

**INTERNATIONAL MEDIA AS A FOREIGN POLICY TOOL OF THE  
WEST: CASE STUDY OF SOMALI**

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IN DIPLOMACY**

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## DECLARATION

I, Janet Ndenga hereby declare that this research project is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.

Signed..... Date.....

Janet Ndenga

Reg. No.R51/69443/2011

This project has been submitted for examination with my approval as University Supervisor;

Signed..... Date.....

Dr. Patrick Maluki

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to my family and colleagues, particularly the Communications team at the United Nations Development Programme, who supported me to mobilize data which went a long way in enabling me to undertake this research work. My beloved husband Peter and my children Maria, Hazel and Heidi

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## ABSTRACT

During the 1980s the proliferation of new technologies transformed the potential of the news media to provide a constant flow of global real-time news. Tiananmen Square and the collapse of communism symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall became major media events communicated to Western Audiences instantaneously via TV news media. By the end of the decade the question was being asked as to what extent this 'media pervasiveness' had impacted upon government—particularly the process of foreign policy making. The new technologies appeared to reduce the scope for calm deliberation over policy, forcing policy-makers to respond to whatever issue journalists focused on. The phrase 'CNN effect' encapsulated the idea that real-time communications technology could provoke major responses from domestic audiences and political elites to global events. At the beginning of 1992, civil war and starvation gripped Somalia in the wake of the overthrow of Mohammed Siad Barre, who had ruled the country for two decades as many as 1.5 million of an estimated Somali population of 6 million were threatened with starvation, with approximately 300,000 Somalis already having died, including roughly 25% of all children under the age of five. On 26 November, the Bush administration announced that the United States would send troops to Somalia. This study examines whether the media played any role in making the US government to intervene in Somalia. This study finds starts from the premise that media is obtrusive to the point of forcing people and governments react to issues in the media desired way. The study was guided by three objectives: to examine the extent to which the West uses the international media as a tool for its foreign policy; to appraise the extent to which the media determines the foreign policy of the West and to evaluate the effects of the international media to propagate its foreign policy in Somalia. The study departs on the theory of agenda setting by the media. It is a qualitative study using mapping aspects where the various variables are categorized on an ordinal scale. The analysis of the final data makes it possible for the themes to be identified and the findings presented descriptively. The study found that though the media does have the potential to set agenda and shape opinion in the Somalia case the media didn't really prompt the US government to intervene rather at the time it came to focus on Somalia policy makers had begun to plan action. The Medias focus coincidentally converged with that of government. What the media did in length was to fast track an idea that government operatives actually had.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>CNN</b>	Cable News Network
<b>USA</b>	United States of America
<b>TV</b>	Television
<b>NATO</b>	Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization
<b>ABC</b>	American Broadcasting Company
<b>CBS</b>	Columbia Broadcasting System

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 Introduction

Past studies of foreign policy decision-making described the media mainly if at all as a channel for delivering messages during the process, but the reality of the last decades reveals that this point-of-view minimizes the actual role of the media, which is much more complex. The media; TV, press, radio and new multimedia technologies are not only channels, but also play a far more important role in the process. The media are a crucial part of the foreign policy decision-making environment, which should not be regarded only as the input stage of the process, but much more as a general context, and output environment in which leaders make foreign policies.(Seib, 2000)<sup>1</sup>

In Washington, the important role of social media in facilitating the Arab revolutions of 2011 did not go unnoticed. Indeed, many pundits and policymakers were caught up in the same tide of excitement. In several countries, the media proclaimed the emergence of the “Twitter Revolution” and lauded the Facebook Youth of Tahrir Square. It was clear that social media had a significant role in these movements, though questions linger regarding the nature of its role.(Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010)<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the prominence of social media platforms and their clear utility encouraged many in the US government to explore its possible use as a tool of foreign policy. Those efforts that were already underway similarly received a significant boost in funding and encouragement.<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt that the United States government has begun to

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<sup>1</sup> Seib, Philip, “Politics and the Fourth Estate: The Interplay of Media and Politics in Foreign Policy.” *Harvard International Review* 22, no. 3 (fall 2000): p60.

<sup>2</sup> Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, “Users of the world, unite!.The challenges and opportunities of social media,” *Business Horizons* (2010), 53, 59-68.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* p62

leverage social media as tool of foreign policy. Today there are a great number of offices across the interagency using social media platforms for diplomatic, military, and intelligence purposes that advance US foreign policy interests yet the field is relatively new and changing rapidly.(Steinitz and Zarin,2012)<sup>4</sup>

With the September 11 attacks, the magnitude of Middle Eastern disaffection for the United States was brought, violently, to the attention of official Washington, and a new focus on propaganda was one result. According to the Bush administration, “a deep misunderstanding of the United States and its policies” created this hostility. It argues that a more assertive campaign of self-promotion would reverse these views. It says that the end of the Cold War led to neglect of “public diplomacy”, resulting in a diminution of U.S. prestige and global effectiveness.(Amy and Mansour, 2002)<sup>5</sup>

For the past several years, the United States government has been using media platforms as a tool of foreign policy. While the use of social media for this purpose has expanded rapidly, it remains a new and developing field. This paper is an initial aspect at the ways in which the media has been used, and is currently being used by the US government as a tool of foreign policy. It includes considerations for policymakers and practitioners who are exploring the utility of these platforms.

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<sup>4</sup>Christopher Steinitz and Hilary Zarin(2012) An Initial Look at the Utility of Social Media as a Foreign Policy Tool A CNA Occasional Paper DOP-2012-U-002538 Final September 2012 p2

<sup>5</sup>Jasperson, Amy E. and El-Kikhia, Mansour. "U.S. and Middle Eastern Media Perspectives on the Aftermath of the Sept. 11 Terrorist Attacks" Harvard Symposium: Restless Searchlight: The Media and Terrorism. 8/25/2002

## 1.2 Background

Reporting on Africa and the Middle East in the western media sometimes seems to be dominated by the colonial view of a dark needy continent, in need of civilizing. Where previously colonialists, traders and missionaries were responsible for disseminating information about Africa, today print and electronic media carry out the same role via television, films, satellites, radio and the Internet. The images portrayed are unfortunately frequently still negative and reinforce old stereotypes. Terms such as 'primitive', 'anarchic', 'irrational', 'savage', 'tribal' portray Africa and Africans as backward and inferior to western civilization.

Somalia has been 'securitized' by the US under the heading of the global war on terror, that is, it has been discursively constructed as a threat of 'existential' proportions and considerable urgency, thus warranting a resort to 'extraordinary measures.(Jimale, 1995)<sup>6</sup> What motivated this securitization was mainly the familiar assumption that failed states somehow foster terrorism, which made the Bush Administration concerned about stateless Somalia and eager to support the Transitional Federal Government.<sup>7</sup> This general assumption has been reinforced by the trust placed in very concrete and intelligence-based but in quite a few instances simply wrong pieces of evidence on the whereabouts of various individuals suspected of complicity in the 1998 embassy bombings and/or of planning new terrorist attacks fed to the media.(Maria, 2001)<sup>8</sup>

The media continues to utilize countless tactics designed to heighten public perception regarding the critical need to advance America's war on terror. 'We see this on a daily basis. Often, the media states bold-faced lies regarding so-called terrorist activities, so as to enrage Americans.

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<sup>6</sup> Ahmed, Ali Jimale (ed.):(1995) *The Invention of Somalia* . Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, p32

<sup>7</sup> De Waal, Alex (ed.): (, 2004) *Islamism and Its Enemies in the Horn of Africa* . London: Hurst & Co p14

<sup>8</sup>Brons, Maria H.:(2001) *Society, Security, Sovereignty and the State in Somalia: From Statelessness to Statelessness?* (Utrecht: International Books p11

On other instances, the media stages complete fabrications of events to twist reality in order to advance the agenda of Washington.(BBC, 2003)<sup>9</sup> Once Washington sends the official story line to the media, any alternative ideas offered are always labeled as conspiracies. Others are labeled as quacks, racists, bigots or anti-Semites. Instead of addressing the issues, the media is quick to defame individuals who present viewpoints counter to those supplied to the media by Washington.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

The capabilities of modern media to be immediate, sensational and pervasive are unsettling the conduct of foreign affairs. This would be so were the Cold War still underway, but in the shapeless aftermath of a clear-cut superpower rivalry the impact of media's immediacy is magnified. The technology that makes possible real-time, global coverage is truly revolutionary. Today's correspondents employ lap-top computers, wireless telephones that transmit directly to satellites and mobile satellite dishes to broadcast vivid pictures and commentary from the scenes of tragedy and disorder without the transmission delays, political obstructions or military censorship of old.

Now the barriers are breaking down, and when a crisis or event breaks across the 24-hour information cycle, pioneers from each profession find themselves turning to fast-placed, flexible social media twitter, blogs, Facebook, YouTube and the likes to help make and project succinct meaning in a world of noise.(McCombs, 2005)<sup>10</sup> This is hardly surprising when more and more of the people and phenomena they are trying to track and interpret from Middle Eastern social

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<sup>9</sup>Is the war on terror violating human rights?, BBC, Talking Point Forum, January 20, 2003

<sup>10</sup>McCombs, M. (2005). A look at agenda-setting: Past, present and future. *Journalism Studies*, 6, 543–557

movements to Western political leaders are using these same tools to influence and instantly define developments (Nye,1999).<sup>11</sup> Having the West as major stake holders in majority of the international media corporations, satellites and their transmission station and social media companies, these research will seeks to investigate the lengths which they have influenced foreign policies to be based on the media coverage of international events and agendas they set socially and politically and the effects.

The American news media reported on the crucial role of new and social media in the origination and perpetuation of revolutionary sentiment in the Americas region, especially among the young adult population. Some argue that Twitter, Facebook and text messaging, for example, facilitated the rapid dissemination of ideas and helped citizens organize mass demonstrations against their governments. These media seem to have had important impacts on domestic politics, also affecting the politics of neighboring countries and the international community as a whole. Thus, domestic factors had recognizable international implications.

This research is intended to focus on how international factors can influence domestic politics, in other words, how the media can be used as tools of foreign policy. Under what conditions can states utilize new media to affect other states' behavior and assist states in their relations with others?

#### **1.4 Objectives of The Study**

1. To examine the extent to which the west uses the international media as a tool for its foreign policy.

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<sup>11</sup>Nye.J 1999. , "Redefining the National Interest," Foreign Affairs 78 (Jul/Aug 1999) p24.

2. To appraise the extent to which the media coverage determines the foreign policy of the West.
3. To evaluate the effects of the West use of international media to propagate its foreign policy in Somali.

### **1.5 Hypothesis**

1. That the West uses the international media as a tool for its foreign policy.
2. That media coverage determines the foreign policy of the west.
3. That there are effects to the West's use of international media to propagate its foreign policy.

### **1.6 Justification of The Study**

The media plays an essential part in the education, information and entertaining of the people. It can present alternatives to stereotypes and conflicts. It is viewed as a 'friend of the people', a tool that enables citizens to make well-informed decisions in their own best interests. Under ideal conditions, the international media is supposed to have a mind of its own and operate according to professional codes of conduct.

This study will provide a basis for examining, assessing and evaluating the effects of the west use of international media as a foreign policy tool. the 'manufacturing consent' school of thought which argues that the media does not create policy but rather mobilized and manipulated into supporting government policy, in this case the west' s interests.

The knowledge attained from this study will go a long way to evidently depict not only the impacts of the West using the media as a foreign policy tool, but the effects and impacts this has

created as a result. This research includes considerations for politicians, policy makers, practitioners and academicians who are exploring the utility of these platforms.

## **1.7 Literature Review**

Salaita(2012) states that, while it would appear obvious to anybody who follows patterns of Western media that those media highlight events and regions that prove instrumental to the practice of American imperialism, it is important to assess the discourses that rationalize such inconsistent coverage. In the case of Arab revolutions, those discourses reveal the extent to which corporate media convey the interests of the American government. They do so not only by uncritically repeating official government statements, but also by presenting limited information based on the tendencies of the economic elite, a tacit form of politicking passing itself off as objectivity.<sup>12</sup> However, Scully (1998) argues that the media affects the decision-making process and agenda in the West and at times determine foreign policy undertaken by the West.<sup>13</sup> But Salaita (2013) negates his sentiments and echoes that Western media allots coverage to certain uprisings at much different rates. To him, protests in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, for instance, were under reported or ignored, while those in Syria are highlighted. These disparities are determined by whether a particular tyrant was a United States client or enemy.<sup>14</sup>

According to Steinitz and Zarin(2012), there is no doubt that the United States government has begun to leverage social media as tool of foreign policy. To them, there are a number of offices across the interagency, using social media platforms for diplomatic, military, and intelligence

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<sup>12</sup>Steven Salaita(2012)Corporate American media coverage of Arabrevolutions: the contradictory message of modernity journal for and about social movements Article Volume 4 (1) p 133 (May 2012)

<sup>13</sup> Michael A. Scully,(1998) “The Media: An Influence on the US Foreign Policy and Military Policy by any Other Means” Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, 1998).

<sup>14</sup>Salaita p135

purposes that advance US foreign policy interests.<sup>15</sup> Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2010) also add that, one of the most common ways that the West's foreign policy establishment has begun to use social media is through the establishment a social media presence, via the creation of Twitter feeds and Facebook pages. Such sites have typically been established to fulfill a public affairs and strategic communications function.<sup>16</sup> To them, their tweets can be re-tweeted, allowing the public affairs message to circulate widely. The Twitter platform also allows these accounts to post links to websites for other agencies or organizations or even re-tweet other posts as appropriate. Facebook offers a different set of options for content, as it allows users to post photos, videos, or statements, rather than only links. However, argues that is that social media data do not necessarily reflect impact beyond social media, and noted, Tunisians took to the streets due to decades of frustration, not in reaction to a WikiLeaks cable, a denial-of-service attack, or a Facebook update. Nonetheless, Seib(2010) states that the West is involved in a subset of strategic communications, messaging to counter violent extremism and strategically engage online communities to counter falsehoods and misinformation that fuels extremist ideology while propagating their foreign policy.<sup>17</sup>

According to Edward and Wayne (1999) "The White House expends a great deal of capital in attempting to direct the media's attention on relevant issues."<sup>18</sup> Hence, McCombs (2005) cites that it should be no surprise then that scholars have cited the president as the leading agenda-

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<sup>15</sup>Christopher Steinitz and Hilary Zarin (2012 )An Initial Look at the Utility of Social Media as a Foreign Policy Tool,A CNA Occasional Paper DOP-2012-U-002538-Final September 2012

<sup>16</sup>Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media," *Business Horizons* (2010), 53, 59-68.

<sup>17</sup> Philip Seib, "CENTCOM's Digital Engagement Team tries to counter extremists," *University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy Blog*, 26 Aug 2010.

<sup>18</sup>Edwards, G. C., & Wayne, S. J. (1999).*Presidential leadership* (5th ed.). New York: St. Martin.



setter in the United States.<sup>19</sup> But according to Edwards and Wood, the president mainly reacts to changes in the media attention and world events instead of setting the agenda. However, to Bennett & Paletz(1994), it is clear that the American president has influence on the media concerning high priority issues relative to political campaigns such as foreign policy, but a lower influence concerning other issues.<sup>20</sup>

Immediately after the ghastly attacks, the act of terrorism was declared by George Bush and others as “war” as opposed to a mass crime against humanity. While emotionally one can describe it as being under attack and use the analogy of an act of war, politically, this has significant ramifications because this allows one to change the possible means of retaliation. It also allows claims to be made that because this is war then Article 51 of the United Nations Charter of the right to self-defense can be invoked. From there an entire military build-up and action has resulted. The media in general did not really question the semantics or the point that Article 51 does not allow for indeterminate amount of time to elapse to carry out “self-defense”.<sup>21</sup>

According to Chomsky(1991), the mainstream media is supportive of government policy and vulnerable to "news management" by the government. This is most evident in foreign affairs reporting, in which strong domestic constituencies contesting government propaganda campaigns are rare, and in which the government can employ ideological weapons like anti-communism, a demonized enemy or alleged national security threats to keep the media compliant.<sup>22</sup> Thus in the

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<sup>19</sup>McCombs, M. (2005). A look at agenda-setting: Past, present and future. *Journalism Studies*, 6, 543–557.

<sup>20</sup> Bennett, W. L., & Paletz, D. (Eds.). (1994). *Taken by storm: The media, public opinion, and U.S. foreign policy in the Gulf War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>21</sup> Tom Barry and Martha Honey, *Foreign Policy In Focus*, Progressive Response, Volume 5, Number 30, September 12, 2001

<sup>22</sup> Noam Chomsky, 1991 *Deterring Democracy* . London: Verso, p4

1980s the Reagan administration was able to demonize the Soviet Union as an Evil Empire, Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi as premier terrorist, Grenada and Nicaragua as U.S. national security threats and Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega as a villainous drug dealer, with a high degree of mainstream media cooperation.<sup>23</sup> A classic and often-cited study by Sigal(1973), he observes that nearly three-quarters of the front page stories in the Washington Post and New York Times depended on official sources that support the West's foreign policy.<sup>24</sup> However, Gans(1985) argues that the media has been too liberal and at times put Western national interests at risk by exposing state secrets. A spokesperson for the media, he regularly portrays them as the West's watchdogs, who "root about", exposing what they deem right for exposure," without fear or favor.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, according to Herman (1982) they serve mainly as a supportive arm of the state and dominant elites, focusing heavily on themes serviceable to them, and debating and exposing within accepted frames of reference.<sup>26</sup>

According to Battle Propaganda strategies developed in tandem with war plans will include those arguments explaining and defending U.S. actions that have the widest popular appeal. As has become the rule for U.S. military operations, information will be controlled and filtered by the Pentagon.<sup>27</sup> 'In Iraq, some will welcome an overthrow of the present repressive government, even if brought about by a foreign invasion; the U.S. government will do what it can to ensure that this reaction monopolizes news coverage'. The administration has reason to be confident that a passive opposition party, a pro-war mainstream press, all the apparatus of news manipulation

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<sup>23</sup> ibid

<sup>24</sup> Leon V. Sigal, 1973 *Reporters and Officials: The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath p. 48

<sup>25</sup> Herbert Gans, 1985 "Are U.S. Journalists Dangerously Liberal?," *Columbia Journalism Review*, November-December 1985, pp. 32-3

<sup>26</sup> Edward S. Herman, 1982 *The Real Terror Network* Boston, MA: South End Press, pp. 208-9

<sup>27</sup> John F. Devlin, 1976 *The Ba'th Party* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 108-109, 194

available to the government, and a public and mass media predisposed to view the motives of their country<sup>28</sup>. Thus, in a favorable light, and to hope that their sense of insecurity will be lessened by an attack on a designated enemy, are likely to ensure that a U.S. invasion of Iraq will be judged a success - at least in the short term.

Shoemaker et al (1991), found that negative events were more likely to be reported by the U.S. media. Therefore, the value of negative news in the media industry as well as in evolutionary history may underpin the public's gravitation toward negatively themed public policy.<sup>29</sup> To some degree, the promotion of negative news encourages ignoring positive events concerning foreign countries to facilitate the West's interests. According to Wanta et al., if an unstable country is planning to build nuclear weapons or it is involved in activities violating human rights, it is coded negative. If a country is involved with activities that are consistent with U.S. interests or values that the United States wants to promote, it is coded positive. For example, if a country dedicated itself to the activity of anti-terrorism, it was coded positive. A country is coded neutral when it exhibits a balance of both positive and negative or displayed indeterminate interests and values. However, Walgrave & Van Aelst (2006) disputes that notion and argues that the Media sets the values and interests of the West (Walgrave, S., & Van Aelst,2006).<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, Carter states that the West provides Americans with defined ideological stigmata, and this is revealed in

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<sup>28</sup>Joyce Battle, U.S. Propaganda in the Middle East - The Early Cold War Version, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 78, December 13, 2002

<sup>29</sup>Shoemaker, P. J., Danielian, L. H., & Brendlinger, N. (1991). Deviant acts, risky business and U.S. interests: The newsworthiness of world events. *Journalism Quarterly*, 68(4), 781–795.

<sup>30</sup>Walgrave, S., & Van Aelst, P. (2006). The contingency of the mass media's political agenda setting power: Towards a preliminary theory. *Journal of Communication*, 56, 88–109.

the media: "The parameters of press coverage tend to be those of the West's foreign policy. The press is often critical, but of the execution of policy more than the aims."<sup>31</sup>

Gowing (1994) believes that, there is far more real-time war than ever before" and whatever is transmitted is determined by its graphic potential to the West.<sup>32</sup> Girardet(1996) points out that there is an obsession with the medium, rather than the purpose. The "technological conveniences" that news ICT's bring constitute a threat to quality journalism, since all too often, information is confused with understanding, and high technology with journalism, so fascinated are the people by the vehicle rather than the purpose. The consequence is an obsession with immediacy, which shortens the journalist's time to fully research and understand the issues at hand", encouraging "laziness and an overreliance on existent data feed."<sup>33</sup> Shapiro (2002) observations concur with Gowing's and he states that that, in the current conflict against radical Islamic terrorism, the media has become a crucial battlefield. The fight against terrorism is carried out not only in the hills of Afghanistan but also on television screens in the United States, Europe and Asia. Experience in many regions, including Israel, Northern Ireland, Spain and Peru, amply demonstrates that terrorism can rarely be beaten only by military means. An effective media policy has become an integral part of the politics of conflict and an essential element in the international effort against terrorism.<sup>34</sup> While global media pluralism negates much of the effectiveness of traditional propaganda and censorship, post-Cold War conflict media policies developed into an integral part of conflict management. In Somalia, Bosnia-

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<sup>31</sup>Carter, R. F., Stamm, K. R., &Heintz-Knowles, K.(1992). Agenda-setting and Consequentiality.Journalism Quarterly, 69, 868-877.

<sup>32</sup> Gowing, N. (1994) "Real-time TV Coverage from War, Does it Mae or Break Government Policy?" Bosnia by Television.

