Political Communication, 22:27–44
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ISSN: 1058-4609 print / 1091-7675 online
DOI: 10.1080/10584600590908429

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The CNN Effect: The Search for a Communication Theory of International Relations

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This study investigates the decade long effort to construct and validate a communications theory of international relations that asserts that global television networks, such as CNN and BBC World, have become a decisive actor in determining policies and outcomes of significant events. It systematically and critically analyzes major works published on this theory, known also as the CNN effect, both in professional and academic outlets. These publications include theoretical and comparative works, specific case studies, and even new paradigms. The study reveals an ongoing debate on the validity of this theory and concludes that studies have yet to present sufficient evidence validating the CNN effect, that many works have exaggerated this effect, and that the focus on this theory has deflected attention from other ways global television affects mass communication, journalism, and international relations. The article also proposes a new agenda for research on the various effects of global television networks.

Keywords CNN effect, communication technologies, foreign policymaking, global communication, humanitarian intervention, international conflict, paradigms, television news, U.S. foreign policy

The Second World War created for the first time in history a truly global international system. Events in one region affect events elsewhere and therefore are of interest to states in other, even distant places. At the beginning of the 1980s, innovations in communication technologies and the vision of Ted Turner produced CNN, the first global news network (Whittemore, 1990). CNN broadcasted news around the clock and around the world via a combination of satellites and cable television outlets. In the 1990–1991 Gulf War, CNN emerged as a global actor in international relations, and its successful coverage inspired other broadcasting organizations such as BBC, which already had a world radio broadcast, NBC, and Star to establish global television networks.

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CNN's growth and diversification, including the creation of CNN International, have affected many facets of global communications and international relations, such as technology, economics, culture, law, public opinion, politics, and diplomacy, as well as warfare, terrorism, human rights, environmental degradation, refugees, and health. In the 1980s, these effects attracted limited attention from both the academic and professional communities, but CNN's coverage of the Gulf War encouraged greater investigations. The war marked a turning point in the history of communications and of CNN in particular, which brought about a similar change in scholarship on the network. The emergence of a significant new actor in communications and international relations requires adequate theoretical and empirical work to scientifically assess its place and influence. Scholars have conducted studies of CNN within various general frameworks (Gurevitch, 1991; Silvia, 2001; McPhail, 2002) and specific contexts, such as public sphere (Volkmer, 1999), ownership and economics (Parker, 1995; Flournoy & Stewart, 1997; Compaine, 2002), competition (Johnston, 1995), and newsmaking (Flournoy, 1992; Seib, 2002). This article investigates studies of CNN's effects on war and intervention, foreign policy, and diplomacy. Many of these works explore what became known as the CNN effect.

Senior officials have acknowledged the impact of television coverage on policymaking. In his memoir, former Secretary of State James Baker III (1995) wrote: "In Iraq, Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, and Chechnya, among others, the real-time coverage of conflict by the electronic media has served to create a powerful new imperative for prompt action that was not present in less frenetic [times]" (p. 103). Former British foreign secretaries Douglas Hurd (Hopkinson, 1993, p. 11) and David Owen (1996, p. 308) made similar observations. Former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali was also quoted as complaining that "CNN is the sixteenth member of the Security Council" (Minear, Scott, & Weiss, 1996, p. 4). Other senior policymakers, however, have provided a more complex view of the CNN effect. Colin Powell observed that "live television coverage doesn't change the policy, but it does create the environment in which the policy is made" (McNulty, 1993, p. 80). Anthony Lake, a scholar and Bill Clinton's first national security adviser, acknowledged that public pressure, driven by televised images, increasingly played a role in decision making on humanitarian crises, but added that other factors such as cost and feasibility were as important (Hoge, 1994, p. 139).

Scholars have yet to define properly the CNN effect, leading one to question if an elaborated theory exists or simply an attractive neologism. In the early analysis of this supposed effect, writers also called it the "CNN complex," the "CNN curve," and the "CNN factor," each carrying multiple meanings with journalists, officials, and scholars. In recent years, however, researchers have predominantly associated global real-time news coverage with forcing policy on leaders and accelerating the pace of international communication. Constructing and testing a new theory in these fields is significant because the international community has considered ethnic and civil wars and humanitarian interventions two of the most important issues of the post–Cold War era. The effects of instant communications and time pressure created by that speed also may push policymakers to make decisions without sufficient time to carefully consider options (Gilboa, 2002a, 2003). In addition, the popularity of the CNN effect and the attention it has received in all circles, including the policymaking and media communities, and the consequences of this effect for both policymaking and research also call for a comprehensive study of the theory's origins, development, and contributions.