<sup>33</sup> Girardet, E. (1996) "Reporting Humanitarianism: Are the new Electronic Media Making a Difference?" in From Massacres to Genocide, Rotberg and Weiss, eds. 59-60

<sup>34</sup> Ibid p57

Herzegovia(2002), Kosovo and Macedonia, to name but a few, conflict media policies have become an integral element of Western military plans and operations.<sup>35</sup>

According to Zhang & Benoit(2004), other countries considered allies of the West employ the media resource to clean their image hence they cite Saudi Arabia's image was damaged due to its connection with terrorists after 9/11, the country launched a multimillion-repair campaign to restore a positive national image.<sup>36</sup> The campaign has employed a number of tactics, including paid spots on U.S. media outlets, foreign speaking engagements, and even polling the American public regarding popular opinions of the country.<sup>37</sup> Results from the study indicated that while the measures employed were not completely effective, the country made minor repairs to its national image regarding a portion of the negative criticisms. However, Zhang (2004) argues, with the evolution of the media other powers can effectively espouse their image without the abet of the West and its media. He cites that the Chinese government has undertaken a number of proactive steps in the past to improve the country's national image. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has established an Overseas Propaganda Department to confront directly attacks on China's national image. Since its founding, the department has published a series of white papers to address issues concerning human rights and Tibet.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, Mermin's (1997) research entitled "Television news and American intervention in Somalia" reveals that Washington's decisions were the key to the subsequent coverage of the events, which fluctuated in amount and

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<sup>35</sup> Shlomo Shapiro(2002) Conflict Media Strategies and the Politics of Counter-terrorism. Bar-Ilan University, Israel POLITICS: 2002 VOL 22(2), p76

<sup>36</sup>Zhang, J., & Benoit, W. L. (2004). Message strategies of Saudi Arabia's image restoration campaign after 9/11. *Public Relations Review*, 30(3), 161-167.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*

<sup>38</sup> Wang, H. (2003). National image building and Chinese foreign policy. *China: An International Journal*, 1(1), 46-72.

importance in relation to what was going on in Washington.<sup>39</sup> Just as well, he notes that coverage was also drawn in relation to the priority Somalia played in the American agenda, as an example, he points out that during July of 1992, Somalia was never in the top of the news because it was not in the top of the foreign policy agenda. In the words of Jonathan Mermin(1997), “if television inspired American intervention in Somalia, it did so under the influence of governmental actors a number of senators, a House committee, a presidential candidate and figures within the Bush administration.”<sup>40</sup>

### **The Somali Conflict And Western Media**

Maren (1997) states that, the US has an interest in getting rid of surplus food generated from subsidizing and purchasing grain at above-market prices from American farmers, and one of the ways it does so is to donate food to Somalia. The food is supposed to save millions of Somali refugees at risk of death from famine and warfare, but instead it almost single-handedly destroyed the Somali economy. Seeking income in a declining economy, Somalis fight to control remaining sources of revenue for their clans, and food aid has become the nation’s most valuable resource.<sup>41</sup>

According to Moeller (1999), “a look at recent images of the Somali famine published by international media, and more of Western media, has been brought to our attention, that there are existing patterns of media reporting on African crises”. Raising the question: Why do these patterns exist and can methods of reporting on disasters and famine in African countries, and

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<sup>39</sup> Mermin, J. (1997) "Television News and American Intervention in Somalia" *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 112

<sup>40</sup>Mermin, Jonathan. *Television News and American Intervention in Somalia: The Myth of a Media-Driven Foreign Policy*, *Political Science Quarterly*, 113 no. 3, (New York: Academy of Political Science, Fall 1997): 385

<sup>41</sup>Michael Maren, *The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 97

media's use of imagery that depict malnourished children be changed, and how? This question applies not only to international media's coverage of Africa, but also to Africa's coverage of the continent itself.<sup>42</sup>

Burman (1994) also adds that, the stereotypical photograph of a malnourished child has become the poster image of Somalia and its famine. To Maxted and Zegeye(1997):, the advantage of such an image is that the crisis now has an innately attributable image. The danger is that the posterity of the image has led to detachment from its content.<sup>43</sup> So, what exactly is the intended and resulting effect of such a photograph on the media-consuming individual? These are complex and multifaceted, touching on patterns of news construction and Africa's colonial history, and how these two interact through discourse and imagery often perpetuates rather than challenges stereotypes in the "social representations of 'self' and 'the other'."<sup>44</sup>

Media research has shown that images depicting exclusively black victims, such as in this case vulnerable, malnourished black Somali children, reinforce racial stereotypes and can perpetrate the victimization of black Africans. Identical patterns are rarely witnessed to the same extent in cases of conflict in Western, developed nations. An example is the recent attack on youth in Norway, where a Google Image search yields largely wide-angle photos of the island where the

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<sup>42</sup> Moeller, S. D., *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*. Routledge, (New York, 1999) , p. 9

<sup>43</sup>J. Maxted and A. Zegeye, *State Disintegration And Human Rights In Africa*, *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 38 (1/2, 1997): 64-86.

<sup>44</sup> Burman, E. (1994) *Poor children: Charity Appeals and Ideologies of childhood, Changes: An International Journal of Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 12, (1), pp. 29-36.

shooting took place and none of the children victims of the shooting themselves, whereas a search for terms 'Somalia famine' results in stomach-turning close-ups of skeletal children.<sup>45</sup>

To Lewis (2008), the reporting of the Somali conflict is usually framed in a very particular way by the mainstream media, as the situation is presented void of any political or historical context. The conflict is portrayed in isolation from the rest of the history of the Horn of Africa, where colonial intervention had caused the 'divide and rule' of Somali people into different territories with different foreign rulers. Economic motives, such as the discovery of oil, have also played their part in the events. Before the overthrow of his regime, Siyad Barre had signed lucrative contracts with major American oil companies Conoco, Amoco, Chevron and Philips. These companies had strong interests in the region, but the mainstream media did not cover this issue.<sup>46</sup>

Amal (2002) affirms that, in terms of the war on terror, there is a double standard in denoting a group as terrorist, which seems arbitrarily discriminatory to groups not pre-approved by the US.<sup>47</sup> Emenyeonu (1995) believes Western media, responsible for the continent's attention on conflict and crime in media coverage and therefore perpetration of negative perceptions of the group.<sup>48</sup>

For example, Amal (1995) alludes to al Shabaab lacks the right of liberating its homeland from foreign occupation without being called "terrorists" for attempting it, while groups directly funded by the US, such as the Libyan rebels or the Afghan Muja Hedeem are given license to

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<sup>45</sup> Media Monitoring Africa (1999) The News in Black and White: An Investigation into Racial Stereotyping in the Media. Retrieved from:<http://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org>

<sup>46</sup>Ioan Lewis, *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland: Culture, History and Society* (London: Hurst and Co., 2008),

<sup>47</sup> Amal Saad- Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion*, (London: Pluto Press, 2002) pp. 93-94.

<sup>48</sup> Emenyeonu, N. B. (1995) Africa's Image in the Local Press: An Analysis of African News in Some Nigerian Newspapers. In *Africa Media Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2. Pp. 82-104



practice similar tactics without fear of condemnation.<sup>49</sup> To Susan (1996), Al- Shabaab is denoted as “terrorist” for its internal struggle to push Ethiopia out of its country, but the Ethiopian invaders and US drone strikes are not reproached for their identical behavior of assassinating opponents and imposing their version of law and order via the sword. It is unfair judgment by the mainstream media.<sup>50</sup>

To Seib (2000), the most important issue is whether the media is deliberately employed as a tool to compound support for already made decisions. It is also arguable that the CNN effect offers officials the opportunity to support decisions that have already been made. It seems that in the case of Somalia certain politicians chose the media as a method of drumming up support for a policy of intervention and aid. There is little doubt that this effect could be achieved. It is however, beyond the scope of this paper to speculate whether or not this has occurred. In the case of Somalia, it is safe to say that the media has an impact on foreign policy, not in its formulation and not in changing it, but simply, and importantly, in influencing the rate at which events occurred.<sup>51</sup>

Despite official denials peddled by the mainstream media, it is emerging that France and US are engaged in a new war in the Horn of Africa. Given that 11-12 million people are at risk of starvation in the famine-hit region, an escalation of conflict has huge humanitarian and legal implications. Yet the Western public is being given no oversight on the matter from what appears to be a veritable news blackout on the dire situation.

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<sup>49</sup> Amal Saad- Ghorayeb, (2002) *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion*, London: Pluto Press, pp. 93-94.

<sup>50</sup> Susan Douglas, “Double Standards” *The Progressive* 60, no. 1, (Jan 1996): 17.

<sup>51</sup> Philip Seib, “Politics and the Fourth Estate: The Interplay of Media and Politics in Foreign Policy” *Harvard International Review*, 22, no. 3 (fall 2000): 61.

The literature has shown that, the political agenda of the West's foreign policy governs which resources for which it will compete through various political means. The media, as a tool is to advance the West's political agenda, by the filtering and manipulation of information to guide a populace's decision-making ability towards the West's proposed end. The gap that appears in the literature is the effectiveness of the media to propagate The West's foreign policy.

## **1.8 Theoretical Framework**

The Agenda-Setting Theory states that the media (mainly the news media) are not always successful at telling us what to think, but they are quite successful at telling us what to think about. It comes from a scientific perspective, because it predicts that if people are exposed to the same media, they will place importance on the same issues (McCombs, 1972).<sup>52</sup> The common assumption of agenda- setting is that the ability of the media to influence the visibility of events in the public mind has been a part of our culture for almost half a century. Therefore, the concept of agenda setting in society is for the press to selectively choose what we see or hear in the media (McCombs, 1972).<sup>53</sup> <sup>54</sup>

Agenda-setting is the creation of public awareness and concern of salient issues by the news media. Two basic assumptions underlie most research on agenda-setting. One is that the press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it. Secondly, media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues. One of the most critical aspects in the concept of an agenda-setting role of mass

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<sup>52</sup>McCombs, M., & Shaw, D.L. (1972).The agenda-setting function of the mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36, 176-185.

<sup>53</sup>ibid

<sup>54</sup>McCombs, M.E., & Shaw, D.L., & Weaver, D.L. (1997).*Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory*. Mahwah, N.J. Lawrence Erlbaum.

communication is the time frame for this phenomenon. In addition, different media have different agenda-setting potential. Agenda-setting theory seems quite appropriate to help us understand the pervasive role of the media on international political communication systems.

The west's control of print and broadcast media in many African countries leave little scope for dissenting opinions and, therefore, public debate. International media sources such as the BBC, CNN, al Arabiya, and al Jazeera have global reach, and as such have an "agenda-setting effect." This effect, as Steven Livingston (1997) notes, revolves around the ideological components of political disagreements, and more specifically the way key actors in conflict seek to manipulate public perceptions of the disagreement. That is, actors in any conflict will seek to either minimize or exaggerate the conflict, depending upon their relative position of power. Weak actors will want to "socialize" the conflict—that is, to enlist allies in their cause against a greater power and to increase the perception of suffering. Actors in positions of dominance seek to "privatize" the conflict and limit attention to or awareness of the conflict. Those who are weak will seek to draw media coverage to the conflict while those who in power will seek to minimize the extent of the problems.

## **1.9 Research Methodology**

### **1.9.1 Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to provide an accurate description of the situation or of an association between African domestic politics and international actors, which the design used shall be one that minimizes bias and maximizes the reliability of data collected on Western interests/ foreign policy and international Media

## **1.10 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

Information on the research relies both on primary and secondary data. Primary data collection involves direct interaction of the researcher with the respondent in order to generate data for use in the research. This type of data is considered to be original in that it is generated from the source. The main methods to be used in this research to collect primary data are focused interview. Using focused interviews will be beneficial in this study as the data collected will be from the people knowledgeable in the area of study and will therefore provide peer credence towards the result of the study. In using self-administered questionnaires, the questions will seek to capture relevant data and avoid departures from the main objectives of the research.

In order to corroborate or disprove information generated from the generated from the primary data, as well as collect representative material, secondary data will also be used in this research. Secondary data is that which someone else has collected. The secondary data used will be from written materials and documents from the archives and include: Books, policy reports and papers, news paper articles, online journal and publications. The research instruments will be used to ensure reliability and validity of data collection from various respondents who will be selected period of two months. The employment of various methods and techniques would justify that the study will be conducted in qualitative and quantitative research methods.

### **1.10.1 Ethical Considerations**

Before data collection exercise begins, permission will be sought from the University of Nairobi Institute of Diplomacy and international Studies, to conduct the research. I will also obtain a letter of introduction from the University commencing the research study. In general, the researcher will ensure all ethical standards relating to the research are adhered to.

### **1.10.2 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The data analysis will be qualitative and will take place concurrently with the data collection; this is in order to guide decisions related to further data collection. Using mapping aspects, the various variables will be categorized on an ordinal scale. This will provide the most manageable way of measuring the variables in the study. The theme that emerges from document analysis will form the basis of further data collection and summary. The analysis of the final data will make it possible for themes to be identified and findings presented descriptively.

### **1.10.3 Data Analysis Procedures**

This chapter will seek to analyze the data collected in the previous chapters by comparing and contrasting with the hypothesis and the theoretical framework that will be used to guide the study to see if the research meets its objective and either confirm or nullify the hypothesis of the research. Realism in this case is used to justify the actions of the West to engage in Somali directly or indirectly by using media to confirm it or nullify if the national interests of the west set western media agenda.

### **Chapter Outline**

Chapter one comprises of the introduction/ background of study, statement of the problem, a review of existing literature, objectives of the study, hypothesis, scope of the study and ethical issues for considerations. Chapter two provides a historical overview of how the media seeks to set agenda for policy makers and to shape the opinion of its audiences. It also analyses the media approach based on the agenda setting theory which has been discussed by various scholars of the subject. Chapter three is a case study of the media's focus on Somalia and the US government's intervention after the eruption of the civil war in the 1990s. The chapter examines whether the

media set the agenda for the government or if it was the government that brought the media to focus on Somalia: who set the agenda of intervening in Somali? Chapter four is an analysis of issues emerging from the study while chapter five provides a summary of the study, key findings and conclusions.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE AGENDA SETTING ROLE OF THE WESTERN MEDIA

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter delves into a historical overview of how the media has been used over the years to set the agenda of governments of western countries and goes further to discuss agenda setting as a theory and to show that agenda setting is actually now more a function of the media than a theory. The chapter looks at whether it is the media that actually sets the agenda or does it simply accelerate agenda setting by policy makers or do the agendas of both simply converge or is governments that set the agenda subtly. The chapter seeks to bring out different views by scholars of policy formulation.

#### 2.1 Use of the Media by The West: Historical Overview

The conflicts of the last decade have amply demonstrated that the media, apparently non-state actors, have become an important party in many international conflicts. In conflicts involving advanced Western militaries, this is accentuated by the evolution and increasing importance of information operations. Winning the media war is crucially important to Western war-planners, and increasingly sophisticated methods for doing so have been developed even though with varying results (Payne, 2005).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Kenneth Payne, *The Media as an Instrument of War*, Strategic Studies Institute, 2005 p.85

The West, is acutely aware of the importance of media portrayal of conflict, and has developed an array of techniques to affect that presentation. Public affairs staff begin their support of information operations by drafting a Public Affairs Estimate, which includes an assessment of the media presence. The estimate addresses the following questions: “What media representatives and organizations are in the area of operation? Are they radio, television, or print? Are they state-run or independent? What is their political slant? Are they pro- or anti-coalition? Are they receptive to coalition information products such as news releases or other print or electronic products?”<sup>56</sup> Lying outright to the media may not, in many circumstances, make much sense, but controlling the flow of information emphatically does, and the purpose of the public affairs staff is to control the dissemination of information so as to maximize the military and political advantage to the West.

In the West’s new quest for sympathy and support across the globe, media, public relations (PR) and marketing specialists no longer form a sideshow to traditional, government-to-government diplomacy. Brand thinking and brand-asset management now dominate Western life, affecting the nature and dynamics of Western politics as well. Business gurus encourage their publics to think of themselves as a ‘brand’, while territorial entities (countries, regions, cities) are equally branding themselves like companies and products. It comes as no surprise therefore, that former US Secretary of State Colin Powell defined US diplomacy as follows: ‘We are selling a product. That product we are selling is democracy.’<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> US Department of the Army, Public Affairs Tactics, Techniques and Procedures, Field Manual 3-61.1 (Washington: GPO, 1 October 2000), ch. 9, “Information Operations,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/3-61-1/>

<sup>57</sup> Foreign Policy, 2001. ‘Brand U.S.A.’, Foreign Policy 127: 19.



The Western media serve elite interests and undermine democracy. The media do this by portraying the world in a way that tends to shape the perspective of those entering the political elite, generate public consent for or at least acquiescence to the West's foreign policy and make it difficult for the public to have access to information necessary to challenge the interests of the elite. This is seen to operate less through censorship than through a recruitment process that selects and rewards those who see the world in a way agreeable and unchallenging to those elite interests. Uncongenial facts and framings usually do not have to be censored because they are mostly not even perceived to exist(Chomsky, 1989).<sup>58</sup> News stories that run contrary to those vested interests are, on balance, less likely to surface than those consistent with the world view of major corporate multinationals.

According to Hallin (1986), the unintended consequence of 'objective' journalism was that, because journalists were meant to simply gather the political 'facts' from which to construct the news, those with political authority 'were guaranteed access to all the major media and protected against "irresponsible" attack by virtue of their position, not their particular party or politics'.<sup>59</sup> The result was a tightening of the link between journalists and the state and increased power for government officials to influence the news through both agenda setting and framing of issues. 'Objective' journalism, in short, led to a loss of a critical edge on the part of journalists and to pursuit of state interests.

Western governments have given considerable attention to the means through which they might influence the activities and output of the media. Should they choose to exercise them, the tools at

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<sup>58</sup>Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies* (London: Pluto Press,, 1989), p. 16

<sup>59</sup>Hallin, *The 'Uncensored War': The Media and Vietnam* (London: University of California Press, 1986) p 70

their disposal could include deception, distortion, omission, or obfuscation: the tools of political “spin” adapted to the ends of their interests.<sup>60</sup>

In the last few decades, the promotion of ‘democracy’ has come to prominence as an integral legitimizing force for the West’s foreign policy, helping fuel the myth that West is a benign and democratic leader of international affairs. According to Blum, this myth has survived, in spite of a well-documented but often ignored historical record, which have shown that from 1945 onwards ‘the United States attempted to overthrow more than 40 foreign governments’, ‘crush more than 30 populist-nationalist movements’ and provided support to right-wing terrorist armies in every European country throughout the Cold War to further their interests.<sup>61</sup> It comes as no surprise then that the Western media serves an essential role for their governments, legitimizing their governance, and manufacturing public consent for often decidedly antidemocratic and repressive policies (Herman & Chomsky, 1989).<sup>62</sup>

Numerous studies have documented how the West has been able to exploit the system’s supportive tendencies of the mainstream media to justify overt wars (Gabner, 1992),<sup>63</sup> cover-up covert wars , legitimize controversial ‘humanitarian’ interventions, and marginalize genocides in which their governments are implicated , and manufacture public consent for economic sanctions that wrought genocide. The media has also effectively ignored internal ‘wars’ waged by

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<sup>60</sup> US Department of the Army, Public Affairs Tactics, Techniques and Procedures, Field Manual 3-61.1 (Washington: GPO, 1 October 2000), ch. 9, “Information Operations,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/3-61-1/>

<sup>61</sup>Blum, W. (2004) *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press p2

<sup>62</sup>Herman, E.S. and Chomsky, N. (1988) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books

<sup>63</sup>Molwana, H., Gerbner, G. and Schiller, H.I. (1992) *Triumph of the Image: The Media’s War in the Persian Gulf: A Global Perspective*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press p’16

intelligence agencies against both citizens of the West and their media outlets (McKenzie, 1997).<sup>64</sup>

### **2.1.1 Use Of The Media During The Cold War**

In the 1940s and 1950s, Western governments turned to radio as the most effective means of countering the Soviet information monopoly. U.S. and West European radio stations attempted to provide listeners with the kind of programs they might expect from their own radio stations if the latter were free of censorship. For most of these listeners in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the broadcasts were their only contact with the outside world. The importance of the foreign radio programs was confirmed not only by audience estimates, but also by the considerable efforts the Communist regimes made to jam the transmissions (Critchlow,1999).<sup>65</sup>

During the early Cold War, psychological warfare enthusiasts defined the practice and conduct of psychological warfare broadly to include any non-military action taken to influence public opinion or to advance foreign policy interests. Covert operations, trade and economic aid, diplomacy, the threat of force, cultural and educational exchanges, and more traditional forms of propaganda were all seen as important instruments of psychological warfare. Psychological warfare was thus transformed into a “catch-all” formula that embraced disparate measures of intervention in the internal affairs of both hostile and friendly states (Del Pero 2002).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Mackenzie, A. (1997) *Secrets: The CIA's War at Home*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press , p37

<sup>65</sup> James Critchlow (1999) *Western Cold War Broadcasting*. *Journal of Cold War Studies*. Fall 1999, Vol. 1, No. 3, Pages 168-175

<sup>66</sup> Mario del Pero, “The Cold War as a ‘Total Symbolic War’”: *United States Psychological Warfare Journal of Cold War Studies* Vol. 4, No. 2, Spring 2002, p. 85

Herman and Chomsky highlight the importance of an ideology of ‘anticommunism as a control mechanism’ that provided journalists, at least during the Cold War, with a ready made template with which to ‘understand’ global events, and provided the political elite with a powerful rhetorical tool with which to criticise as unpatriotic anyone who questioned US foreign policy (Herman, 1988).<sup>67</sup> Whilst there may be grounds for questioning the specific content of this filter following the collapse of most Communist states and the internal transformation in the direction of capitalism of many of those that remain, alternative ideological mechanisms, such as the current ‘war on terrorism’ have broadly the same effect upon news output.

A striking feature of U.S. news programming in the early Cold War, according to Bernhard, anyone who has watched newsreels from the 1940s and 1950s has probably observed, was the simplistic and sensational nature with which broadcasts depicted the “red menace.” If the tone may be fairly labeled “propagandistic,” Bernhard shows that this was not entirely accidental; propaganda experts actively worked in concert with network television to paint a grim picture of international Communism in order to stimulate domestic morale (Bernhard, 1999).<sup>68</sup>

Propaganda is a normal characteristic of their battle on the ‘information’ front, a fourth arm alongside military, naval and air campaigns. This was evident both in the war in Afghanistan one month after 9/11 and with Iraq. In the mid-1980s, the US Special Operations Command specially designed a propaganda and psychological warfare aircraft called Commando Solo that was capable of overriding domestic media broadcasts (radio and television) and substituting outside

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<sup>67</sup> Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, 1988 *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, p.292

<sup>68</sup> Nancy Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947–1960*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999

content of any kind, true or false. In Afghanistan, it was used solely as a radio platform as the Taliban had banned the domestic use of television. (Snow & Taylor, 2006)<sup>69</sup>

### **2.1.2 Use Of The Media In The Post-Cold War Era And The War On Terror**

In the current conflict against radical Islamic terrorism, the media has become a crucial battlefield. The fight against terrorism is carried out not only through military means but also through the media. While global media pluralism negates much of the effectiveness of traditional propaganda and censorship, post-Cold War conflict media policies developed into an integral part of conflict management. In Somalia, Bosnia-Herzegovia, Kosovo and Macedonia, to name but a few, conflict media policies have become an integral element of Western military plans and operations(Shapiro,2002).<sup>70</sup>

The terror attacks of 11 September 2001 have dramatically, and visually, altered the perceptions of millions of people around the world towards terrorism and radical political violence. Western governments and primarily those of the United States and the United Kingdom, enjoy a much higher degree of public legitimacy for their use of military force in Afghanistan than in other conflicts during the past decade. A major policy challenge posed to Western governments by the current campaign is how to conduct the war against terrorism in an open and democratic way that would promote the confidence of the media and, ultimately, that of the citizen as well. The global media, for its part, struggles to maintain its democratic responsibilities by providing the

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<sup>69</sup>Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor 'The Revival Of The Propaganda State; US Propaganda at Home and Abroad since 9/112006 Sage Publications London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi 1748-0485 VOL. 68(5-6): 389-407

<sup>70</sup> Shlomo Shapiro2002 Conflict Media Strategies and the Politics of Counter-terrorism Bar-Ilan University, Israel© Political Studies Association, p

public with extensive information without awarding the terrorists with a worldwide stage for their propaganda.<sup>71</sup>

During any war, allegations of propaganda abound between the warring parties. To most people, propaganda equates to misinformation or disinformation. These are much misunderstood words and they are frequently used erroneously.<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, during the 20th century, democracies at war have tended toward what was described during the Second World War as a ‘Strategy of Truth’ as described by Taylor (2006).<sup>73</sup> This does not, of course, mean that the whole truth was told. What it does mean is that democratic governments have tended to wage war in a manner that mainly reflects the way they do business in peacetime, namely by paying due respect to such characteristics of democratic practice as accountability, transparency, protection of minorities, the accommodation of dissenting views and so on. The freedoms that are suspended in wartime tend to relate to matters of national or operational security, although it is too often forgotten that these are anyway restricted in times of peace and that war merely brings these issues into a much sharper focus.

During the Gulf War coverage, powers of all descriptions were “learning the new language of force and terror that is the media”.<sup>74</sup> Wark (1994) observes that during the Gulf War coverage, television no longer existed “in a relation to an audience assumed to be a mass of consumers or a public to be educated. The event turns television into part of a feedback loop connecting the spectator to the action via the vagaries of ‘opinion’ and the pressures of the popular on political

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid p76

<sup>72</sup> Boyd-Barrett, O. (2004). Judith Miller, the New York Times, and the propaganda model. *Journalism Studies*, 5, 435-449.

<sup>73</sup> Taylor, P.M. (1999) *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press p 208

<sup>74</sup> Wark, M. (1994). *Vectoral perception and cultural studies*. *The Journal of International Communication*. 1(1), . Sydney: Macquarie University, p78

elites.<sup>75</sup> The mobilization of viewers and media technology by media corporations and states alike were meshed in a loop between war simulations and a simulated consensus by a public believing itself to be “informed.”

The information provided by CNN was to educate the public in the consumption of war coverage as a TV product, while its content was intended by the U.S.-dominated alliance to mobilize bias on a global scale against a threat to its oil market. For the audience to remain seated in their living rooms was sufficient for the Western alliance to undertake the task of protecting its commercial interests in Kuwait using brute force beneath a technological veil (Balzacq, 2005).<sup>76</sup>

The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington were the first strikes on continental America since the British razed Washington to the ground in 1812. The insecurity that this new attack generated prompted an isolationist-inclined Bush Jnr. administration to declare a new doctrine that marked a fundamental change in US foreign policy. This so-called Bush Doctrine had three essential strands ; to hunt down terrorists wherever they are, including in those rogue states now dubbed an ‘axis of evil’, to wage pre-emptive war to prevent further strikes or to prevent weapons of mass destruction from falling into terrorist hands, and the aggressive promotion of democracy, US-style. Despite NATO’s historic invocation of Article V of its Charter on 12 September, the fear was that the US would pursue these goals unilaterally without recourse to its traditional allies or the United Nations<sup>77</sup>. The problem was that the first two doctrinal strands jeopardized, and perhaps even contradicted, the third.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid p71

<sup>76</sup>Balzacq, T. (2005).The three faces of securitization: Political agency, audience and context. *European Journal of International Relations*.11(2) ,p 171–201

<sup>77</sup> Kull, S. (2003) ‘Misperceptions, the Media and the Iraqi War’, The PIPA/Knowledge Networks Poll, 2 October; at: [www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Iraq/Media\\_10\\_02\\_03\\_Report.pdf](http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Iraq/Media_10_02_03_Report.pdf)

Post 9/11, the American media have waged a relentless propaganda offensive against the public on behalf of President George W. Bush's administration, successfully persuading a significant proportion of the domestic population that the annihilation of Afghanistan and Iraq was both necessary and justified.<sup>78</sup>

The war on terrorism is a war of images. Just as the September 11 attacks were calculated not simply to wreak terrible destruction but to create a global media spectacle by targeting symbols of American prestige and power, so too the response of the US and UK governments has been highly image-conscious. Particularly in those aspects of the war on terrorism which have involved actual war fighting, producing the right image appears to be at least as important as any tangible results achieved on the ground. This emphasis on image is a response to the lack of any political vision which can inspire loyalty and enthusiasm. Yet it ultimately serves only to exacerbate the problem, encouraging distrust of coalition claims and cynicism about the purpose and objectives of the war but compliments western interests (Hammond, 2003)<sup>79</sup>.

The coverage of the ongoing 'war on terror' in cyberspace offers a good example of how political considerations are framed and how the State benefits from the framing. Mass media representations of the "War on Terror" present a war taking place on a number of geographic fronts, from the Western "liberation" of Afghanistan and Iraq, to the bombings in Bali, Madrid, New York, and London. The mass media representations of the war against terrorism presents Western governments with an opportunity to mobilize public support in new and ubiquitous

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<sup>78</sup>Friel, H. and Falk, R.A. (2004) *The Record of the Paper: How the New York Times Misreports US Foreign Policy*. London

<sup>79</sup>Philip Hammond (2003) *The Media War on Terrorism* London South Bank University *Journal for Crime, Conflict and the Media* 1 (1) p2



ways.<sup>80</sup> “Terrorists” and independent reporters have proved adept at utilizing cyberspace to cover the war with the end result being to challenge Western states and to sap the confidence of formerly complacent Western societies.

The world gets to learn much after a war as journalists often reveal facts they were unable or unwilling to report during war time. For instance during the invasion of Iraq, reporters produced dramatic real-time footage of the rapid coalition advance. A photographer working for the New York Times Magazine is reported to have later given an interview to the Le Monde media in which he recounted numerous incidents of US Marines shooting civilians (Guerrin, 2003).<sup>81</sup> NBC correspondent Ashleigh Banfield revealed that her own network had produced a ‘glorious and wonderful picture that had a lot of people watching and a lot of advertisers excited, but it wasn’t journalism’. (Banfield, A. 2003)<sup>82</sup> These revelations all came after the war.

The internet is clearly changing the landscape of political discourse and advocacy. It offers new and inexpensive methods for collecting and publishing information, for communicating and coordinating action on a global scale, and for reaching out to policy makers. It supports both open and private communication. Advocacy groups and individuals worldwide are taking advantage of these features in their attempts to influence foreign policy

Cyber threats on foreign and domestic policy have resulted in several countries, like the U.S. to lobby for mutual legal assistance treaties, extradition, the sharing of intelligence, and the need for uniform computer crime laws so that cyber criminals can be successfully investigated and

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<sup>80</sup>Pax, S. (2006).Where is Raed? Retrieved February 20, 2006 [http://dear\\_raed.blogspot.com](http://dear_raed.blogspot.com)

<sup>81</sup>Guerrin, M. (2003) ‘Embedded photographer: “I saw marines kill civilians”’, trans. Norman Madarasz, Counterpunch, 16 April <http://www.counterpunch.org/guerrin04162003.html>

<sup>82</sup>Banfield, A. (2003) ‘MSNBC’s Banfield slams war coverage’, AlterNet, 29 April <http://www.alternet.org/story.html?StoryID=15778>

prosecuted even when their crimes cross international borders, as they so often do.<sup>83</sup> This effort is not focused on either cyber terrorism or hacking, but rather addresses an array of actions that includes all forms of hacking and computer network attacks, computer and telecommunications fraud, child pornography on the Net, and electronic piracy (software, music, etc.). It also covers state-sponsored cyber warfare operations that use hacking and computer network attacks as a military weapon.

One advantage of the Internet over other media is that it tends to break down barriers erected by government censors. For example, after Jordanian officials removed an article from 40 print copies of the Economist on sale in Jordan, a subscriber found a copy on-line, made photocopies, and faxed it to 1,000 Jordanians (Davis, 1999).<sup>84</sup>

Just how much impact did the Internet have on foreign policy decisions relating the war? It clearly had a part in the political discourse taking place, and it was exploited by the West seeking to alter foreign policy decisions. It also impacted military decisions. While NATO targeted Serb media outlets carrying Milosevic's propaganda, it intentionally did not bomb Internet service providers or shut down the satellite links bringing the Internet to Yugoslavia. Policy instead was to keep the Internet open. James P. Rubin, spokesman for the U.S. State Department, said "Full and open access to the Internet can only help the Serbian people know the ugly truth about the atrocities and crimes against humanity being perpetrated in Kosovo by the Milosevic regime."<sup>85</sup> Indirectly, the Internet may have also affected public support for the war, which in turn might have affected policy decisions made during the course of the conflict.

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<sup>83</sup> Kevin Whitelaw, 1998 A Terrorists on the Web: Electronic Safe Haven at U.S. News & World Report, June 22, p. 46.

<sup>84</sup> Richard Davis, 1999 The Web of Politics, Oxford University Press, p. 177.

<sup>85</sup> Larry McShane, Yugoslavs Condemn Bombs Over E-mail to U.S. media,@Nando Times, April 17, 1999, [www.nandotimes.com](http://www.nandotimes.com).

## 2.2 Agenda Setting Theory

American journalist, Walter Lippmann, was the first to analyze the impact of the media on people's perceptions. In 1922, Lippmann(1992) described in 'Public Opinion' that people did not respond directly to events in the real world but instead lived in a pseudo-environment composed of "the pictures in our heads". The media would play an important part in the furnishing of these pictures and shaping of this pseudo-environment.<sup>86</sup>

According to the agenda-setting theory the mass media set the agenda for public opinion by highlighting certain issues. The theory was first developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in their Chapel Hill study (1968),<sup>87</sup> Studying the way political campaigns were covered in the media, Shaw and McCombs found that the main effect of news media was agenda-setting, which means telling people not what to think, but what to think about. Agenda setting is usually referred to as a function of mass media and not a theory. In an investigation of the agenda-setting function of the mass media, they attempted to assess the relationship between what voters in one community said were important issues and the actual content of the media messages used during the campaign. McCombs and Shaw (1972) concluded that the mass media exerted a significant influence on what voters considered to be the major issues of the campaign.

The abstract in their article about this theory states: In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. In reflecting what candidates are saying

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<sup>86</sup>Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion,1922 , Harcourt Brace

<sup>87</sup>McCombs, M.E., & Shaw, D.L. (1972).The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media. Public Opinion Quarterly, 36 (Summer), 176-187.

during a campaign, the mass media may well determine the important issues – that is, the media may set the “agenda” of the campaign (McCombs, 2003).<sup>88</sup>

The theory explains the correlation between the rate at which media cover a story and the extent to which people think that this story is important. This correlation has been shown to occur repeatedly. Since that time, McCombs and Shaw have expanded on this theory, producing many research articles and even extending the theory to include what they now call Second Level Agenda Setting (Davie, 2011).<sup>89</sup>

Agenda setting is believed to occur because the press must be selective in reporting the news. News outlets act as gatekeepers of information and make choices about what to report and what not. What the public know and care about at any given time is mostly a by-product of media-gate keeping.

The agenda-setting function is a 3 part-process<sup>90</sup>:

1. Media Agenda – Issues discussed in the media
2. Public Agenda – issues discussed and personally relevant to the public
3. Policy Agenda - issues that policy makers consider important

Media Tenor (2013) identified that priming, vividness of presentation and position were all determinants of the importance given to a news story.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> McCombs M., The Agenda Setting Role of the Mass Media in the Shaping of Public Opinion, 2003

<sup>89</sup> Davie G., Agenda Setting Theory: Quick Overview of Agenda Setting, 2011

<sup>90</sup> Agenda Setting Theory, International Agenda Setting Conference, [www.agendasetting.com](http://www.agendasetting.com), accessed July 2, 2013

<sup>91</sup> Agenda Setting Theory', International Agenda Setting Conference, [www.agendasetting.com](http://www.agendasetting.com)

As evidence of how media sets agendas, Media Tenor<sup>92</sup> gives an example of how the media covered the tsunami that hit South-East Asia in December 2004 and the earthquake that hit Pakistan in October 2005. The tsunami received far more extensive coverage in all countries analyzed in both television and print media which in turn affected people's behaviour in terms of private donations. The public were not aware of the need for help in the earthquake affected region of Pakistan. In Germany, for example, the tsunami received 666 reports in the three TV channels in comparison to 66 on the earthquake. These 666 reports contributed to private donations amounting to USD178 million while only \$USD8 million was collected for the earthquake victims.

Livingstone (1997) quotes former Secretary of State, James Baker, “all too often, television is what determines what is a crisis. Television concluded the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and the fighting in the Balkans was a crisis, and they began to cover it and cover it. And so the Clinton administration (was left) to find a way to do something. (Yet) they didn't do that in Rwanda where the excesses were every bit as bad, if not worse”<sup>93</sup>. The salience that media may give or not give to certain topics can influence the importance that the topic has for the government, thus increasing its priority in terms of national security.

Blanton (2012) narrates that when FOX News issued a poll regarding President Obama's birth certificate, 37 percent of Republican respondents said they believe that Obama was not a natural born citizen compared to just 12 percent of Democrats.<sup>94</sup> The agenda setting theory suggests that

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid

<sup>93</sup>Livingston, S., 'An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention', Harvard College. Massachusetts: The Joan Shorenstein Center,. 1997

<sup>94</sup> Blanton D., Fox News Polls, “24 percent believe Obama not born in the US”, retrieved November 10, 2012, <http://www.foxnews.com>

this is the result of repeated coverage by FOX News of the birth certificate issue, an issue that was not covered as much by other networks.

Riaz(2008)<sup>95</sup> observes that media organizations and institutions have employed thousands of people to observe those events and report them. The news media tell us which issues are important and which ones are not. Even without setting sight on the war situations of Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Kashmir the world has pictures of these disputed areas. The media's daily reports inform about the latest events and changes taking place in the world. As a result of this phenomenon, most perceptions about the world are a second-hand reality created by the media organizations. Riaz argues that there is no assurance and no guarantee that this reality is an accurate picture of the world.

A close scrutiny of the media shows that that with the explosive growth and deployment of an increasingly pervasive global mass media around the world today, television broadcasters and U.S. foreign policy makers have come to interact in a highly complex and synergetic way (Harmon, 1999)<sup>96</sup>. Over the years, the global mass media's role in the United States has expanded and developed into a powerful force, one that arguably influences both the substance of American foreign policy and the process by which this policy is formulated. To this end, it is evident that the strength of this influence was powerful enough to have helped bring an end to American involvement in Vietnam, and was a significant factor in President Carter's failed bid for re-election by way of the November 1980 hostage crisis in Iran.

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<sup>95</sup>RiazSaquib, ' Agenda Setting Role of Mass Media', Global Media Journal, Vol 1, issue 2, AllamaIqbal Open University, Pakistan, Autumn 2008

<sup>96</sup> Harmon T. Mathew, 'The Media, Technology and United States Foreign Policy: A Re-examination of the "CNN Effect"', Swords & Ploughshares, Vol VIII, No.2, Spring 1999, [www.ocean.otr.usm.edu](http://www.ocean.otr.usm.edu)

Over time the U.S. political system has undeniably seen what Hermon refers to as a veritable “explosion” of news media technology. In this explosion, the world has witnessed the development of a 24-hours-a-day Cable News Network (CNN), and the deployment of communications satellites that can dispatch “real-time” news reports from anywhere on the planet. The term “CNN effect” or the “CNN curve,” or the “CNN factor.” from the works of Warren P. Strobel (1996) has come to represent the influence that this new kind of “realtime” reporting can have – that dramatic images of starving masses, shelled populations, or dead American soldiers can induce public demands for action from elected officials. The phrase CNN effect emerges from the idea that real-time communications technology could provoke domestic audiences and political elites to global events.<sup>97</sup>

Whether or not these demands are ill considered is a matter of intense debate. But the general opinion among policy leaders is that “these temporary emotional responses may conflict with the more considered judgment of foreign policy officials, forcing them to take action that will soon have to be reversed or modified”<sup>98</sup>. This effectively means a loss of policy control and sovereignty on the part of government policymakers.<sup>99</sup> Accordingly, George F. Kennan (1993) (writing as U.S. troops landed in Somalia to help deal with the imminent humanitarian disaster) was concerned that if foreign policy decisions are made by popular whim, “then there is no

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<sup>97</sup>Warren Strobel, “The Media and U.S. Policies Toward Intervention: A Closer Look at the ‘CNN Effect,’” in C. Crocker and F.Hampson, eds., *Managing Global Chaos* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996. p. 357.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid

<sup>99</sup> Steven Livingston and Todd Eachus, “Humanitarian Crises and U.S. Foreign Policy: Somalia and the CNN Effect Reconsidered,” Vol. 12, No. 4, *Political Communication*, October-December 1995. pp. 415-416.

place, not only for myself, but for what have traditionally been regarded as the responsible deliberative organs of our government, in both executive and legislative branches.”<sup>100</sup>

In 1988 Patrick O’Heffernan<sup>101</sup>, conducted a survey amongst U.S. foreign policy officials to find out if “there evidence that the mass media [both positive and negative media coverage] accelerate foreign policy making”. 76 percent of the foreign policy officials surveyed responded positively. Results from the interviews corroborate the survey findings

91 per cent of policy officials surveyed perceive that the media accelerate policy decisions; while 14 percent responded that it depends on the event and 77 percent agreed without qualification. Respondents were not unanimous in their opinion of the impact of this speed-up on foreign policy, however; 43 percent felt it was an unqualified negative; 22 percent said there were some benefits; 13 percent felt it was positive; and the remainder did not know (Harmon, 1999).<sup>102</sup>

Former Secretary General of the United Nations Boutros Boutros-Ghali is on record stating that, “for the past two centuries, it was law that provided the source of authority for democracy. Today, law seems to be replaced by opinion as the source of authority, and the media serve as the arbiter of public opinion” (Neuman, 1995).<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> George Kennan, “Somalia, Through a Glass Darkly,” New York Times, September 30, 1993. p. A25.

<sup>101</sup> Patrick O’Heffernan, ‘Mass Media and American Foreign Policy’, New Jersey: Ablex, 1991, p. 64.

<sup>102</sup> Harmon T. Mathew, ‘The Media, Technology and United States Foreign Policy: A Re-examination of the “CNN Effect”’, Swords & Ploughshares, Vol VIII, No.2, Spring 1999, p5, www.ocean.otr.usm.edu

<sup>103</sup> J. Neuman, Ambassadors, ‘ Relics of the Sailing Ships? A Gentle Inquiry into the Diplomatic Trade in the Age of Cyberspac’ Washington, DC: Annenberg Washington Program in Communication Policy Studies, Northwestern University, 1995, p. 2.



Livingstone and Eachus (1995)<sup>104</sup> hold that government officials, legislators, media professionals, and scholars have certainly voiced a strong and growing concern and anxiety that journalists are exercising an uncontrollable control over U.S. foreign policy.

“Real-time” television images of dramatic foreign policy developments greatly increase temporal pressure on policy makers to come up with some sort of a response to the events depicted in the news. This kind of pressure is not irresistible, but it is endured at the risk of media commentary and political criticism and, fundamentally, even one’s own political well-being (Warren Strobel, 1997)<sup>105</sup>

Former White House spokesperson Dee Dee Myers confessed that during the Somalia crisis in October 1993, “every single day we were forced to respond to developments and do so within the same news cycle.”<sup>106</sup>

In his article in The Huffington Post, Joshua Gleis (2011)<sup>107</sup> states with confidence that the “CNN Effect” ultimately led to NATO’s intervention of Libya on 19 March 2011. Indeed Bernard C. Cohen argues that in the 1990s television “has demonstrated its power to move governments. By focusing daily on the starving children in Somalia, a pictorial story tailor-made for television, TV mobilized the conscience of the nation’s public institutions, compelling the

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<sup>104</sup> Steven Livingstone and Todd Eachus, “Humanitarian Crises and U.S. Foreign Policy: Somalia and the CNN Effect Reconsidered,” Vol. 12, No. 4, Political Communication, October-December 1995. pp. 415-416.

<sup>105</sup> Warren Strobel, *Late Breaking Foreign Policy: The News Media’s Influence on Peace Operations* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1997).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid

<sup>107</sup> Gleis, J., “The Syrian Anomaly”, The Huffington Post, 18 April 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joshua-gleis/the-syrian-anomaly\\_b\\_849762.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joshua-gleis/the-syrian-anomaly_b_849762.html)&gt;.

government into a policy of intervention for humanitarian reasons’’.<sup>108</sup> In the view of Michael Mandelbaum, "televised pictures of starving people" in Somalia "created a political clamor to feed them, which propelled the U.S. military" into action.<sup>109</sup> Adam Roberts (1993) characterizes U.S. intervention in Somalia as "responding to the immediate pressure of media."<sup>110</sup> George F. Kennan describes American policy as "controlled by popular emotional impulses, and particularly ones provoked by the commercial television industry."<sup>111</sup> A reading of various works shows states that, next to Vietnam, Somalia may be the most often cited case of media influence on American foreign policy, and it is one in which an effect of high order-inspiring a military intervention-is claimed. There is no reason to doubt that the appearance of Somalia on American television just before major changes in U.S. policy in August and November of 1992 influenced the decision of the Bush administration to act (Mermin, 1997)<sup>112</sup>

Mermin narrates that General Brent Scowcroft, former President Bush’s national security advisor, also commented that CNN “routinely became the first way we found out about crises,” often long before the U.S. embassy or the CIA had given their briefings. “Five minutes after that, the press would want to have a U.S. policy response on it.” While it was possible to endure the

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<sup>108</sup>Bernard C. Cohen, "A View from the Academy" in W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz, eds., *Taken By Storm: The Media, Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 9-10.

<sup>109</sup>Michael Mandelbaum, "The Reluctance to Intervene," *Foreign Policy* 95, Summer 1994, 16.

<sup>110</sup>Adam Roberts, "Humanitarian War: Military Intervention and Human Rights," *International Affairs* 69, July 1993, 446.

<sup>111</sup>George F. Kennan, "Somalia, Through a Glass Darkly," *New York Times*, 30 September, 1993.

<sup>112</sup>Jonathan Mermin, "Television News and American Intervention in Somalia: The Myth of a Media-Driven Foreign Policy", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 112, No. 3, Autumn, 1997, pp. 385-403, *The Academy of Political Science*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2657563> .Accessed: 02/08/2013 04:22

pressure, “you could only do that [delay a response] for so long” before the news media began to accuse the administration of being unprepared, dumbfounded, and disorganized”.<sup>113</sup>

Hefferman (1991) quotes Chris Van Hollen, former U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Chief of Staff, commenting on the impact of modern-day effects of real-time reporting: It means more distractions, which take people’s eyes off a long-term goal. People end up spending a lot of time fire-fighting on issues that probably wouldn’t have been raised to a high level in earlier days because there wasn’t that much information about it that quickly.<sup>114</sup>

Other senior policy officials and government media representatives voiced similar concerns. Phyllis Oakley, former Deputy Spokesperson, US. Department of State is reported to have stated that: “The tendency would be [to say] that it harms foreign policy because it doesn’t allow for enough time to think things through and to consult.”<sup>115</sup> Hodding Carter, former Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State stated that “television has, because of the impact of the fast arriving picture, has forced or driven governments to respond more quickly to events than its own information would have deemed prudent, to say something to counter these images. These images thus affect posturing”.<sup>116</sup>

A prime example of the role of “real-time” media reports on U.S. foreign policy decisions is the gruesome footage of the February 5, 1994, “marketplace massacre” in Sarajevo. Warren Strobel (1997)-then White House and former State Department correspondent for The Washington Times recounts how a mortar shell was fired into the central market in Sarajevo’s old city. The shell turned the crowded marketplace into a charnel house, dismembering and decapitating

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid

<sup>114</sup> Patrick O’Heffernan, *Mass Media and American Foreign Policy*, New Jersey: Ablex, 1991 p. 64.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid

<sup>116</sup> Ibid

bodies with its powerful explosion. Sixty-eight people were killed and nearly two hundred wounded in the deadliest single attack in Sarajevo's twenty-two-month siege. Within minutes, television cameras caught the horrible carnage and broadcast the scene around the world. At the Wehrkunde security conference in Munich, attended by then U.S. defense secretary William Perry, along with European defense ministers and parliamentarians, the images came in on the hotel television system's CNN channel. The impact was immediate.<sup>117</sup>

CNN reported the event, replete with pictures, for almost three days. In New York, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Madeline Albright, was in a meeting with her staff when the telephone rang with the news. She said "I did what anyone would do. I turned on CNN."<sup>118</sup>

Hermon (1999)<sup>119</sup> records that in the aftermath of the attack and the public outcry, the United States abandoned its hands-off policy towards the Balkan conflict. It let NATO in issuing an ultimatum to the Bosnian Serbs to remove their heavy weapons from around Bosnia's capital (an extension of this threat would lead to NATO's first use of offensive force in Europe in its history). The United States established the five-nation "Contact Group," giving new momentum to the search for a diplomatic solution to the conflict. This would clearly seem to be a case where CNN's reports directly led the United States towards action.

The first reports of the Sarajevo market massacre "incensed" President Clinton. "They pushed him and some (though not all) of his advisors into the Oval Office on a Saturday afternoon. The television pictures made their own silent plea – the carnage did not need a journalist to say categorically "something must be done." No viewer, whether politician or not, could fail to be

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<sup>117</sup> Strobel, Ibid

<sup>118</sup> Madeline Albright, Remarks to CNN World Contributors' Conference, quoted in Warren Strobel, 1997, Ibid . p. 154

<sup>119</sup> Hermon T. Mathew, Ibid

appalled by the un-sanitized images of shredded limbs, headless bodies, puddles of blood and the torsos being shipped on trucks like animal carcasses (Gowing,1994)<sup>120</sup>.

The gruesome scenes on television also seemed to help the then US Secretary of State, Warren Christopher – who was now a principal advocate of powerful and commanding U.S. action in the Balkans – make his case both publicly and within the administration. Thus, the “real-time” facet of television images accelerated the policy process and forced decisions outside of the bureaucracy – at least according to Michael McCurry (Christopher’s spokesperson at the time). “It could have taken weeks or months. The impact of the marketplace bombing was to force there to be a response much quicker than the U.S. government” would normally produce.<sup>121</sup>

Warren Strobel (1997) reports that a senior US official anonymously commented that “people had been dying day after day after day in Sarajevo.” But once the images flashed across that television screen, people “think something new or different has happened... a discrete act that needs to be responded to.”<sup>122</sup>

Many scholars of the “CNN Effect” contend that it is debatable whether the Clinton administration could have explained a more forceful policy in the Balkans to the American people, much less convince reluctant allies such as Britain and Canada to participate, without the action-imperative social and political atmosphere created by the vivid images from Sarajevo.

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<sup>120</sup>Nik Gowing, "Real-time" Television Coverage of Armed Conflicts and Diplomatic Crises: Does it Pressure or Distort Foreign Policy Decisions?' Working Paper 94-1, Cambridge, MA: The Joan Shorenstein Center, Harvard University, 1994.,p. 3.

<sup>121</sup> Strobel, 1997, Ibid

<sup>122</sup> Ibid

Harmon<sup>123</sup> argues that the significance of the “CNN effect” is grossly overstated. The media does not *control* the direction of U.S. foreign policy – the media’s effect on U.S. foreign policy is far more complex than just a simple “cause effect” attribution suggests and much more subservient to the policy actions of government officials themselves than the case commonly seems. Rather than having an overarching and controlling effect on the formulation and execution of U.S. foreign policy, the “CNN effect” wields its power in two very specific ways:

1) *As a catalyst*. The pervasiveness of “real-time” media reports often contracts the policymaking process, giving officials less time before they must respond publicly.

2) *As a watchdog*. If executive branch policy is in flux or is poorly articulated, media reports have a greater role in focusing U.S. public opinion in a given direction. This in turn leads to an impact on policy.

The media’s catalytic function has to do with the nature of technology and the ability of modern news media to transmit graphic images almost instantaneously. This speed overwhelms and overburdens the traditional policymaking structures, forcing decisions that might not otherwise be made, perhaps before all the facts are in. “Real-time” reports can also force government officials to spend far more time than they used to explaining and selling their policies to the public and worrying about how those policies will be received. The president and his staff may then try to “fine tune” the policy by making rhetorical adjustments. These adjustments, if left unabated, can potentially force a sharp, impulsive, and almost certainly an unexpected change in focus at the upper levels of government. In short, this catalytic function makes the conduct of foreign policy

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid

and the use of military force “more transparent, subjecting diplomats and military officers to a level of democratic review that has little, if any, historical precedent.” (Strobel, 1997)<sup>124</sup>

This first function of media as catalyst certainly has a great deal to do with the media’s second function, of watchdog. No one can deny the fact that the speed at which the global mass media is able to report on events today has thrown open U.S. government policies and actions to more unrestricted public review than at any other point in U.S. history<sup>125</sup> As a result, government officials cannot afford to conduct modern foreign policy without explaining it to, and building support among, the American public. (Strobel, 1997)<sup>126</sup> They can do this through the news media and with the emergence of “real-time” reporting. This gives policymakers a corresponding increase in their ability to frame events and solicit public support, but they must do so responsibly and diligently. If government officials and policymakers are clear, organized and relatively straightforward about their policy, the media can be a powerful tool for garnering public support. However, if government officials and policymakers fail to put forth concrete and well-defined policies, the news media will fill this “policy void” by focusing on the criticisms or the policy preferences of the government’s opponents. Also, if policymakers wander from their societal mandate, the news media will “sooner or later make this fact transparent, and those officials will find public opinion in open revolt, demanding, usually without great specificity, a change of policy.”<sup>127</sup> In this, they may discover what has been called the “dark side” of the

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<sup>124</sup> Warren Strobel, ‘Late Breaking Foreign Policy: The News Media’s Influence on Peace Operations’, Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1997, p. 7.

<sup>125</sup> Warren Strobel, 1996. p. 358.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid

<sup>127</sup> Ibid

“CNN effect,” a force – “as sudden, immediate and powerful as an avenging angel” – that can sweep them along in its path.<sup>128</sup>

Warren Strobel (1997) finds the “CNN Effect” to be more myth than reality. By looking closely at four different peace-keeping operations, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Rwanda, and the decisions to intervene and/or pull out once involved (the push and the pull, as Strobel calls it), Strobel demonstrates, quite convincingly, the “CNN Effect” is more a myth than a reality. Policy-makers have not lost control of the foreign policy process. Television may be there. But sometimes it is responding to our leaders more than they are responding to it. The public may see these pictures, but that does not always lead to a major push to act. In the end, the decisions are, he shows, largely a function of strategic decisions made by our leaders. Television may magnify the audience or the action, but it does not cause us to act one way or the other.<sup>129</sup>

Strobel (1997) has argued that the relationship between policy makers and the media is a complex one, and that government officials use the media to serve their own goals more than the media drives policy decisions. He focuses on the major peace initiatives that the U.S. has participated in since the gulf war, with particular attention paid to the humanitarian effort in Somalia. Strobel believes that television can exert undue influence over policy decisions only if there is a lack of leadership. If the government defines particular objectives and goals for a mission, the government can usually rely on the support of the American public no matter the media's position. However, if an operation veers off course, the media can make officials react to the pressure of the moment. Many military and political officials in Somalia, for example,

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<sup>128</sup> F. Stech, “Winning CNN Wars,” Vol. 24, No. 3, Parameters, Autumn 1994. pp. 37-56.

<sup>129</sup> Warren Strobel, ‘Late Breaking Foreign Policy: The News Media’s Influence on Peace Operations’, Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1997, p. 7.



considered the U.S. operation there a success in that it prevented hundreds of thousands of people from dying of starvation. But because the government did not clearly and repeatedly state the objectives, it is considered a failure by many in that there were 28 American casualties.

However in a review of Strobel's book *Late Breaking Foreign Policy*, Arthur Sanders (1998) contends that, to say that television is not the cause of these decisions is not to say that television is not important or influential. This study found that, in many ways the case studies which Strobel examines reads like lessons in how important and influential television actually is. Television is everywhere. The decisions may not be "caused" by television, but every decision seems to be made with a conscious awareness of how it will appear on television. Our policy-makers may not be controlled by television, but they are abundantly aware of its presence.<sup>130</sup> And, in fact, Strobel outlines a number of effects that television does have. It causes us to change tactics. That is, once we decide to act or not act, the particular response is often shaped to the imperatives of television. It causes people (and by that Strobel means both the public and those who make policy decisions) to focus more on the humanitarian aspects and less on the underlying political aspects of these situations. It leads to "telescoping," shortening the time frame within which policymakers must act. And policy makers uniformly seem to be aware of needing to account for potential media reaction to whatever decision they ultimately make.

It is to Strobel's credit that, in a book whose central thesis is that television is not as important as it is sometimes thought, he does not try to shy away from discussing the influence that he does see. Thus, while he "attempts to demonstrate that there is nothing inevitable about the news media's ability, sometimes seemingly out of the blue, to alter plans and complicate policy" (p.

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<sup>130</sup> 'Late Breaking Foreign Policy' by Warren Strobel (Ibid), a Review by Arthur Sanders, H.Pol., February 1998, [www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev](http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev).

225), he closes with a series of recommendations concerning how government officials need to act in order to maintain control of policy in our media-saturated environment which, he notes, can be ignored only at great peril. This study agrees with Sanders that if you took out the brief discussions interspersed in the book about how television was not ultimately responsible for what happened, the book could be seen as an argument for just how much television has changed the nature of foreign policy in general, and peace-keeping operations in particular. It emerges that it is more a matter of emphasis than difference. For those who don't believe that the "CNN effect" was as strong as some people made it out to be, then Strobel's finding that television does not have as much impact as some have argued is less striking than his documentation of television's actual effects are.

On the flip side, Hermon (1994)<sup>131</sup> urges policy makers to view the media's spontaneity as a boon since "Real-time" television allows Government officials to disseminate their policies and assertions almost instantaneously; to send signals to both opponents and allies; and to view and analyze the impact of their actions, adjusting and correcting when and where necessary. Also, because CNN is by nature "real-time" and immediate, its reports are more like the old news wires, which typically distribute the first written, factual accounts of news events. This means that there is less judgmental bias inserted into the anchor or reporter's story.<sup>33</sup>

Arguably the greatest service to policymakers that CNN's "real-time" reporting provides is its ability to reach a large audience quickly. This allows policymakers to make their positions known clearly and efficiently if done correctly.

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<sup>131</sup> Hermon T. Mathew, *ibid*, p7

Another aspect of the “CNN effect” is the way that it can instantly inform the U.S. public of foreign crises that raise questions of U.S. involvement or even intervention. Simply put, television images help build a public constituency for U.S. involvement abroad, and CNN might be one of the last lines of defense against a traditionally isolationist U.S. public.

Gowing (1994) states thus: We are in the “Decade of the Dish” – while the military arsenal contains the latest stealth and smart technology, the television journalist’s arsenal contains a laptop computer, a Marisat telephone, and a portable “up-link” satellite the size of a large umbrella.<sup>132</sup> By definition, “real-time” images are those television pictures beamed back live by satellite from a location. Alternatively, they may have been taped a few minutes earlier, or possibly an hour or two before. These images are transmitted out of a war or conflict zone virtually instantaneously without the dangerous challenge of dispatching videocassettes by road, air, or sea to the distant television station. Consequently, the absence of a satellite dish in a conflict zone usually translates into a significantly lessened amount of coverage or none at all. Often, however, the presence of a dish creates news coverage because the TV station has to justify the cost of developing and owning the equipment. “Sometimes live ‘two-way’ interviews on location with correspondents or key news figures help to generate news or keep up the profile and/or momentum of a story, even though there is no particular news development to warrant them. Without “real-time” satellite ‘up-links,’ such an editorial momentum cannot be maintained.”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>Nik Gowing, “Real-time” Television Coverage of Armed Conflicts and Diplomatic Crises: Does it Pressure or Distort Foreign Policy Decisions?” Working Paper 94-1, Cambridge, MA: The Joan Shorenstein Center, Harvard University, 1994. p. 3.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid

The role of the mass media, especially in modern democracies, is a controversial topic. It is such a paradox to explain the exact impact the mass media have on the government. Mass media, especially in democratic states, has a role to play as a watchdog of the government. It watches what government does in particular, and also the policies being pursued. Government also has its agendas which it shrewdly and subtly projects as being in “public interest”. So it emerges that the relationship is akin to the classical “egg and chicken” puzzle: what comes first?

In a review of how the media covers issues other than political, William (2000) argues that over the last two decades the US media have been shifting rightward as their corporate owners enforce tighter ideological conformity. And all of the media now refer to people as “consumers,” cogs in a capitalist machine.<sup>134</sup> News is less than half profitable as entertainment and media firms are intensifying pressures on their “news properties” for higher profits, which means the pursuit of upscale demographics. Owners are removing journalism’s much vaunted separation of newsroom practices and business decisions, blurring the line between news and entertainment. Solomon narrates that when in 1996, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on a personal feud between Rupert Murdoch and Ted Turner “the combatants quietly conceded that they have become too interdependent to let the fight escalate into global warfare.

The result is increasingly slick, narrow sensationalist and upbeat news that lacks the capacity and avoids any attempt to engage the public in critical thinking on basic issues. This is especially so with business and economics. A case in point is the coverage of the protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, which took place concurrent with the WTO ministerial meetings in 1999. According to Solomon, the coverage documents the corporate media’s world

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<sup>134</sup>William S., ‘More Form than Substance: Press coverage of the WTO Protests in Seattle’, Monthly review, May 1 2000, [www.monthlyreview.org/2000/05/01](http://www.monthlyreview.org/2000/05/01)

view as they impose what one writer called “standardized assumptions” on the events and participants.

The coverage of the protests showed a common theme amongst especially the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times: that only zealots hold radical critiques of the WTO, which actually represents the best hope for the world’s future. The radical critiques were represented as marginal figures who hold unconventional, impractical and unwise views.<sup>135</sup>

Language is perhaps the most basic indicator of the corporate media’s views. Such terms as “free trade” and “liberalization” were not defined; their meaning was assumed to be so clear as to require no explanation. Thus “globalization” is simply a fact of life, rather like gravity.

William (2000) narrates how the protests themselves elicited the news media’s longstanding aversion to social disorder. Thus “violence” was defined solely as social unrest and damage to private property, not as environmental damage and human suffering. Although police and protest groups had discussed the protest plans in advance, the police may have been misled by “extreme dissenters.”<sup>136</sup> the Los Angeles Times reported that, perhaps the Seattle police should have been more proactive in learning the demonstrators’ true intentions; in Washington, DC, the paper said, police “even use informants and undercover officers.”

Reports on the protests were followed by reports commending delegates who “struggled...to salvage” the meeting.<sup>137</sup> Clinton’s efforts “collapsed...after a rebellion by developing countries and deadlock among America’s biggest trading partners”<sup>138</sup>.

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<sup>135</sup> Los Angeles Times, December 3, 1999, P. A1

<sup>136</sup> Los Angeles Times, December 2, P,A1

<sup>137</sup> Ibid

The New York Times' and the Los Angeles Times' coverage was in sharp contrast to that in Britain's daily Guardian and Sunday Observer. Both U.S. newspapers estimated the protesters' numbers at thirty thousand; the Guardian/Observer said one hundred thousand. Similarly, the latter newspaper was far more willing to criticize the U.S. delegation's behavior: In the hotels, "the U.S. is doing a bit of heavy arm-twisting to get some of the developing countries to sign up to their position, but it seems to have backfired", said a European Union official.<sup>139</sup>

The social unrest in Seattle was summed up by New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani: "It indicates the remaining damage that Marxism has done to the thinking of people" (December 4).

When an issue is important to the state and the corporate sector, they shape its coverage in the mainstream U.S. news media. (This point is made more extensively by Bagdikian in *The Media Monopoly* and W. Lance Bennett in his essay on press-state relations in the United States in the *Journal of Communication*, Spring 1990.)

For these media, a basic critique—much less a total rejection—of the WTO is simply unthinkable. As exemplified by the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times*, these media tended to trivialize and misrepresent the demonstrators' perspectives, thus devaluing them and rendering them more compatible with corporate values. Solomon demonstrates how the mainstream U.S. news media's political economy is a far more reliable guide to their content.

If the agenda setting role of the media in regard to foreign policy is in doubt then its coverage of issues like climate change leaves no doubt how media bias can affect perceptions. A scrutiny of the coverage shows that it has had noticeably significant effects on the public's opinion on

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<sup>138</sup>New York Times December 5, p. A 1

<sup>139</sup> The Observer, December 1 in Solomon S. William, *Ibid*

climate change,<sup>140</sup> as it mediates the scientific opinion on climate change. Scientists and media scholars express frustrations with inadequate science reporting<sup>141</sup> arguing that it can lead to basic distortions. First, journalists distort reality by making scientific errors. Second, they distort by keying on human-interest stories rather than scientific content. And third, journalists distort by rigid adherence to the construct of balanced coverage. Bord, O'Connor, & Fisher (2000) argue that responsible citizenry necessitates a concrete knowledge of causes and that until, for example, the public understands what causes climate change it cannot be expected to take voluntary action to mitigate its effects.<sup>142</sup>

Commentators have argued that the climate change discourses constructed in the media have not been conducive to generating the political will for swift action. For instance Hulme (2009) argues that media coverage of climate change (particularly in tabloid journalism but also more generally), is concentrated around extreme weather events and projections of catastrophe, creating "a language of imminent terror which some commentators argue has instilled policy-paralysis and inhibited public response. Moser et al. suggest that using solution-orientated as opposed to catastrophe frames will help inspire action to solve climate change<sup>143</sup> The current discursive setting has only generated concern over climate change but not inspired action.

Lastly this study examined the media's approach to election coverage and from a review of articles in the months leading to the Kenya's elections 2013 it was clear to the researcher that the Western tended to hype more on the possibility of violence erupting after elections as it did in

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<sup>140</sup>Antilla, L. "Self-Censorship and Science: A Geographical Review of Media Coverage of Climate Tipping Points" 2010, *Public Understanding of Science* 19 (2): 240–256. doi:10.1177/0963662508094099

<sup>141</sup>Singer, E., & Endreny, P. M., 'Reporting on Risk: How the Mass Media Portray Accidents, Diseases, Disasters and other Hazards' New York: Russell Sage, 1993

<sup>142</sup>Bord, R.J.; O'Connor & Fisher, "Public Perceptions of Global Warming: United States and International Perspectives". *Climate Research* 11 (1), 1998 75–84. doi:10.3354/cr011075

<sup>143</sup>Moser & Dilling, M., and L., 'Creating a Climate for Change, 2007, Cambridge University Press.

2007. It also tended to lean more to the Western government's claims that Kenya would become a pariah State in the event that the ICC inductees were elected buttressing the view of the administration in Washington and London. Though the media didn't set the agenda of the Western government's it carried their policy and sort to sway opinions of the audience particularly in Kenya towards the outcome desired by the Western governments. This clearly showed that there exists a link between policy makers and the media.

In concluding this chapter this study posits that much more research on the links between information, opinion, and decision making needs to be conducted. It is the view of this study that IakovFrizis (2013) balances it out well when he holds that he does not consider the media as another independent actor in the international arena, which tries to influence others in order to protect its interests. Nor does it pay much tribute to any reductionist analysis of the individuals who might govern the media.<sup>144</sup> This essay has shown that the media can take many faces, and through the evolution of technology the media have become the catalyst that alters the environment in which international actors interact. In other words, both game and players have remained the same, while what has changed and has possibly become more sophisticated is the rules or the variables that a player has to take under consideration as well as the strategies that a player has to deploy in order to "checkmate the opposing king". In other words, the evolution of media has affected the structure of both the international and the domestic system, thus indirectly impacting foreign policy.

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<sup>144</sup>IakovFrizis, 'The Impact of Media on Foreign Policy', e-international Relations, May 10, 2013, [www.e-ir.info/2013/05/10](http://www.e-ir.info/2013/05/10)



Chapter three of this study will provide a detailed case study of the media's activities in Somalia with a view to examining if the US Government's intervention was a function of the media's coverage or the media's coverage was a function of policy makers in Western capitals..

## CHAPTER THREE

### A CASE STUDY OF WESTERN MEDIA IN SOMALIA

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the role of the media in Somalia and whether or not it influenced the intervention of the West particularly the United States to intervene militarily in 1992.

#### 3.2 Background

At the beginning of 1992, civil war and starvation gripped Somalia in the wake of the overthrow of Mohammed Siad Barre, who had ruled the country for two decades. In January, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution calling for a ceasefire and a political settlement of the conflict (Makinda, 1993).<sup>145</sup> In March this ceasefire went into effect; but with no national government and continued factional conflict over food, by August "as many as 1.5 million of an estimated Somali population of 6 million were threatened with starvation, with approximately 300,000 Somalis already having died, including roughly 25% of all children under the age of five."(Schraeder, 1994)<sup>146</sup> As of March, the United States resisted a peacekeeping role for the UN in Somalia, supporting a Security Council resolution "only after language calling for a UN-sponsored peacekeeping mission had been removed."<sup>147</sup> In April, the Security Council authorized a modest military operation, but negotiations with Somali factions delayed its implementation. On 27 July, the Security Council voted to airlift food to Somalia, and on 12

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<sup>145</sup>Samuel M. Makinda, "Seeking Peace From Chaos: Humanitarian Intervention in Somalia", Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1993, 61.

<sup>146</sup>Peter J. Schraeder, "United States Foreign Policy toward Africa: Incrementalism, Crisis and Change, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 177.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid

August the UN announced plans to send 500 troops to protect the international relief effort. On 14 August, the White House announced that the United States would take charge of the airlift.

The 500 troops did not arrive until September-"with the support of four U.S. warships carrying 2,100 Marines"-and proved unable to do much to protect the relief effort.(Schraeder, 1994) <sup>148</sup> In November, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali informed the Security Council that the relief effort was not working. On 26 November, the Bush administration announced that the United States would send troops to Somalia if the Security Council passed an authorizing resolution, which it did on 3 December. The first contingent of Operation Restore Hope hit the shores of Somalia on 9 December.

This study seeks to examine the extent of influence that the media had on the conceptualisation and activation of Operation Restore Hope and any other intervention in Somalia. It also provides an insight into how media operates, the so called "joined in the hip with government" theory where government officials rope in the media to sway public and official opinion on issues.

### **3.3 Media Operations**

Piers Robinson (1999), notes that during the 1980s the proliferation of new technologies transformed the potential of the news media to provide a constant flow of global real-time news.<sup>149</sup> Tiananmen Square and the collapse of communism symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall became major media events communicated to Western audiences instantaneously via TV news media. By the end of the decade the question was being asked as to what extent this 'media

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<sup>148</sup>Schraeder, United States Foreign Policy toward Africa, 175.

<sup>149</sup> Piers Robinson : 'The CNN effect: Can the News Media Drive Foreign Policy?' Review of International Studies,British International Studies Association , , 1999 , 25, 301

pervasiveness'<sup>150</sup> had impacted upon government—particularly the process of foreign policy making. The new technologies appeared to reduce the scope for calm deliberation over policy, forcing policy-makers to respond to whatever issue journalists focused on<sup>151</sup>This perception was in turn reinforced by the end of the bipolar order and what many viewed as the collapse of the old anti-communist consensus which—it was argued—had led to the creation of an ideological bond uniting policy makers and journalists. Released from the 'prism of the Cold War'<sup>152</sup>journalists were, it was presumed, freer not just to cover the stories they wanted but to criticise US foreign policy as well. The phrase 'CNN effect' encapsulated the idea that real-time communications technology could provoke major responses from domestic audiences and political elites to global events.

### **3.4 Media And The Somalia Situation**

Piers Robinson (1999) argues that if the Gulf War reminded observers of the enormous power that governments had when it came to shaping the media analysis, events after the 1991 conflict appeared to confirm the opposite.<sup>153</sup> In fact, according to Martin Shaw<sup>154</sup>, emotive and often highly critical coverage of Kurdish refugees fleeing from Saddam Hussein's forces, quite literally caused 'the virtually unprecedented proposal for Kurdish safe havens'. Operation Restore Hope in Somalia quickly followed, and once again it was believed that the ill-fated sortie

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<sup>150</sup> James Hoge, 'Media Pervasiveness', *Foreign Affairs*, 73 (1994), pp. 136–44.

<sup>151</sup> Michael R. Beschloss, 'Presidents, Television and Foreign Crisis' Washington DC: The Annenberg Washington Program in Communications Policy Studies of Northwestern University, 1993, Timothy J. McNulty, 'Television's Impact on Executive Decision-Making and Diplomacy', *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 17 (1993), pp. 67–83.

<sup>152</sup> Kevin Williams, 'The Light at the End of the Tunnel' in John Eldridge (ed.), *Getting the Message* London: Routledge, 1993, p. 315.

<sup>153</sup> Piers Robinson : 'The CNN effect: Can the News Media Drive Foreign Policy?' *Review of International Studies*, British International Studies Association , , 1999 , 25, 301–309

<sup>154</sup> Shaw Martin, 'Civil Society and Media in Global Crises', London: St Martin's Press, 1993, p. 88.

into the Horn of Africa in 1992 had effectively been forced upon the United States by media pressure. The two interventions—in Northern Iraq and Somalia—triggered a major debate within academic and government circles. Foreign policy ‘experts’ in particular were dismayed by what they saw as this unwarranted intrusion by the Fourth estate into the policy process. Kennan (1993), typically, argued that media coverage of suffering people in Somalia had usurped traditional policy making channels triggering an ill thought out intervention.<sup>155</sup> Other commentators followed Kennan in expressing concern at the dangers of media dictated foreign policy.<sup>156</sup> James Hoge, for example, observed that ‘today’s pervasive media increases the pressure on politicians to respond promptly to news accounts that by their very immediacy are incomplete, without context and sometimes wrong’.<sup>157</sup> Working from a realist perspective, critics generally decried the CNN effect and stressed the need for elite control of the foreign policy making process.

Cohen (1994) argues that in the 1990s television "demonstrated its power to move governments. By focusing daily on the starving children in Somalia, a pictorial story tailor-made for television, TV mobilized the conscience of the nation's public institutions, compelling the government into a policy of intervention for humanitarian reasons."<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> George F. Kennan, ‘Somalia, Through a Glass Darkly’, *New York Times*, 30 September 1993.

<sup>156</sup> For example see Raymond R. Coffey, ‘Don’t Let TV Cameras Shape Policy’, *Chicago Sun-Times*, 10 December 1992, Hoge, ‘Media Pervasiveness’, Michael Mandelbaum, ‘The Reluctance to Intervene’, *Foreign Policy*, 95 (1994), pp. 3–18, Jessica Mathews, ‘Policy vs TV’, *Washington Post*, 8 March 1994.

<sup>157</sup> Hoge, ‘Media Pervasiveness’, p. 137.

<sup>158</sup> Bernard C. Cohen, "A View from the Academy" in W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz, eds., *Taken By Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 9-10.

Next to Vietnam, Somalia may be the most often cited case of media influence on American foreign policy, and it is one in which an effect of high order-inspiring a military intervention-is claimed.

In the view of Mandelbaum (1994), "televised pictures of starving people" in Somalia "created a political clamor to feed them, which propelled the U.S. military" into action.<sup>159</sup> Roberts (1993) characterizes U.S. intervention in Somalia as "responding to the immediate pressure of media."<sup>160</sup> George F. Kennan describes American policy as "controlled by popular emotional impulses, and particularly ones provoked by the commercial television industry."<sup>161</sup>

We get an insight of the media's role in Somalia from Major Stockwell (1995),<sup>162</sup> a military officer in the US military who wrote that, the media's coverage of the United States' and United Nations' intervention in Somalia influenced military operations primarily because the press had unprecedented access to the battlefield. Somalia reinforced that public opinion is a military operation's center of gravity and that media access to the battlefield is a military operation's critical vulnerability.

Media images of starving Somalis got the world into Somalia and media images of a dead U.S. soldier being dragged through Mogadishu streets got the world out of Somalia. In between, the media's access to the battlefield influenced operations in a manner previously unseen. For example, consider the frustration that U.S. troops felt when the international press corps reported

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<sup>159</sup>Michael Mandelbaum, "The Reluctance to Intervene," *Foreign Policy* 95, Summer 1994, 16.

<sup>160</sup>Adam Roberts, "Humanitarian War: Military Intervention and Human Rights," *International Affairs* 69, July 1993, 446.

<sup>161</sup>George F. Kennan, "Somalia, Through a Glass Darkly," *New York Times*, 30 September, 1993.

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Major David B. Stockwell, 'Press Coverage in Somalia: A Case for Media Relations to be a Principle of Military Operations Other Than War,' A Masters Thesis, April 18, 1995, [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

on Task Force Ranger's seemingly bungled raid on a U.N. compound in Mogadishu in August 1993. Three days later, a U.S. Army Quick Reaction Force patrol approached a suspected militia mortar firing position in Mogadishu that was housed in a humanitarian relief organization compound. This time, these soldiers knocked on the gate and asked the proprietor for permission to search the premises. Media coverage had influenced that patrol's actions. The likelihood is good that the media will have similar access to future operations-other-than-war battlefields.

According to Stockwell (1994), if the military is to keep pace with the influential press on the operations-other-than-war battlefield, the military would be better-served if it considered media relations as a principle of operations other than war to give it the prominence it needs for proper planning and execution. Stockwell (1994) recommended that media relations has the impact necessary to be considered a principle of military operations other than war and the U.S. military ought to adopt it as such.

Mermin (1997) argues that there is no reason to doubt that the appearance of Somalia on American television just before major changes in U.S. policy in August and November of 1992 influenced the decision of the Bush administration to act.<sup>163</sup> What is not clear, however, is why Somalia appeared on television in the first place, a question of central importance in understanding the scope and character of television's influence on foreign policy formulation.

According to Mermin (1997) one possibility is that independent journalistic initiative put Somalia in the news. An example of this is television coverage of the Ethiopia famine in 1984.

Immediately after a series of NBC stories on Ethiopia in October 1984, American aid to Ethiopia

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<sup>163</sup> Jonathan Mermin "Television News and American Intervention in Somalia: The Myth of a Media-Driven Foreign Policy, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 112, No. 3, Autumn, 1997, pp. 385-403, The Academy of Political Science, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2657563> .Accessed: 02/08/2013 04:22

skyrocketed, from \$23 million for all of fiscal 1984 to nearly \$100 million for October and November 1984.

Harrison and Palmer(1986)find that an enterprising NBC correspondent in London is responsible for getting a story on Ethiopia, originally broadcast on the BBC, onto the air in the United States. The origin of the Ethiopia story appears to have been the effort of a journalist to publicize distant events that had for the most part been ignored in the West. The origin of Somalia as a news story could turn out to be similar.<sup>164</sup>

Mermin(1998) however offers another angle arguing that a second possible explanation for the appearance of Somalia on American television is that it had not been ignored but made the news only after it had generated interest among foreign policy makers in the United States. In this view, television coverage of Somalia in the summer and fall of 1992 did not originate in the independent actions of journalists but in the interaction of journalists engaged in routine newsgathering practices and sources in Washington who made efforts to get Somalia onto the foreign policy agenda.

Mermin (1997) is more inclined that it was the government which got the Somalia mindset before the media and then roped in the media. He argues that although the Ethiopia model often appears to be implicit in the argument that television got America into Somalia and in claims that television has emerged as a major independent player in the foreign policy arena, the evidence indicates that only when Washington turned its attention to Somalia did ABC, CBS, and NBC deem events there worthy of coverage. In other words, if television inspired American intervention in Somalia, it did so under the influence of governmental actors-a number of

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<sup>164</sup>Paul Harrison and Robin Palmer,' News Out of Africa: Biafra to Band Aid'London: Hilary Shipman, 1986, 123-24.



senators, a House committee, a presidential candidate, and figures within the Bush administration-who made considerable efforts to publicize events in Somalia, interpret them as constituting a crisis, and encourage a U.S. response.<sup>165</sup>

If television affects what the government is paying attention to, it is in a position to affect government policy. "By publicizing foreign events," Kegley and Wittkopf(199) observe, the media may "provoke decision making about issues which, had they not attracted attention, would probably have been met with apathy and indifference."<sup>166</sup> Journalists necessarily engage in agenda setting, in deciding out of the vast universe of events what to report and what to ignore.

Mermin(1997) poses, what rules do journalists follow in setting the news agenda,? On this question, Robinson states that most studies have found that American journalists turn to politicians and government officials for guidance in deciding what constitutes news. Mermin argues that although news happens everywhere, practical considerations limit where reporters are able to look for it. To offer a package of news consistently, "on deadline with a limited budget and staff, editors have to assign reporters to places where newsworthy information is made public every day. Reporters need sources that can provide information on a regular and timely basis; they are not free to roam or probe at will." (Sigal 1986)<sup>167</sup>In the area of foreign policy, a concentration of "places where newsworthy information is made public every day" is found in Washington. The White House, the State Department, the Pentagon, and Congress generate a consistent flow of statements, briefings, speeches, hearings, resolutions, and other forms of information on the events of the day.

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<sup>165</sup> Mermin Ibid

<sup>166</sup>Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf, *American Foreign Policy: Pattern and Process* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 327.

<sup>167</sup>Leon V. Sigal, "Sources Make the News" in Robert Karl Manoff and Michael Schudson, eds., *Reading the News*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1986, 16.

Mermin(1997) quotes the Daniel C. Hallin's formulation which portends that "The government is organized to provide a timely flow of information, geared to the demands of daily journalism; it is extremely efficient for news organizations to locate their personnel at the channels provided by the government."<sup>168</sup> W. Lance Bennett concludes that the virtue of using official sources is "the sheer simplicity that it introduces into the otherwise complex business of representing political reality."<sup>169</sup> Considerations of the need to establish the legitimacy of information reported and the need for protection against liability for inaccurate reports also encourage the use of official sources.

Mermin (1997)<sup>170</sup> argues that Somalia appeared on American television before the decision for U.S. intervention, because it had sparked interest among figures in Washington who made efforts to draw attention to it and because journalists decided to respond to those efforts with coverage. In making that decision, journalists may have been guided to some degree by economic imperatives (the need to win and entertain an audience),<sup>171</sup> ideological factors (the conviction that certain stories demand public attention),<sup>172</sup> or other considerations that figure in editorial decisions. Yet the evidence indicates that before television made the decision to cover the crisis in Somalia, influential politicians had spoken out on it, indicating to journalists who routinely look to Washington for possible stories that Somalia constituted a significant concern of

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<sup>168</sup>Daniel C. Hallin, 'The 'Uncensored War': The Media and Vietnam', New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, 71.

<sup>169</sup>W. Lance Bennett, "Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States," *Journal of Communication* 40, Spring 1990, 122.

<sup>170</sup> Jonathan Mermin "Television News and American Intervention in Somalia: The Myth of a Media-Driven Foreign Policy, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 112, No. 3, Autumn, 1997, pp. 389, *The Academy of Political Science*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2657563> .Accessed: 02/08/2013 04:22

<sup>171</sup>Ben H. Bagdikian, 'The Media Monopoly, Boston: Beacon Press, 1992; and Gans, *Deciding What's News. On news as entertainment*, see Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

<sup>172</sup>Robert S. Lichter, Stanley Rothman, and Linda S. Lichter, 'The Media Elite: America's New Powerbrokers', Bethesda, MD: Adler and Adler, 1986.

American foreign policy and that it warranted consideration for space in the news CNN is an interesting exception on this point). The framing of the Somalia story also appears to have been a joint production of sources and journalists. Mermin states that, as story tellers, journalists inevitably frame the events they report, and much of the coverage examined in this study framed events in Somalia as a crisis the United States could do something about.

Mermin (1997)<sup>173</sup> continues that there is evidence which indicates that the major networks focused on the possibility of American intervention only after it had first been advocated in Washington. Finally, journalists appear to have set the volume of coverage on the evening news through de facto collaboration with politicians. The claim that Somalia appeared "daily" on American television in the period before U.S. intervention turns out to be greatly exaggerated. Instead, the coverage is in proportion to the interest Somalia had sparked in Washington. A case could even be made that journalists allocated less coverage to Somalia than might have been expected from its place on the governmental agenda. Mermin is categorical that in sum, journalists worked closely with governmental sources in deciding when to cover Somalia, how to frame the story, and how much coverage it de-served. The lesson of Somalia is not just about the influence of television on Washington; it is equally about the influence of Washington on television.

Mermin's conviction that Washington got the Somalia intervention idea before the media is anchored on a study he conducted focusing on the coverage of Somalia on ABC World News Tonight, CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, and CNN from 1 January to 25 November of 1992, the day before the White House announced plans for U.S. intervention. The focus of the

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<sup>173</sup> Mermin Jonathan, "Television News and American Intervention in Somalia: The Myth of a Media-Driven Foreign Policy, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 112, No. 3, Autumn, 1997, pp. 385-403, The Academy of Political Science, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2657563> .Accessed: 02/08/2013 04:22

analysis is on ABC, CBS and NBC, then finally on CNN. Much scrutiny goes to ABC, CBS and NBC reportedly because the three major networks have an audience over ten times the size of CNN's, and are therefore more likely to influence official expectations of public opinion.

This research begs to borrow extensively from Mermin's study because it provides statistics that help one to draw logical inferences and make conclusions that help current students of the Somalia situation to better understand the interplay of politics, foreign policy and the media, in a way very few texts can help. Mermin(1997) also cites other scholars extensively which helps to further illuminate the subject.

The study is divided in phases:

In Phase I-1 January to 21 July-Somalia is close to invisible on the major networks, averaging only twelve seconds of coverage per week.

In Phase II-22 July to 13 August-the coverage increased to over four minutes per week.

In Phase III-14 August to 18 September-Somalia received extensive coverage, over ten minutes per week, focusing on the American airlift.

In Phase IV-19 September to 8 November-Somalia disappeared from view, the coverage falling to under a minute per week.

In Phase V-9 November to 25 November-Somalia returned from the eclipse of Phase IV (although not to the level of Phase III), to over six minutes per week. Phase II ends with the announcement of the U.S. airlift to Somalia on 14 August. Phase V ends with the announcement of military intervention on 26 November. As Phases I and IV contain almost no coverage of

Somalia, it is primarily in Phases II and V that the search for television's influence on U.S. intervention was conducted.

Mermin's study showed that from 1 January to 21 July, six stories on Somalia appeared on the three major networks. Three were studio reports that averaged under twenty seconds in length. The other three, full stories of 70 to 150 seconds, appeared on 5 January, 27 February, and 2 March (a full story is one reported by a correspondent, as opposed to a studio report read by the anchor).<sup>24</sup> CBS reported on 27 February that "half of Somalia's eight million people may die of starvation,"<sup>25</sup> and NBC on 2 March described "a terrible, closed world of violence and destruction."<sup>26</sup> As this series of stories ends over five months before August, however, it is unlikely that it made a significant contribution to the events of the summer, although the possibility of some minor influence on the evolution of American policy is not entirely ruled out.

Not until July does the next full story on Somalia appear on the major networks. From 22 July to 13 August there are nine stories on Somalia. Five of the nine, studio reports that do not exceed twenty seconds in length, are not serious candidates for influence on American policy. The four full stories, however, require further investigation. All contained video of starving Somalis. Table 3 superimposes events in Washington in the month before the U.S. decision to conduct an airlift, over the timing of the four full stories on Somalia.

According to Mermin, the first full story in this period-and the first since 2 March-appeared on ABC on 22 July. It described and showed pictures of the grim situation in Somalia, a country of "six million people waiting for relief, starving for attention."<sup>174</sup> Before credit for putting Somalia on the foreign policy agenda is allocated to television, however, it is necessary to consider the

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<sup>174</sup>ABC World News Tonight, 22 July 1992.

context of official activities in which the story appeared. On 22 July, the day the story aired, the House Select Committee on Hunger had held hearings on Somalia. At the hearings, Senator Nancy Kassebaum, chair of the Subcommittee on Africa of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee when the Republicans controlled the Senate from 1981 to 1986, and just returned from an official visit to Somalia, testified that the situation there was desperate. She declared, "I strongly support sending a United Nations security force to Somalia."<sup>175</sup>

This declaration, reported in the ABC story, clashed with the position of the Bush administration that a UN force should not be deployed until a cease-fire had been achieved among the Somali factions. On the Democratic side, Senator Paul Simon, chair of the Subcommittee on Africa since 1987, had commended Kassebaum for visiting Somalia and urged the White House to act: "I don't want to wait to have a Democratic administration before we respond more adequately. I want to do it now."<sup>176</sup> The events of 22 July do not represent the first notice of Somalia in Washington in 1992, but they do mark the movement of the story into a new phase, one of direct calls for forceful action.<sup>177</sup> Although Congress had expressed concern over Somalia in the spring, it had not challenged the Bush administration's policy of working through the UN to achieve a diplomatic solution. A resolution introduced in the House in April commended the administration "for its significant efforts to provide food and humanitarian relief to Somalia."<sup>178</sup> A resolution in the Senate in May expressed "the sense of the Senate regarding needed action to address the continuing state of war and chaos and the emergency humanitarian situation in

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<sup>175</sup>Ibid.

<sup>176</sup>Marilyn Greene, "Senator Reaches Out to Somalia," USA Today, 20 July 1992.

<sup>177</sup>Mark Fishman, *Manufacturing the News* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), 63-76.

<sup>178</sup>Congressional Record, 7 April 1992, E978 in Mermin Jonathan, "Television News and American Intervention in Somalia: The Myth of a Media-Driven Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 112, No. 3, Autumn, 1997, pp. 385-403, The Academy of Political Science, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2657563> .Accessed: 02/08/2013 04:22

Somalia," but suggested no change in policy.<sup>179</sup> In other words, Congress in the spring simply instructed the White House and the UN to go forward with existing policy, hardly a newsworthy event in the framework of American journalism, which most often finds news where there is conflict or something that moves a story forward.<sup>180</sup> Conflict and movement only appeared in July, when Kassebaum and Simon declared the response of the Bush administration inadequate and urged a change in policy.

Mermin seeks to persuade that ABC's 22 July story is best understood as a joint production of politicians, who made efforts to publicize events in Somalia and the possibility of some form of U.S. intervention, and journalists, who decided to respond to those efforts with coverage. ABC's contribution is obviously indispensable and may have been influenced by the judgment that the visually stunning Somalia story made "good television" and could hold an audience, or by the conviction that television-which had inspired efforts to aid Ethiopia eight years earlier-had a responsibility to publicize massive human suffering. It is economic factors that are invoked when reference is made to "the commercial television industry"<sup>181</sup> as the source of U.S. interest in Somalia; ideological ones are suggested in the assertion that journalists "mobilized the conscience of the nation's public institutions,"<sup>182</sup> presumably acting out of conscience themselves.

According to Mermin(1997), economic and ideological factors may indeed have contributed to ABC's decision to send cameras to Somalia. Yet the timing of the story points to the influence of Senators Kassebaum and Simon and the House Committee on Hunger in getting Somalia

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<sup>179</sup>Congressional Record, 19 May 1992, S6933 in Mermin Jonathan Ibid

<sup>180</sup>Fishman, Manufacturing the News, Ibid

<sup>181</sup>Kennan, "Somalia, Through a Glass Darkly." In Mermin Jonathan, Ibid

<sup>182</sup>Cohen, "A View from the Academy," 10 in Mermin, Ibid

considered as a possible story in the first place. Contrary to the impression created by those who attribute to television "the power to move governments,"<sup>183</sup> ABC appears to have observed a rule of deference to government officials, in this case the top Senate experts on Africa in terms of institutional position, in deciding that events in Somalia constituted news in the United States. The efforts of Kassebaum and Simon to publicize the crisis in Somalia were not sufficient to get the story on television; ABC had to cooperate, a decision economic, ideological and other factors may have contributed to. But the evidence clearly suggests that those efforts were necessary. As I show below, exactly the same pattern is found in November; Somalia turned up on television after a period of near invisibility on the very day that a congressional delegation reported on a visit to Somalia and urged U.S. action.

As of 22 July, Somalia had not attained a very conspicuous position on the foreign policy agenda; two senators and one House committee constitute only one corner of the Washington foreign policy establishment. If ABC had made Somalia the top story or offered a series of stories on it in July, a case could be made that it had been magnified out of proportion to its place on the Washington agenda. As Harrison and Palmer observe of British coverage of Ethiopia in 1984, "by leading on two consecutive days with items of eight and seven minutes in length ... the BBC was quite clearly saying: 'Here is an event of major importance.'" (Harrison and Palmer, 1993)<sup>184</sup> Yet the ABC story appeared in isolation at the end of World News Tonight. Somalia may not have been at the top of the foreign policy agenda in July, but neither did it appear at the top of the news. "Somalia," CBS reported on 31 July, "is in danger of becoming a vast grave-

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<sup>183</sup>Cohen,10, ibid

<sup>184</sup>Harrison and Palmer, News Out of Africa, 129 in Mermin Jonathan, Ibid, 394



yard." <sup>185</sup>In Washington, this turn of events had not gone unnoticed. On 27 July 1992, the Washington Post reported: "Congressional pressure is mounting to send U.N. peacekeeping troops to guard relief shipments to Somalia." <sup>186</sup>Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), for example, wondered "why we're not moving in Somalia as we are in Yugoslavia."<sup>187</sup> White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater indicated on 27 July that Somalia was on the president's agenda: "The tragedy in Somalia ... requires the urgent attention of the international community." <sup>188</sup>In other words, CBS covered Somalia on 31 July—the first story on CBS since 27 February 1992 after actors in Washington had defined it as a significant concern of American foreign policy.

Mermin's thesis is that instead of being out ahead of Washington, television appears to have acted in concert with Congress and the White House in illuminating events in Somalia. He says that, this is the only story on Somalia over twenty seconds in length on the major networks in the twenty-one days from 23 July to 12 August. For Mermin, if television contributed to the evolution of American interest in Somalia in this period, its contribution must be described as measured and proportionate. Far from magnifying the crisis, ABC, CBS, and NBC responded to the White House declaration on 27 July 1992 that Somalia warranted "urgent attention" with one story on one network on 31 July, near the end of the broadcast, and no further stories until 13 August 1992.

Mermin narrates that as one moves into August, it appears that Washington is getting out ahead of television on Somalia. On 3 August, 1992 the Senate passed a resolution urging the

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<sup>185</sup>CBS Evening News, 31 July 1992 in Mermin J. Ibid

<sup>186</sup>Shari Rudavsky, "Bush, UN Face Pressure to Aid War-Torn Somalia," Washington Post, 27 July 1992.

<sup>187</sup>"Hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee: U.S. Refugee Programs for FY 1993," Federal News Service, 23 July 1992 in Mermin J., Ibid, 394

<sup>188</sup>Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on the Situation in Somalia," Public Papers of the Presidents, 27 July 1992, in Mermin, Ibid

deployment of a UN force to Somalia. A similar resolution passed the House on 10 August.<sup>189</sup> From 6 August to 13 August, four more senators and a presidential candidate addressed Somalia. Senator Jay Rockefeller listed Somalia as one of four examples of the failure of Bush's foreign policy and criticized the president for inaction: "What's he doing about Somalia? . . . There's no planning.

There's no sense of a course." Somalia also appeared in the debate over Bosnia, which heated up in early August. On 5 August, six senators urged further UN action on Bosnia, and on 13 August the Security Council passed a resolution authorizing the use of force to deliver aid to Sarajevo and other areas. Somalia was introduced into this debate by opponents of intervention in Bosnia. Senator James Jeffords wondered, "How do you make distinctions between going into the former Yugoslavia, and Somalia?"<sup>190</sup> Senator Mitch McConnell also argued that intervention in Bosnia could be a slippery slope to intervention in Somalia.<sup>191</sup>

In responding to this argument, supporters of intervention in Bosnia, like Senator Joseph Lieberman, noted the gravity of the crisis in Somalia, and indicated that further action might be required there too.<sup>192</sup> In other words, the juxtaposition of Bosnia and Somalia in foreign policy debate emerged in part from the tactics of opponents of intervention in Bosnia in the Senate. Finally, on 13 August 1992, Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton cited Somalia along with Bosnia and Cambodia as a "torn" area in which "multilateral action holds promise as never

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<sup>189</sup>Schraeder, *United States Foreign Policy toward Africa*, 177

<sup>190</sup>Morning Edition, NPR, 7 August 1992 in Mermin J., *Ibid*

<sup>191</sup>MacNeil Lehrer News Hour, 6 August 1992.

<sup>192</sup>Crossfire, CNN, 3 August 1992.

before." <sup>193</sup>Only after all this do the first stories on Somalia in August appear on ABC on 13 August 1992.

One story described Somalia as "on the verge of committing suicide," a country in a state of "utter and complete and hopeless misery," where one finds "Graves in athletic fields. Graves in farm fields.Graves along city streets." A second story explored why the West appeared more interested in Bosnia than Somalia. An official from Trans Africa, for example, argued "it's as if the U.S. government is saying that the lives of black babies are not as important and that suffering Bosnians are worth more . . . than the starving Somalians."<sup>194</sup> On 14 August, the White House announced plans to airlift emergency aid to Somalia. It is at this point that the case for the influence of television appears strongest. On 12 August, the United Nations had announced that the warring Somali factions had consented to the deployment of 500 UN troops to guard relief supplies, indicating an increase in international efforts to aid Somalia. This could have inspired ABC to frame a story around the emerging international response to the crisis. Instead, ABC focused on why the West had not responded.

From his study, Mermin (1997) argues that ABC's decision must be viewed in the context of the international response to the crisis in Bosnia. The Security Council had just passed a resolution authorizing the use of force to deliver humanitarian aid in Bosnia. Although doubts existed as to the likelihood of its implementation, reports indicated that NATO had been engaged in "operational planning" and that over 100,000 troops could be used. <sup>195</sup>Next to this effort to show international resolve on Bosnia, a plan to send just 500 troops to Somalia to guard relief supplies, not even authorized to use force to deliver them to those in need, must have appeared

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<sup>193</sup>"Excerpts from Clinton's Speech on Foreign Policy Leadership," New York Times, 14 August 1992.

<sup>194</sup>ABC World News Tonight, 13 August 1992 in Mermin J., Ibid, 396

<sup>195</sup>Trevor Rowe, "UN Approves Use of Military Force for Bosnia Aid," Washington Post, 14 August 1992.

unimpressive. Mermin argues that, International efforts on Somalia paled at this point next to the far greater efforts apparently in the works on Bosnia, a contrast American politicians, as noted, had been working to illuminate.

Somalia had figured in Washington de-bate as the crisis the world had ignored, and the announcement of a major inter-national initiative on Bosnia just twenty-four hours after reports of a minor one on Somalia simply reinforced this interpretation.

It is not hard to explain why the United States finally acted on Somalia. In addition to principled concern for the Somali people and the "new world order," the president may have had, an administration official cited, "a desire by the White House to initiate a dramatic relief effort on the eve of the Republican national convention."<sup>196</sup> According to this official, "The White House figured they couldn't gain votes by acting in Somalia but their image could be tarnished if they didn't do anything." Of course, political costs from inaction only come into play if the inaction is publicized; and in framing events in Somalia in a way that supported the case for intervention, ABC most likely influenced the White House decision. Yet if ABC influenced American policy in crystallizing and amplifying the political stakes in Somalia, it is American politics and the situation in Bosnia-that created those stakes in the first place In sum, an assessment of the scope and character of television's influence on American policy in the summer of 1992 must weigh the evidence that as of 13 August ABC had received numerous signals from actors in Washington-seven senators, a House Committee, the full House and Senate, the Democratic candidate for president, and the White House-that Somalia had emerged as a subject of foreign policy debate.

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<sup>196</sup>Jane Perlez, "U.S. Encounters Snags in Airlift to Aid Somalia," New York Times, 22 August 1992.

This debate, like the ABC stories on 13 August, focused on the proposition that U.S. policy toward Somalia stood in contrast to U.S. policy toward Bosnia, an assessment the Bush administration made no great effort to dispute. ABC could have found another way to frame its coverage of Somalia, but only if it had rejected the frame that had evolved in Washington.

When George Kennan describes American policy as "controlled by popular emotional impulses, provoked by the commercial television industry,"<sup>197</sup> the implication is that television framed Somalia in a way that inspired an emotional reaction. Indeed, the coverage does at times appear designed to pull at the heartstrings and create a sense of American responsibility, as in ABC's 13 August presentation of "a bewildered little girl" whose entire family is dead, "waiting like so many others for help that may never come" from a world that has "turned its back on this country."<sup>198</sup> This is an angle the Bush administration, gearing up for the fall campaign, must have found disturbing. Although explicit commentary on the failure of the West to act is not necessary for a story to push American policy in that direction—pictures of dying children may speak for themselves—it is noteworthy that the framing of the crisis in Somalia as a humanitarian disaster that the United States could do something about does not appear on television until it had appeared in Washington first.

Stories in February and March, before senators had criticized the White House for inaction, characterized Somalia as "a terrible, closed world of violence and destruction."<sup>199</sup> But they offered no hint of possible Western action, a frame that evokes, in contrast to the one found in July, a sense of inevitability and hopelessness about the events described. In July 1992, when Kassebaum openly urged the United States and the international community to do more for

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<sup>197</sup>Kennan, "Somalia, Through a Glass Darkly.", Ibid

<sup>198</sup>ABC World News Tonight, 13 August 1992 in Mermin J., Ibid, 397

<sup>199</sup>NBC Nightly News, 2 March 1992 in Mermin, Ibid

Somalia and criticized White House inaction, this angle appeared on television. The framing of Somalia as desperate for Western intervention that could happen turns out to be a joint production of television and actors in Washington, who signaled in July 1992 and August that the crisis in Somalia was not just an unfortunate disaster in a distant land but one the United States could do something to end.

### **3.5 CNN Effect: Fallacy Or Real?**

Mermin(1997) examines the CNN approach and finds that for the most part, the coverage on CNN follows the pattern found on ABC, CBS, and NBC. From 1 June to 13 August, only three stories on Somalia appeared on CNN: on 27 July, 4 August, and 6 August, or after Somalia had emerged as a contested issue in Washington. From 1 January to 30 April, CNN aired no stories on Somalia. Where CNN departs from the pattern observed on the major networks is in May. Without any apparent cues from Washington, CNN sent a reporter to Somalia and aired eight stories on the crisis there from 1 May to 15 May.

In this series of reports Mermin finds the stuff of which the image of television's power over U.S. foreign policy is made. Pictures of starving Somalis illustrate the following narrative:

*The weak were pushed aside, trampled in the rush on one rice pot. The cooks desperately tried to save it as the starving crowd clawed in vain. Hundreds of faces eyed the cooking pot, burning to eat the contents."4 These are the faces of famine. Countless thousands of children now look like this. Hanging on to life by a thread, hoping that something soon will change. They want the world to see, to witness their skeletal forms, to share and understand their agony, and to forcefully act in a way that will end or at least ease this suffering.*

According to Mermin, the detail here is more vivid, more disturbing than in the CBS and NBC stories in February and March. Moreover, in contrast to the CBS and NBC stories, CNN explicitly frames Somalia as a tragedy the United States has turned its back on, ignoring those children who "want the world to see ... and to force-fully act." In the blunt assessment of CNN's Brent Sadler, Somalia "needs bombarding with food by a massive, coordinated rescue mission."<sup>200</sup>The West "will be neither forgiven nor forgotten"<sup>201</sup> if this does not happen. Finally, eight reports in two weeks made Somalia a major story on CNN, over two months before the Kassebaum visit and three months before the U.S. airlift. In the first half of May, CNN presented the crisis in Somalia in extraordinarily dire terms and explicitly criticized the West for declining to act. Yet the CNN stories had no discernible impact on American policy. Plans to increase the UN presence in Somalia continued to stall. Calls for intervention did not sound in Washington. Nor could they be heard around the United States.

Turning to newspapers, Mermin holds that if letters to the editor are an indication: a LEXIS/NEXIS search of letters to nine major American newspapers turned up one letter on Somalia in May, one in June, and one in July. Not until August did the number of letters to the editor in the nine newspapers increase (to 25). Although editors have the power to decide what subjects to publish letters on, if the CNN stories in May had generated a significant public outcry one might expect the letters appearing in some of the papers examined to reflect this.

According to Mermin, the papers were selected arbitrarily: they are the nine papers that list their letters in LEXIS/ NEXIS under the heading "letters to the editor." The papers are the Columbus Dispatch, the Louisville Courier-Journal, the San Diego Union-Tribune, the San Francisco

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<sup>200</sup>"Somalia Starvation Worsens Due to Civil War," CNN, 3 May 1992 in Mermin, Ibid

<sup>201</sup>"Somalia Problems Mounting Without Signs of Respite," CNN, 5 May 1992 in Mermin, Ibid

Chronicle, the Atlanta Journal and Constitution, the Los Angeles Times, the Orlando Sentinel Tribune, the St. Petersburg Times, and the Washington Post.

In sum, the series of stories on CNN in May offers something of a test: What happens when television does independently investigate a foreign crisis that has not sparked much interest in Washington and frames it in terms that cry out for action? In this case, no impact on American policy is apparent.

The study shows Mermin that, maybe the CNN stories had some behind-the-scenes influence on Senator Kassebaum and others in Washington, encouraging them to consider the possibility that interest in Somalia could be mobilized in the United States. Yet what influence CNN may have had in the spring is far more subtle and indirect than declarations on "the immediate pressure of media"<sup>202</sup> and claims that television "propelled the U.S. military"<sup>203</sup> into action appear to indicate. CNN may have contributed something to the evolution of American interest in Somalia, but the episode is evidence that even a concerted effort on the part of CNN to put a foreign crisis on the Washington agenda may have no direct impact on American policy, if the "pressure of media" is not joined with a political dynamic that encourages action. Of course, if ABC, CBS, or NBC, each with an audience over ten times the size of CNN's, had aired eight stories on Somalia in May, the impact on the public and on politicians who anticipate the evolution of public opinion-might have been much greater.

On 18 September, the United States temporarily suspended flights to one area of Somalia after an aircraft came under fire. Although the airlift continued, at this point Somalia all but disappeared from the news. From 19 September to 8 November, only 250 seconds of coverage appeared on

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<sup>202</sup>Roberts, "Humanitarian War," 446, In Mermin, *Ibid*, 399

<sup>203</sup>Mandelbaum, "The Reluctance to Intervene," 16, in Mermin, *Ibid*



the major networks. The primary explanation for the eclipse of Somalia on American television is the presidential election in the United States, in which foreign policy played a marginal role. With a campaign focused on domestic issues, politicians for the most part ignored Somalia, offering journalists few words or deeds upon which stories might have been based. It is also likely that the story simply grew old, as the airlift went on with no change of phase to generate "news" deemed worthy of coverage.<sup>204</sup> From 9 November to 25 November (the day before the White House announced plans to send troops), over sixteen minutes of Somalia coverage appeared on ABC, CBS, and NBC. From 9 November to 17 November, this took the form of six studio reports of ten to thirty seconds in length.

According to Mermin, the coverage then increased, as four full stories appeared from 18 November to 24 November. Mermin traces four full stories carried in November. The first reference to Somalia in November, is an ABC story on Clinton's military policy which reportedly appeared the day Senators Simon, Kassebaum, and Harris Wofford held a press conference urging further U.S. action on Somalia. "The United Nations has to move from being peacekeeper to being a peace-maker," Simon declared. "This is a situation that cannot wait" for the Clinton administration. Senator Kassebaum argued that "We simply must send security guards in."<sup>205</sup>

In mentioning Somalia on 9 November, Memin argues that ABC clearly had not gotten out ahead of Washington. On 18 November, President-Elect Clinton met with President Bush at the White House for a briefing that focused on foreign affairs. After the meeting, Clinton cited four areas of the world that had been discussed: the former Soviet republics, Bosnia, the North American Free

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<sup>204</sup>Fishman, *Manufacturing the News*, 63-76 in Mermin, *Ibid*

<sup>205</sup>Marilyn Greene, "Senators Call for Protection for Somalian Aid Shipments," *USA Today*, 10 November 1992.

Trade Area, and Somalia.<sup>206</sup> The Clinton camp was apparently struck by the depth of Bush's concern over Somalia.<sup>207</sup>

The New York Times reported in a story filed on that day that "Key Bush aides will ... urge [the president] to energize the UN now to provide more food, more transport and most importantly more troops with more powerful weapons and a mandate to be aggressive."<sup>208</sup> Also on 18 November, a six-member congressional delegation that had just visited Somalia held a press conference in Nairobi, where they described the situation in Somalia as "an affront to humanity," and urged further action.<sup>209</sup> Only after the White House had put Somalia at the top of its agenda and Congress had dispatched a delegation to investigate the crisis does a full story on Somalia appear on a major network in November 1992.

Neither White House nor congressional activities are reported in ABC's 18 November story, which focuses on the futility of UN efforts in Somalia, but as in July, the timing clearly suggests a connection. In November as in July, the evening news first contained a full story on Somalia the very day a congressional delegation reported on a visit to that country and urged U.S. intervention. In each case, television coverage and the actions of politicians are closely correlated, official actions falling just before Somalia makes the news. Three more stories appeared on the major networks before the announcement of the decision to send U.S. troops. Half of the 21 November story on NBC is an interview with Representative John Lewis, head of the congressional delegation, who argues, "We must get the United States to go before the UN

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<sup>206</sup>Gwen Ifill, "Bush and Clinton Proclaim End to the Election's Rancor," New York Times, 19 November 1992.

<sup>207</sup>Russell Watson, "Troops to Somalia," Newsweek, 7 December 1992.

<sup>208</sup>Leslie H. Gelb, "Shoot to Feed Somalia," New York Times, 19 November 1992 in Mermin, *Ibid*, 401

<sup>209</sup>BuchizyaMseteka, "Members of Congress Call for Firmer UN Role in Somalia," Reuters, 18 November 1992.

and intervene" in Somalia.<sup>210</sup> The CBS story on 21 November also focuses on the findings of the congressional delegation.<sup>211</sup> The 21 November stories may have accelerated the movement in Washington toward intervention, but they are also clearly a product of that movement. Only after all of this did what is probably the most powerful and evocative story on Somalia found on the major networks appear. On 24 November, NBC presented a series of still photographs of starvation in Somalia, over the grim narration of anchor Tom Brokaw: "In Somalia, children under the age of five have all but disappeared. Hundreds die each week. It's a place where a thousand die today and a thousand will die tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that. We have seen all this before, and we will see it again. The images will fade, but the memory cannot."<sup>212</sup>

Mermin argues that it is likely that video and commentary like this on the evening news increased the sense of the White House that something had to be done about Somalia, or the legacy of the Bush administration and its "new world order" could be tarnished.<sup>213</sup> The scholar argues that in assessing television's influence, however, it is important to note that the tone of this report is no more dire than the judgment of Representative Lewis, who the House had sent to Somalia, that what he had found there "[could not] be compared to anything else in modern history."<sup>214</sup>

Mermin holds that NBC's grim framing of Somalia matches that of the institutionally authorized representative of the House. CNN's coverage in November parallels the major networks. The first CNN story in November appeared on the 12th. The Somali fashion model Iman is interviewed and urges further action. Yet it does not appear that CNN decided on its own to

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<sup>210</sup>NBC Nightly News, 21 November 1992 in Mermin, *Ibid*, 401

<sup>211</sup>CBS Evening News, 21 November 1992.

<sup>212</sup>NBC Nightly News, 24 November 1992.

<sup>213</sup>Jim Mann, "Somalia Closing Out Bush's 'New World Order,'" *Los Angeles Times*, 29 November 1992

<sup>214</sup>Rep. John Lewis, "Reuter Transcript Report, 21 November 1992 in Mermin J., *Ibid*

consult Iman, as only three days before Senators Kassebaum and Simon had held a press conference with her. This presumably is what made Iman as worthy of consultation.

Stories on Somalia also appeared on CNN on 15, 22, and 24 November, in a pattern similar to the one found on the major networks. In view of the position Somalia had achieved on the American foreign policy agenda, it is hard to argue that television overplayed the story in November. ABC and CBS each found space from 1 November to 25 November for a single story on Somalia over thirty seconds in length, neither in the top half of the broadcast. NBC offered two full stories on Somalia, neither in the top third of the news. Setting aside brief studio reports that could not possibly be argued to have inspired the Bush administration to act, one is left with four stories on ABC, CBS, and NBC over twenty-five days. Mermin argues that, this is hardly a record of overplaying what the head of a congressional delegation had described as without precedent in modern history and what President-Elect Clinton, following a meeting with President Bush, identified as one of four major issues on the foreign policy agenda of the United States.

The Mermin study concludes that it is likely that television news contributed to the decision of the Bush administration to act in Somalia. Events in Somalia could not have threatened to damage Bush politically in August or tarnish his legacy in November had they not been publicized in the United States. The 13 August stories on ABC may have signaled to the White House the political dangers that lurked if it failed to act on an issue those Democrats (and some Republicans) had begun to use against it.<sup>215</sup> News stories in November may have crystallized the damage the president's place in history could suffer if the "new world order" proved meaningless

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<sup>215</sup>Schraeder, *United States Foreign Policy toward Africa*, 177-78 in Mermin, *Ibid*, 402

in Somalia. Yet if television contributed to the emergence of Somalia as a political liability for the president in August and a threat to his legacy in November, it had powerful, outspoken allies in Washington, whose efforts to get Somalia onto the news in the first place appear to have been indispensable.

The evidence in this study shows that stories on Somalia appeared just after the articulation of demands for intervention in Washington in the summer and fall of 1992. Journalists ultimately made the decision to cover Somalia, but the stage for this decision had been set in Washington. It is Cohen who states that the lesson of Somalia is often thought to be that television has the "power to move governments."<sup>216</sup>

The Mermin study found that governments also have the power to move television. The study showed that television is clearly a player in the foreign policy arena, but according to Mermin, the evidence from Somalia is that journalists set the news agenda and frame the stories they report in close collaboration with actors in Washington. In the case of Somalia, television turns out not to be the independent, driving force that much of the commentary on its influence would lead one to believe.

Robinson has also dwelt extensively on the Somalia intervention and the role of the media in provoking action. He notes there was also a good deal of debate about the apparent power of the news media to cause the intervention.<sup>217</sup> Indeed, ever since the 1984 Ethiopian famine, there had been much discussion about the purported impact which the media had had upon crises in the Third World.<sup>13</sup> According to Robinson,, amongst the most significant works in this genre were

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<sup>216</sup>Cohen, "A View from the Academy," 10 in Mermin, *Ibid*

<sup>217</sup>Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: Can the News Media Drive Foreign Policy?* *Review of International Studies* (1999), 25, 301–309, British International Studies Association

the Crosslines Special Report *Somalia, Rwanda and Beyond* 14 and *From Massacres to Genocide*.<sup>15</sup> Both took a decidedly different approach to that of either Kennan or Hoge, and writing from a broadly ‘world society’ approach applauded the role played by non-state actors in expanding the policy debate beyond the narrow corridors of political power. Furthermore, instead of attacking the irresponsible part played by the media, these writer-advocates actually praised the new activism and sought to harness the perceived potential of the media to encourage humanitarian intervention.

Robinson (1999) holds that though standing at opposite ends of the policy debate, crucially both realists and humanitarians took it as read that the news media was capable of driving policy.<sup>16</sup> Rarely if ever did either question the claim that the news media had played a pivotal role in causing recent interventions.<sup>218</sup> In this way, the CNN effect became an untested and unsubstantiated ‘fact’ for many in foreign policy and humanitarian circles.

Robinson introduces another dimension to the debate with what he refers to as “manufacturing consent”. Arguing that the underlying assumption of the ‘CNN effect’ literature is that the news can make policy. Those who talk of the manufacture of consent argue that political elites impel news makers to ‘read’ global events in a particular way. Thus rather than assuming that the news media influences or determines what governments do, those who adhere to this position maintain that the media is influenced by government and government policy.

Robinson (1999) discerns two implicit versions of the manufacturing consent paradigm. First, the *executive* version: this insists that news media reports conform to what might loosely be called the official agenda. The second *elite* version of the manufacturing consent paradigm claims that

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<sup>218</sup> Joanna Neuman, *Lights, Camera, War*, New York: St Martins Press, 1996 in Robinson, *Ibid*, p3

news media coverage conforms with the interests of political elites, where elites are defined broadly as members of the executive, legislative or any other politically powerful group.<sup>21</sup> This viewpoint has received conceptual clarification through the work of Lance Bennett,<sup>22</sup> who argues that ‘mass media news is indexed . . . to the dynamics of governmental debate’.<sup>23</sup> Hence, even when media coverage is critical of executive policy, this simply reflects a ‘professional responsibility [for journalists] to highlight . . . struggles within the centres of power’.<sup>24</sup> An important implication of this elite version is that news coverage critical of executive policy is possible when—and perhaps only when—there exists elite conflict over policy., Robinson is categorical that the thesis that the media has the power to move governments is clearly at odds with manufacturing consent theory..

On the Somalia case, Robinson (1999) shares the opinion of Mermin and casts doubt on the CNN effect. However he acknowledges that many have taken it that the media shapes policy. Robinson cites scholars like George Kennan, who held that the media had an effect on policy when he argued that media coverage of suffering people in Somalia had usurped traditional policy making channels triggering an ill thought out intervention.<sup>219</sup> Other commentators followed Kennan in expressing concern at the dangers of media dictated foreign policy.<sup>11</sup> James Hoge, for example, observed that ‘today’s pervasive media increases the pressure on politicians to respond promptly to news accounts that by their very immediacy are incomplete, without context and sometimes wrong’. Working from a realist perspective, critics generally decried the CNN effect and stressed the need for elite control of the foreign policy making process.

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<sup>219</sup> George F. Kennan, ‘Somalia, Through a Glass Darkly’, New York Times, 30 September 1993.

In casting doubt on the CNN Effect, Robinson refers to research studies that while leaning towards the belief of the power of the media to influence opinion/policy still fail to convince. For instance Robinson cites Nik Gowing (1994), admits that media coverage can change ‘overall [government] strategy’, though only on very rare occasions.<sup>220</sup> Robinson argues that Gowing never really defines what he means by overall strategy and therefore leaves the reader unsure as to whether the media can cause humanitarian intervention. Robinson also cites Strobel whom he accuses of the same lack of precision. Strobel (1996) argues at one point that there is ‘little evidence of a *push* i.e. cause intervention] effect . . . nor is there evidence of a pull [i.e. cause withdrawal] effect’.<sup>221</sup> But elsewhere he speculates that ‘televised images of innocents’ suffering can be a factor in moving policy’.<sup>222</sup> He also asserts that the media ‘can exert strong influence’ on policy,<sup>223</sup> that it only plays ‘a supplementary role’, that it can ‘have a decided effect’, but in the end does not ‘cause intervention’.<sup>224</sup>

According to Robinson, this analytical confusion leaves one unsure as to what role the media does play exactly during humanitarian crises. The same lack of precision can be found in the volume, *The News Media, Civil Wars and Humanitarian Action*. The different contributors to the volume look in detail at US intervention in Northern Iraq 1991. They argue that media pressure built upon a perceived Western obligation toward the Kurds in order to create a rationale for humanitarian intervention.<sup>225</sup> Yet once again it is never clear how important the media was.

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<sup>220</sup> Gowing, ‘Real-Time TV Coverage’, p. 88 in Robinson, Ibid, p4

<sup>221</sup> Strobel, Late-Breaking Foreign Policy, p. 212 in Robinson, Ibid

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>225</sup> Minearet al., *The News Media, Civil Wars and Humanitarian Action*, p. 51.



They could get to grips better here if they differentiated between immediate and underlying cause. For example, the perceived Western obligation towards the Kurds<sup>226</sup> could have been described as the underlying cause of the intervention decision. Media pressure would then be understandable as the immediate factor in causing intervention. Instead, what we are presented with is a good deal of loose speculation about ‘complex systems’, ‘fluid interplay’ and a ‘rich and diverse relationship’ between media coverage and policy outcome<sup>227</sup>—all of which sounds reasonable enough but does little to clarify things or prove a direct causal relationship between news coverage and policy options.

Robinson notes that Gowing approvingly quotes Kofi Annan who has observed that ‘when governments have a clear policy, . . . then television has little impact’; however ‘when there is a problem, and the policy has not been thought’ through ‘they have to do something or face a public relations disaster’. Strobel is even more certain. He notes that ‘the effect of real time television is directly related to the . . . coherence . . . of existing policy’.<sup>228</sup> The contributors to the Minear volume come to much the same conclusion. Indeed, in their view, there is an inverse relationship between policy clarity and media influence. Hence, when policy is unclear or ill-defined the media can indeed have some influence on policy; on the other hand, ‘the media effect on policy decreases as the clarity of strategic interest increases’.<sup>229</sup>

Robinson also examines a case study based on a research by Shaw titled *Civil Society and Media in Global Crises* which contains a useful analysis of the impact that news media coverage is presumed to have had upon the Western decision to intervene in Northern Iraq in 1991. Shaw

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Gowing, ‘Real-Time TV Coverage’, pp. 85–86 in Robinson, Ibid

<sup>228</sup> Strobel, Late-Breaking Foreign Policy, p. 219.

<sup>229</sup> Minearet al., The News Media, Civil Wars, and Humanitarian Action, p. 73 in Robinson, Ibid

systematically analyses news bulletins and describes how coverage of the plight of Kurdish refugees became increasingly critical of Western inaction. When media criticism reached a crescendo, Shaw (1990) argues that the West was impelled to do something. His central and important claim, therefore, is that coverage of suffering Kurdish refugees actually caused the unprecedented proposal for Kurdish safe havens.<sup>230</sup>

Significantly, Shaw's careful analysis of news bulletins reveals that it was a particular type of coverage that pressured Western leaders to intervene. In his words, 'the graphic portrayal of human tragedy and the victims' belief in Western leaders was skillfully juxtaposed with the responsibility and the diplomatic evasions of those same leaders to create a political challenge which it became impossible for them to ignore'.<sup>231</sup> For Robinson the important point that Shaw's work reveals is that the framing of news media reports is crucial in determining their political impact. Media reports do not 'objectively' report humanitarian crises. Rather, they report crises in particular, and often very different, ways.

The emotive and graphic coverage of the Kurds clearly pressured politicians to 'do something'. This pressure would not have existed if media reports had been framed in a less emotive and more distancing manner. For example, with regard to the humanitarian crises in Liberia during the 1990s, Minearet *al.* point out that 'the international media ventured into Liberia . . . to provide bizarre documentary style coverage from the "Heart of Darkness" rather than news of a serious threat to international peace and security' The result of this kind of framing was not to heighten but lessen pressure on Western politicians to do something. This insight into framing is a crucial one.

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<sup>230</sup> Shaw, *Civil Society and Media in Global Crises*, p. 79 in Robinson *Ibid*

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

Livingston and Eachus (1999) offer a systematic in depth case study—not by analyzing the Iraqi case but by looking at US intervention in Somalia during 1992. They base their discussion on a survey of official statements, the policy process in question and media coverage. As such, it is the most methodologically exacting research considered so far. Interestingly, what drives their discussion is not so much whether the media can influence policy but rather who determines the content of the news and therefore controls its capacity to influence. As such the authors actually assume that media influence on policy can and does occur.<sup>232</sup>

Importantly, for Livingston and Eachus, if it turns out to be journalists themselves setting the news agenda, then it might be concluded that the CNN effect was indeed in operation. If on the other hand the news agenda was set by politicians then something else would be going on: but one could hardly talk of a CNN effect. And by carefully unpacking how certain government officials worked hard to get Somalia on the political agenda, Livingston and Eachus convincingly demonstrate how media coverage actually reflected the agendas of certain government officials in Washington. These officials then used this media coverage to influence top executive policy makers to intervene in Somalia. However, because it was government officials (not journalists) setting the news agenda,

Livingston and Eachus argue that the CNN effect (as they understand it) was not present in relation to US intervention in Somalia. Conceptualizing the CNN effect in terms of ‘who controls the media’ is useful because it reflects the debate within foreign policy circles. For foreign policy experts, by focusing upon news media sources this approach can determine if non-elite actors have gained control of the media and therefore the ability to influence policy. This

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<sup>232</sup>Livingston and Eachus, ‘Humanitarian Crises and US Foreign Policy’, pp. 413–429.

conceptualisation is also effective at highlighting how political actors manipulate the news agenda for their own purposes.

Robinson argues however, that whilst valid for these purposes, defining the CNN effect in this way masks important and unanswered questions regarding the purported power of the media to trigger humanitarian intervention. First, by assuming media influence (as Livingston and Eachus do *re* Somalia), the conceptualisation forecloses the possibility that other factors might have caused an intervention decision. This is particularly problematic with regard to recent cases of humanitarian intervention where it is plausible that media inspired altruism was not a prime motivation. Second, whilst media coverage has been associated with recent humanitarian interventions it is also the case that media coverage has accompanied instances of non-intervention: for example, non-intervention during the 1990s humanitarian crises in Liberia.

According to Robinson, the question raised is why intervention occurs in some instances but not others; focusing on the CNN effect as an issue of media control does not explain why news media coverage of humanitarian crises appears only sometimes to cause intervention. Third, defining the CNN effect in terms of who controls the media fails to reflect the humanitarian debate that is concerned not with questions of policy control but the role the news media plays in triggering international responses to humanitarian crises. The questions of if and how the news media causes intervention is the fundamental issue in the context of this study.

Graybill (2004)<sup>233</sup> in a study titled *CNN Made Me Do (Not Do) It* reports that the initial premise upon undertaking the study was a simple one: The U.S. had intervened in Somalia in response to

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<sup>233</sup>Graybill, *CNN Made Me Do (Not Do) It*, Sarai Reader 2004, Crisis Media, 170

media images of starving children in 1992 but had not acted to stop the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 – not because government officials were unaware of what was taking place there<sup>1</sup> – but because the public did not know. CNN was not on the scene beaming home real time images of the killings. Thus, the administration was under no pressure from the public to do something about the genocide.

This is a common view of the power of the media, especially television journalism which through emotive images moves the public to demand action of its government. The “CNN Effect”, it is argued, pushes the government into foreign policy pursuits in response to public opinion. Why did Bush authorize humanitarian intervention in Somalia? Because the media told him to. Why did Clinton not authorize intervention in Rwanda? Because the media, representatives of which had been evacuated from Rwanda as the genocide unfolded, were simply not there to report what was happening. Disturbing images of innocent people being hacked to death did not make the nightly news and did not therefore force the administration into an intervention. If it had made the nightly news, the argument goes, the “CNN Effect” would have forced the US to intervene as it had in Somalia.

However, Graybill (2004) reports that a review of the coverage of the news stories from Somalia and Rwanda presents a different picture. Media coverage followed political debate or policy action in the government. Rather than setting the agenda, the media reflected the government’s agenda, covering what the government decided was important. It is not the all-powerful independent institution that the term “CNN Effect” connotes. Nor does it take foreign policy decision making away from the government as it is assumed.

On Somalia, Greybill is categorical: the “CNN Effect” clearly did not ‘push’ Bush into action he would otherwise not have taken (dispatching troops in December 1992), but did it ‘pull’ Clinton out? Was it media coverage of the deaths of eighteen Army rangers killed in a fire-fight that ensured the US would withdraw? There was no video of the fire-fight itself, but when the image of a dead soldier poked with a stick and dragged through the streets of Mogadishu to the cheers and jeers of the crowd, and that of a very battered captured US pilot Michael Durant, were broadcast on October 4th, 1993, television sets were on in nearly every corner of the White House as well as American households, tuned to CNN. It is widely assumed that these images broadcast around the world forced the US out of Somalia. But, it was not the images per se that caused the US to withdraw. The US could just have easily responded by massive retaliation, an action it considered. The US had intervened because a consensus developed that it was do-able with little risk of casualties. This turned out to be incorrect, especially when the mission changed. Clinton had not been interested in or able to communicate to Congress or the public the changed mission and the reasons for it. Mounting calls on Capitol Hill for withdrawal rose to a level that President Clinton could not ignore. On October 7th, he announced that all troops would be withdrawn by March 31st, 1994. Quoting officials at Capitol Hill, Greybill sums up thus: The risks of escalation did not measure up to the stakes.

Greybill concludes to intervene is less a function of media portrayal than of the president’s calculations of stakes and risks coupled with the perceived public support for these operations. While Bush was willing to intervene in Somalia where no national interest existed, it was considered at the time to be low risk, and had strong public support. When it turned out not to be risk-free (with the deaths of eighteen Army rangers), President Clinton rushed to enact the presidential directive which limits humanitarian intervention only to places where a vital national

interest exists. On no geopolitical or geo-strategic basis – trade relations, host of American military bases, control of shipping lanes, a critical ally in an unstable region – did Rwanda meet the traditional definition of “national interests”. And so the official response to the genocide appeared lethargic and confused and lacked any White House, Defence Department or senior State Department commitment” (Natsios,1996).<sup>234</sup>.

Natsios argues that where geopolitical interests are not threatened, electronic and print media attention “will be tangential or irrelevant” to the decision to intervene or not (Natsios, 1996). One reporter from Rwanda wondered, “Do you think we did enough? Is it our fault that the world didn’t react to the massacres?”.<sup>235</sup> According to Gowing(1997),<sup>236</sup> horrifying pictures of bodies floating down rivers perhaps pricked diplomatic consciences, but “they did not lead to any major or fundamental policy change...”. Even if accurate reporting and moving real-time television broadcasts had been the norm, it is doubtful in the aftermath of Somalia that the Clinton administration would have been persuaded that this was an intervention worth the costs. Perhaps Clinton misread the public’s unwillingness to intervene for goals short of national interest ones. In 1994, 65% of the public believed the US should intervene to stop genocide – 31% said always, and 34% in most cases (Kull and Destler, 1999)<sup>237</sup>. But despite public support to stop genocide, it was not an issue about which Americans felt passionately enough to protest or to demand action from their government.

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<sup>234</sup> Natsios, Andrew. “Illusions of Influence: The CNN Effect in Complex Emergencies”, in Robert I. Rotberg and Thomas G. Weiss eds., *From Massacres to Genocide: The Media, Public Policy, and Humanitarian Crises*, (Brookings Institution, 1996) pp. 149-168.

<sup>235</sup> Weiss, Thomas and Cindy Collins. *Humanitarian Challenges and Intervention: World Politics and the Dilemmas of Help* Westview, 1996, Boulder.

<sup>236</sup> Gowing, Nik. *Media Coverage: Help or Hindrance In Conflict Prevention* (Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, 1997, Washington, DC). [www.ccpdc.org/pubs/media/medfr.htm](http://www.ccpdc.org/pubs/media/medfr.htm)

<sup>237</sup> Kull, Steven and I.M. Destler, ‘ Misreading the Public: The Myth of a New Isolationism ‘, Brookings Institution, 1999, Washington, D.C.

This study concludes this chapter by stating that the relationships between the media, foreign policy makers and the public are complex. Much more research on the links between information, opinion, and decision making needs to be conducted before definitive causal explanations can be made. But for now, it can be said that George Kennan's fear on the eve of the Somalia intervention – that American policy is “controlled by popular emotional impulses, and particularly ones provoked by the commercial television industry” (Kennan, 1993)<sup>238</sup> – is not borne out. Gowing's conclusion that real-time television “creates emotions but ultimately makes no difference to the fundamental calculations in foreign policy making” (cited by Luke and Tuathail, 1997: 719)<sup>239</sup> is a better interpretation.

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<sup>238</sup> Kennan, George. “Somalia, Through a Glass Darkly”, *The New York Times* (September 30, 1993).

<sup>239</sup> Luke, Timothy W. and Gearoid O. Tuathail. “On Video cameralistics: The Geopolitics of Failed States, the CNN International and (UN)governmentality”, *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 4, No. 4, Winter, 1997, pp. 709-33.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: EMERGING ISSUES**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter looks at the western media's focus on Somalia and its role or otherwise in bringing attention to bear on the civil war in Somalia, post 1992 what this study refers to as the agenda setting role. The chapter identifies some key issues that emerged in the course of the study and provides a critical analysis of the same while pointing out the lessons that can be learned both positive and negative by students of the subject and policy makers in general.

### **4.2 Background**

At the beginning of 1992, civil war and starvation gripped Somalia in the wake of the overthrow of Mohammed Siad Barre, who had ruled the country for two decades. In January, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution calling for a ceasefire and a political settlement of the conflict. In March this ceasefire went into effect; but with no national government and continued factional conflict over food, by August "as many as 1.5 million of an estimated Somali population of 6 million were threatened with starvation, with approximately 300,000 Somalis already having died, including roughly 25 % of all children under the ages of five." As of March, the United States resisted a peacekeeping role for the UN in Somalia, supporting a Security Council resolution only after calling for a UN-sponsored peacekeeping mission had been removed. In April, the Security Council authorized a modest military operation, but negotiations with Somali factions delayed its implementation. On 27 July, the Security Council voted to airlift food to Somalia, and on 12 August the UN announced plans to send 500 troops to protect the international relief effort. On 14 August, the White House announced that the United States would take charge of the airlift.

The 500 troops did not arrive until September-with the support of four U.S. warships carrying 2,100 Marines"-and proved unable to do much to protect the relief effort. In November, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros- Ghali informed the Security Council that the relief effort was not working. On 26 November, the Bush administration announced that the United States would send troops to Somalia if the Security Council passed an authorizing resolution, which it did on 3 December. The first contingent of Operation Restore Hope hit the shores of Somalia on 9 December.<sup>240</sup>

Television, it is often argued, caused the United States to intervene in Somalia in 1992. Bernard C. Cohen argues that in the 1990s television "has demonstrated its power to move governments. By focusing daily on the starving children in Somalia, a pictorial story tailor-made for television, TV mobilized the conscience of the nation's public institutions, compelling the government into a policy of intervention for humanitarian reasons."<sup>241</sup>

For Mandelbaum (1994), "televised pictures of starving people" in Somalia "created a political clamour to feed them, which propelled the U.S. military" into action.<sup>242</sup> Adam Roberts characterizes U.S. intervention in Somalia as "responding to the immediate pressure of

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<sup>240</sup> Jonathan Mermin "Television News and American Intervention in Somalia: The Myth of a Media-Driven Foreign Policy, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 112, No. 3 , Autumn, 1997, pp. 390, The Academy of Political Science, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2657563> .Accessed: 02/08/2013 04:22

<sup>241</sup>Bernard C. Cohen, "A View from the Academy" in W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz, eds., 'Taken By Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War', Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 9-10.

<sup>242</sup>Michael Mandelbaum, "The Reluctance to Intervene," *Foreign Policy* 95 (Summer 1994): 16.

media."<sup>243</sup> Kennan (1993) describes American policy as "controlled by popular emotional impulses, and particularly ones provoked by the commercial television industry."<sup>244</sup>

According to Mermin (1997)<sup>245</sup>, next to Vietnam, Somalia may be the most often cited case of media influence on American foreign policy, and it is one in which an effect of high order-inspiring a military intervention-is claimed. Mermin states that there is no reason to doubt that the appearance of Somalia on American television just before major changes in U.S. policy in August and November of 1992 influenced the decision of the Bush administration to act.

However it now emerges that while Somalia did appear on TV, it's not clear why it appeared in the first place.

One possibility is that independent journalistic initiative put Somalia in the news. An example of this is television coverage of the Ethiopia famine in 1984 as described in chapter 3 where this study found out that immediately after a series of NBC stories on Ethiopia in October 1984, American aid to Ethiopia skyrocketed, from \$23 million for all of fiscal 1984 to nearly \$100 million for October and November 1984.<sup>246</sup> Paul Harrison and Robin Palmer find that an enterprising NBC correspondent in London is responsible for getting a story on Ethiopia, originally broadcast on the BBC, onto the air in the United States.<sup>247</sup> The origin of the Ethiopia story appears to have been the effort of a journalist to publicize distant events that had for the

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<sup>243</sup> Adam Roberts, "Humanitarian War: Military Intervention and Human Rights," *International Affairs* 69, July 1993, 446.

<sup>244</sup> George F. Kennan, "Somalia, Through a Glass Darkly," *New York Times*, 30 September, 1993.

<sup>245</sup> Mermin J., *Ibid*, p 385

<sup>246</sup> Christopher J. Bosso, "Setting the Agenda: Mass Media and the Discovery of Famine in Ethiopia" in Michael Margolis and Gary A. Mauser, eds., *Manipulating Public Opinion: Essays on Public Opinion as a Dependent Variable* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1989), 168-69.

<sup>247</sup> Paul Harrison and Robin Palmer, 'News Out of Africa: Biafra to Band Aid', London: Hilary Shipman, 1986, 123-24.

most part been ignored in the West. The origin of Somalia as a news story could turn out to be similar.

During the 1980s the proliferation of new technologies transformed the potential of the news media to provide a constant flow of global real-time news. Tiananmen Square and the collapse of communism symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall became major media events communicated to Western audiences instantaneously via TV news media. By the end of the decade the question was being asked as to what extent this ‘media pervasiveness’ had impacted upon government—particularly the process of foreign policy making. The new technologies appeared to reduce the scope for calm deliberation over policy, forcing policy-makers to respond to whatever issue journalists focused on. (Bechloss,1993)<sup>248</sup> This perception was in turn reinforced by the end of the bipolar order and what many viewed as the collapse of the old anti-communist consensus which—it was argued—had led to the creation of an ideological bond uniting policy makers and journalists. Released from the ‘prism of the Cold War’ journalists were, it was presumed, freer not just to cover the stories they wanted but to criticize US foreign policy as well. The phrase ‘CNN effect’ encapsulated the idea that real-time communications technology could provoke major responses from domestic audiences and political elites to global events.

The “CNN Effect”, it is argued, pushes the government into foreign policy pursuits in response to public opinion. Why did Bush authorize humanitarian intervention in Somalia? Because the media told him to. Why did Clinton not authorize intervention in Rwanda? Because the media,

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<sup>248</sup>Michael R. Beschloss, *Presidents, Television and Foreign Crisis* (Washington DC: The Annenberg Washington Program in Communications Policy Studies of Northwestern University, 1993), Timothy J. McNulty, ‘Television’s Impact on Executive Decision-Making and Diplomacy’, *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 17 (1993), pp. 67–83.

representatives of which had been evacuated from Rwanda as the genocide unfolded, were simply not there to report what was happening. Disturbing images of innocent people being hacked to death did not make the nightly news and did not therefore force the administration into an intervention. If it had made the nightly news, the argument goes; the “CNN Effect” would have forced the US to intervene as it had in Somalia.<sup>249</sup> It is believed that Operation Restore Hope in Somalia was forced upon the United States by media pressure.

Kegley and Wittkopf (1987) observe that the media may "provoke decision making about issues which, had they not attracted attention, would probably have been met with apathy and indifference."<sup>250</sup>

However there is another side to the story, most studies have found that American journalists turn to politicians and government officials for guidance in deciding what constitutes news.<sup>251</sup>

The West, is acutely aware of the importance of media portrayal of conflict, and has developed an array of techniques to affect that presentation. Public affairs staffs begin their support of information operations by drafting a Public Affairs Estimate, which includes an assessment of the media presence. The estimate addresses the following questions: “What media representatives and organizations are in the area of operation? Are they radio, television, or print? Are they state-run or independent? What is their political slant? Are they pro- or anti-coalition? Are they receptive to coalition information products such as news releases or other

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<sup>249</sup>Graybill, CNN Made Me Do (Not Do) It, Sarai Reader 2004, Crisis Media, 170

<sup>250</sup>Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf, ‘American Foreign Policy: Pattern and Process’ New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987, 327.

<sup>251</sup>Gaye Tuchman, "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity," American Journal of Sociology 77, November 1972

print or electronic products?”<sup>252</sup>The Gulf War reminded observers of the enormous power that governments had when it came to shaping the media analysis,<sup>253</sup>

The conflicts of the last decade have amply demonstrated that the media, apparently non-state actors, have become an important party in many international conflicts. In conflicts involving advanced Western militaries, this is accentuated by the evolution and increasing importance of information operations.

Journalists necessarily engage in agenda setting, in deciding out of the vast universe of events what to report and what to ignore. But in setting the news agenda, what rules do journalists follow? On this question, from most studies it has emerged that American journalists turn to politicians and government officials for guidance in deciding what constitutes news.<sup>254</sup>

From a reading of various works for instance Mermin (1997), the framing of the Somalia story appears to have been a joint production of sources and journalists.<sup>255</sup> As story tellers, journalists inevitably frame the events they report, and much of the coverage examined in this study framed events in Somalia as a crisis the United States could do something about. The evidence from a review of numerous literatures indicates that the major networks focused on the possibility of American intervention only after it had first been advocated in Washington.

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<sup>252</sup> US Department of the Army, Public Affairs Tactics, Techniques and Procedures, Field Manual 3-61.1 (Washington: GPO, 1 October 2000), ch. 9, “Information Operations,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/3-61-1/>

<sup>253</sup> W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz (eds.), *Taken By Storm*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994,

<sup>254</sup> Gaye Tuchman, “Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity,” *American Journal of Sociology* 77, November 1972,; and Mark Fishman, *Manufacturing the News*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1980.

<sup>255</sup> Mermin Jonathan, “Television News and American Intervention in Somalia: The Myth of a Media-Driven Foreign Policy,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 112, No. 3, Autumn, 1997, pp. 385-403, *The Academy of Political Science*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2657563> .Accessed: 02/08/2013 04:22

Journalists appear to have set the volume of coverage on the evening news through de facto collaboration with politicians. Mermin is categorical that the claim that Somalia appeared "daily" on American television in the period before U.S. intervention turns out to be greatly exaggerated. Instead, the coverage is in proportion to the interest Somalia had sparked in Washington. Mermin even makes a case that journalists allocated less coverage to Somalia than might have been expected from its place on the governmental agenda.

It is likely that television news contributed to the decision of the Bush administration to act in Somalia. Events in Somalia could not have threatened to damage Bush politically in August or tarnish his legacy in November had they not been publicized in the United States. Stories aired on ABC TV in August stories may have signalled to the White House the political dangers that lurked if it failed to act on an issue that Democrats (and some Republicans) had begun to use against it.

News stories in November may have crystallized the damage the president's place in history could suffer if the "new world order" proved meaningless in Somalia. Yet if television contributed to the emergence of Somalia as a political liability for the president in August and a threat to his legacy in November, it had powerful, outspoken allies in Washington, whose efforts to get Somalia onto the news in the first place appear to have been indispensable. The evidence in this study shows that stories on Somalia appeared just after the articulation of demands for intervention in Washington in the summer and fall of 1992.

Journalists ultimately made the decision to cover Somalia, but the stage for this decision had been set in Washington. The lesson of Somalia is often thought to be that television has the "power to move governments."<sup>256</sup> This study has found that governments also have the power to

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<sup>256</sup>Cohen, "A View from the Academy," 10.

move television. Television is clearly a player in the foreign policy arena, but the evidence from Somalia is that journalists set the news agenda and frame the stories they report in close collaboration with actors in Washington. In the case of Somalia, television turns out not to be the independent, driving force that much of the commentary on its influence would lead one to believe.

From this study, there emerged a concept referred to as “Manufacturing Concept”<sup>257</sup> The underlying assumption of the ‘CNN effect’ literature is that the news can make policy. Those who talk of the manufacture of consent argue that political elites impel news makers to ‘read’ global events in a particular way. Thus rather than assuming that the news media influences or determines what governments do, those who adhere to this position maintain that the media is influenced by government and government policy.<sup>258</sup> The ‘manufacturing consent’ school of thought is a more radical way of thinking about the relationship between news and political elites :media does not create policy but rather that news media is mobilized (manipulated even) into supporting government policy.

It now emerges that the “CNN effect” occurs when there exists policy that is uncertain and media coverage that is framed to advocate a particular course of action. When there exists uncertain policy *vis-à-vis* an issue the government is unable to feed a plausible and well-rehearsed policy line to the media and therefore set the agenda. In this situation journalists are able to frame reports in a way that is critical of government inaction and pressures for a particular course of action. The idea of media influence when there are policy uncertainty fits neatly with the elite version of manufacturing consent media theory. This version implies that news coverage that is

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<sup>257</sup> Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: Can the News Media Drive Foreign Policy?* *Review of International Studies* (1999), 25, 301–309, British International Studies Association

<sup>258</sup> W. Lance Bennett, ‘Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States’ *Journal of Communication*, 40, 1990,, pp. 103–125



critical of executive policy is possible in the presence of elite conflict over policy (i.e. policy uncertainty). Alternatively, when government has a certain policy it will draw upon its substantial resources and credibility as an information source to influence news media output. In these situations, the media serves to ‘manufacture consent’ for government policy.

Mermin reveals that television coverage of Somalia and the actions of politicians are closely correlated, and from a review of Somali coverage in the 1990s official actions falling just before Somalia makes the news.

Then perhaps as Greybill (2004)<sup>259</sup> puts it, a better way to understand why the US intervened in Somalia but not in Rwanda has less to do with the media than with the perceived do-ability and level of risk. Judith Murison has coined the phrases “Helpless Africa” and “Hopeless Africa” to describe this phenomenon. She argues that the US will intervene for “Helpless Africa” – starving children, famines, cholera and the like, but when the image is one of “Hopeless Africa”, the US refuses to intervene. These conflicts are viewed as primordial, ancient rivalries. The point is that nothing can be done, so why bother? Livingston and Eachus (2000) concur: “There are fewer rational responses to irrational behaviour, such as a presumably spontaneous massacre.”<sup>260</sup>

In conclusion this chapter leans towards a belief that the news agenda in the Somali context was a joint production of sources and journalists. It is this formulation that most accurately describes the contribution of television to American intervention in Somalia. Somalia appeared on American television before the decision for U.S. intervention, because it had sparked interest among figures in Washington who made efforts to draw attention to it and because journalists decided to respond to those efforts with coverage. In making that decision, journalists may have

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<sup>259</sup>Lyns. Graybill, ‘CNN Made Me Do (Not Do) It’, Sarai Reader 2004, Crisis Media, 170

<sup>260</sup>Livingston Steven and Todd Eachus. “Rwanda: U.S. Policy and Television Coverage”, in Adelman, Howard and Suhrke, Astri, eds., ‘The Path of a Genocide: The Rwanda Crisis from Uganda to Zaire’ Transaction Publishers, 2000, New Brunswick, N.J, pp. 209-228.

been guided to some degree by economic imperatives (the need to win and entertain an audience) as described by Ben H. Bagdikian (1992)<sup>261</sup> or ideological factors (the conviction that certain stories demand public attention) as discussed by Litcher, Rothman, et al (1986)<sup>262</sup>, or other considerations that figure in editorial decisions.

Although the Ethiopia model often appears to be implicit in the argument that television got America into Somalia and in claims that television has emerged as a major independent player in the foreign policy arena, evidence indicates that before television made the decision to cover the crisis in Somalia, influential politicians had spoken out on it, indicating to journalists who routinely look to Washington for possible stories, that Somalia constituted a significant concern of American foreign policy and that it warranted consideration for space in the news: at most a “joint production” between officialdom and the media.

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<sup>261</sup>Ben H. Bagdikian, ‘The Media Monopoly’, Boston: Beacon Press, 1992

<sup>262</sup>Robert S. Lichter, Stanley Rothman, and Linda S. Lichter, *The Media Elite: America's New Powerbrokers* (Bethesda, MD: Adler and Adler, 1986)

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary

In 1992, starvation gripped Somalia in the wake of the civil war that followed the overthrow of Mohammed Siad Barre in January 1991. As Barre fled, the scorched earth policy of his retreating troops created a famine belt. Once a common enemy no longer existed, the clans that had united to overthrow Barre fought for control of the government. (Factions of the Hawiye based USC guerrilla army supportive of Ali Mahdi Mohammed fought factions of the Hawiye forces loyal to Mohammed Farah Aidid.). Schraeder (1994)<sup>263</sup> writes that fighting, coming at the same time as a serious drought, led to anarchy and famine. 1.5 million out of a population of 2 million were threatened with starvation, and 300,000 had already died, including 25% of all children under five.

A United Nations Security Council resolution called for a cease-fire in January 1992 which was to go into effect in March. Still, factional fighting continued. In April 1992, the Security Council authorized a modest military operation which was delayed by negotiations with Somali factions. On July 27, the Security Council voted to airlift food, and on August 12, announced plans to send 500 troops to protect the relief effort. On August 14, President George Bush announced that the U.S. would take charge of the airlift.

The airlift fell short of its goals, since there was no way to guarantee that the food once dropped reached the famine victims. Five hundred troops, with the support of US warships carrying 2100

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<sup>263</sup> Schraeder, Peter, 'United States Foreign Policy Toward Africa: Incrementalism, Crisis and Change', Cambridge University Press, 1994, New York.

Marines, arrived in September but were unable to protect the relief effort. On November 26, after UN Secretary General Boutros-Boutros Ghali announced that the relief efforts were not working, President Bush announced that the US would send ground troops to protect food convoys, and the UN passed the authorizing resolution on December 3rd. The first troops of “Operation Restore Hope” hit the shores on December 9th.

Many claim that the appearance of Somalia on American television just before major changes in U.S. policy in August and November of 1992 influenced the decision of the Bush administration to act. This school of thought holds that independent journalistic initiative put Somalia in the news. They cite the example of television coverage of the Ethiopia famine in 1984. Immediately after a series of NBC stories on Ethiopia in October 1984, American aid to Ethiopia skyrocketed, from \$23 million for all of fiscal 1984 to nearly \$100 million for October and November 1984. It is reported that an enterprising NBC correspondent in London is responsible for getting a story on Ethiopia; originally broadcast on the BBC, onto the air in the United States. The origin of the Ethiopia story appears to have been the effort of a journalist to publicize distant events that had for the most part been ignored in the West. The origin of Somalia as a news story could turn out to be similar.

It is likely that television news contributed to the decision of the Bush administration to act in Somalia. Events in Somalia could not have threatened to damage Bush politically in August or tarnish his legacy in November had they not been publicized in the United States.

News stories in November may have crystallized the damage the president's place in history could suffer if the "new world order" proved meaningless in Somalia.

However a review of reportage before the US intervention in Somalia convinces one that though the Ethiopia model often appears to be implicit in the argument that television got America into

Somalia and in claims that television has emerged as a major independent player in the foreign policy arena, the evidence indicates that only when Washington turned its attention to Somalia did ABC, CBS, and NBC deem events there worthy of coverage. In other words, if television inspired American intervention in Somalia, it did so under the influence of governmental actors—a number of senators, a House committee, a presidential candidate, and figures within the Bush administration—who made considerable efforts to publicize events in Somalia, interpret them as constituting a crisis, and encourage a U.S. response.

The appearance of Somalia on American television is because it made the news only after it had generated interest among foreign policy makers in the United States. In this view, television coverage of Somalia in the summer and fall of 1992 did not originate in the independent actions of journalists but in the interaction of journalists engaged in routine newsgathering practices and sources in Washington who made efforts to get Somalia onto the foreign policy agenda.

Existing literature shows that if television contributed to the emergence of Somalia as a political liability for the president in August and a threat to his legacy in November, it had powerful, outspoken allies in Washington, whose efforts to get Somalia onto the news in the first place appear to have been indispensable. The evidence in this study shows that stories on Somalia appeared just after the articulation of demands for intervention in Washington in the summer and fall of 1992. Journalists ultimately made the decision to cover Somalia, but the stage for this decision had been set in Washington.

On the withdrawal, the question arises; was it media coverage of the deaths of eighteen Army rangers killed in a fire-fight that ensured the US would withdraw? There was no video of the fire-fight itself, but when the image of a dead soldier poked with a stick and dragged through the streets of Mogadishu to the cheers and jeers of the crowd, and that of a very battered captured

US pilot Michael Durant, were broadcast on October 4th, 1993, television sets were on in nearly every corner of the White House as well as American households, tuned to CNN. It is widely assumed that these images broadcast around the world forced the US out of Somalia.

But, it was not the images per-se that caused the US to withdraw. The US could just have easily responded by massive retaliation, an action it considered. The US had intervened because a consensus developed that it was do-able with little risk of casualties. This turned out to be incorrect, especially when the mission changed. Clinton had not been interested in or able to communicate to Congress or the public the changed mission and the reasons for it. Mounting calls on Capitol Hill for withdrawal rose to a level that President Clinton could not ignore. On October 7th, he announced that all troops would be withdrawn by March 31st, 1994.

The risks of escalation did not measure up to the stakes. According to former press secretary Dee Dee Meyers, “The decision was made that it wasn’t worth a lot of American lives to go after this guy”. Strobel (1997)<sup>264</sup> cites Jeremy Rosner, then National Security Council staff’s chief liaison to Capitol Hill, saying: “The lack of perceived security stakes ended up shaping things more than anything else” According to Strobel, Clinton was already moving in the direction of withdrawing troops even before the deaths of the eighteen Rangers made the news, and he was motivated by factors other than media coverage, especially congressional pressure. Strobel writes, “Public support declined not because of the news media, and specifically televised images of casualties, but because the costs, duration, and outcome of the missions began to diverge from what the public had expected. The televised images of casualties fell into this gap; there is no evidence that they created it”<sup>265</sup>. The decision to withdraw was then reinforced by media stories that

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<sup>264</sup> Strobel, Warren P., ‘Late-Breaking Foreign Policy: The News Media’s Influence on Peace Operations’, United States Institute of Peace, 1997, Washington, DC.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid

followed on ‘traditional clan hatreds’ that conditioned the public to view Somalis as very different kinds of human beings, who ultimately can be deserted.<sup>266</sup>

Subsequently it emerges from the study that the relationships between the media, foreign policy makers, and the public are complex. Much more research on the links between information, opinion, and decision making needs to be conducted before definitive causal explanations can be made. But for now, it can be said that George Kennan’s fear on the eve of the Somalia intervention – that American policy is “controlled by popular emotional impulses, and particularly ones provoked by the commercial television industry” (Kennan, 1993) – is not borne out. The claim by Gowing” (cited by Luke and Tuathail, 1997)<sup>267</sup> that real-time television “creates emotions but ultimately makes no difference to the fundamental calculations in foreign policy making it a better interpretation.

## **5.2 Key Findings**

The media does influence policy. An example of this is television coverage of the Ethiopia famine in 1984. Immediately after a series of NBC stories on Ethiopia in October 1984, American aid to Ethiopia skyrocketed, from \$23 million for all of fiscal 1984 to nearly \$100 million for October and November 1984. An enterprising NBC correspondent in London is responsible for getting a story on Ethiopia, originally broadcast on the BBC, onto the air in the United States.<sup>268</sup> The origin of the Ethiopia story appears to have been the effort of a journalist to publicize distant events that had for the most part been ignored in the West. The same can be

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<sup>266</sup> Besteman, Catherine. “Representing Violence and ‘Othering’ Somalia”, *American Anthropological Association*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (February, 1996) pp. 120-133.

<sup>267</sup> Luke, Timothy W. and Gearoid O. Tuathail. “On Videocameristics: The Geopolitics of Failed States, the CNN International and (UN) governmentality”, *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 4, No. 4, Winter, 1997, pp. 709-33

<sup>268</sup> Paul Harrison and Robin Palmer, *News Out of Africa: Biafra to Band Aid*, London: Hilary Shipman, 1986, 123-24.

said of the situation of Kurds in Northern Iraq, emotive and often highly critical coverage of Kurdish refugees fleeing from Saddam Hussein's forces, quite literally caused 'the virtually unprecedented proposal for Kurdish safe havens.

Within humanitarian circles there was a good deal of debate about the apparent power of the news media to cause intervention in Somalia. Indeed, ever since the 1984 Ethiopian famine, there had been much discussion about the purported impact which the media had had upon crises in the Third World.<sup>13</sup> Amongst the most significant works in this genre were the Cross lines Special Report Somalia, Rwanda and Beyond <sup>269</sup> and From Massacres to Genocide.<sup>270</sup> Writing from a broadly 'world society' approach they applauded the role played by non-state actors in expanding the policy debate beyond the narrow corridors of political power. Furthermore, instead of attacking the irresponsible part played by the media, these writer-advocates actually praised the new activism and sought to harness the perceived potential of the media to encourage humanitarian intervention.

However a review of the Somalia case shows that the appearance of Somalia on American television is because it made the news only after it had generated interest among foreign policy makers in the United States. In this view, television coverage of Somalia in the summer and fall of 1992 did not originate in the independent actions of journalists but in the interaction of journalists engaged in routine newsgathering practices and sources in Washington who made efforts to get Somalia onto the foreign policy agenda.

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<sup>269</sup> Edward Girardet, (ed.), 'Somalia Rwanda and Beyond,' Crosslines Global Report, Geneva: 1995.

<sup>270</sup> Robert Rotberg and Thomas Weiss (eds.), 'From Massacres to Genocide Cambridge Massachusetts' The World Peace Foundation, 1996



Journalists generally engage in agenda setting when deciding on the vast universe of events what to report and what to ignore. But in setting the news agenda, what rules do journalists follow? On this question, most studies have found that American journalists turn to politicians and government officials for guidance in deciding what constitutes news.

A review of media and Somalia reveals that journalists worked closely with governmental sources in deciding when to cover Somalia, how to frame the story, and how much coverage it deserved. The lesson of Somalia is not just about the influence of television on Washington; it is equally about the influence of Washington on television.

One key finding is offered by Lance Bennett<sup>271</sup> who argues that ‘mass media news is indexed . . . to the dynamics of governmental debate’. Hence, even when media coverage is critical of executive policy, this simply reflects a ‘professional responsibility [for journalists] to highlight struggles within the centers of power’. An important implication of this elite version is that news coverage critical of executive policy is possible when—and perhaps only when—there exists elite conflict over policy.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

The relationships between the media, foreign policy makers, and the public are complex. This study recommends that much more research on the links between information, opinion, and decision making needs to be conducted before definitive causal explanations can be made. This is because an examination of the media’s role viewed through the objectives of this study found that though media shapes opinion it actually acts in concert with policy makers and cases abound

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<sup>271</sup> Bennett L., ‘Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States’. (eds) in Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: Can the News Media Drive Foreign Policy?* *Review of International Studies* (1999), 25, 301–309, British International Studies Association

where policy makers use the media to front their agenda. Western media buttresses the opinion of its government as was cited earlier in the case of Kenya's elections 2013.

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## Influence of the Media on Perception

### Questionnaire

Dear Colleague,

I am carrying out a research study on of how the media has been used over the years to set the agenda of governments and the public. In my study I intend to discuss the agenda setting as a theory and show that agenda setting is actually now more a function of the media than a theory

I believe that you have the necessary expertise/experience to contribute significantly to this study by addressing the questions provided in this questionnaire to the best of your ability. Feel free to forward this to your colleagues who you feel can contribute to the study. After filling out the questionnaire kindly send it back to me for inclusion in the study. Thank you.

Questions:

1. What is your thought on the argument that the press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it?
2. The media only concentrates on a few issues and subjects leading the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues?
3. Have you witnessed any instances of agenda setting by the media
4. How many agenda setting types are you conversant with?
5. The media's coverage of events and issues interact with the audience's pre-existing sensitivities to produce changes in issues concerns. Please comment
6. The media was responsible for US intervention in Vietnam and Somalia. Comment.
7. The lesson of Somalia is not just about the influence of television on Washington; it is equally about the influence of Washington on television.