This study attempts to answer the following questions: What exactly is the CNN effect? How has it been researched and analyzed previously? What are the results of these efforts, and what progress has been made during a decade of investigations? Which

research issues have been missed? Where do we go from here? Which research directions and strategies should scholars adopt to investigate the effects of global communications, not just those of CNN, in the near future? In order to answer these questions, this study systematically and critically analyzes major works published on the subject in the last decade, both in professional and academic outlets. These publications include theoretical and comparative works, specific case studies, paradigms, and methodologies. The results reveal an ongoing heated debate among scholars on the validity of the CNN effect theory.

This article concludes that studies have yet to present sufficient evidence validating the CNN effect, that many works have exaggerated this effect, and that the focus on this theory has deflected attention from other ways global television affects mass communication, journalism, and international relations. The article first presents a survey of definitions and approaches to the study of the CNN effect. Then it critically examines theories, theoretical frameworks and methodologies employed by researchers to investigate the effect. The next section presents findings of the different studies, while the last section presents lessons and a new research agenda for future studies on the effects of global communications.

Definitions and Approaches

Systematic research of any significant political communication phenomenon first requires a workable definition. Researchers of the CNN effect, however, have employed a variety of confusing definitions. Several formulations address only the policy forcing effect on humanitarian intervention decisions, while others suggest a whole new approach to foreign policymaking and world politics. Feist (2001, p. 713) wrote: "The CNN effect is a theory that compelling television images, such as images of a humanitarian crisis, cause U.S. policymakers to intervene in a situation when such an intervention might otherwise not be in the U.S. national interest." Schorr (1998) defined the CNN effect as "the way breaking news affects foreign policy decisions," while Livingston and Eachus (1995, p. 413) defined it "as elite decision makers' loss of policy control to news media." According to Seib (2002), the CNN effect "is presumed to illustrate the dynamic tension that exists between real-time television news and policymaking, with the news having the upper hand in terms of influence" (p. 27).

Neuman (1996) expanded the range of effects by addressing the coverage's impact on the initial decision as well as on subsequent intervention phases, including long-term deployment and exit strategies. She described the effect in terms of a curve: "It suggests that when CNN floods the airwaves with news of a foreign crisis, policymakers have no choice but to redirect their attention to the crisis at hand. It also suggests that crisis coverage evokes an emotional outcry from the public to 'do something' about the latest incident, forcing political leaders to change course or risk unpopularity" (pp. 15–16). The "curve" in this context means that television can force policymakers to intervene militarily in a humanitarian crisis, and force them again to terminate the intervention once the military force suffers casualties or humiliation. This definition consists of two parts linked by a "forcing" function. The first represents classic agenda setting—forcing leaders to deal with an issue they prefer to ignore. The second part refers to the power of television to force policymakers through public opinion to adopt a policy against their will and interpretation of the national interest.

Freedman (2000, p. 339) distinguished among three effects of television coverage on humanitarian military interventions: the "CNN effect," whereby images of suffering

push governments into intervention; the "bodybags effect," whereby images of casualties pull them away; and the "bullying effect," whereby the use of excessive force risks draining away public support for intervention. This formulation is somewhat confusing. As mentioned earlier, for Neuman the "CNN effect" and the "bodybags effect" constitute one effect that she called the "CNN curve." Furthermore, all three effects suggested by Freedman result from global news coverage of events at different intervention phases, and therefore all can be grouped under the umbrella of the CNN effect. Strobel (1997) distinguished between effect on outcome and effect on policymaking and wrote: "I found no evidence that the news media, *by themselves*, force U.S. government officials to change their policies. But, under the right conditions, the news media nonetheless can have a powerful effect on process. *And those conditions are almost always set by foreign-policy makers themselves or by the growing number of policy actors on the international stage*" (p. 5).

Livingston (1997, p. 293), Wheeler (2000, p. 300), and Robinson (2001, p. 942; 2002, pp. 37–41) offered more useful distinctions among different CNN effects. Livingston identified three variations of CNN effects: an accelerant to decision making, an impediment to the achievement of desired policy goals, and a policy agenda-setting agent. The impediment effect is primarily related to breaches in operational security. Wheeler distinguished between "determining" and "enabling" effects of television coverage. The "determining" effect means policy forcing, while the "enabling" effect means that coverage makes humanitarian intervention possible by mobilizing domestic support. Robinson adopted a somewhat similar distinction between "strong" and "weak" effects. The "strong" is equivalent to policy forcing, while the "weak" effect occurs when "media reports might incline policymakers to act rather than create a potential imperative to act." Both the "enabling" and the "weak" effects mean that the media play only a marginal role in decision making. Belknap (2002) added that the CNN effect is a double-edged sword: a strategic enabler and a potential operational risk. It enables policymakers to garner public support for operations but at the same time exposes information that may compromise operational security.

Scholars have used various specific and broad approaches to study the CNN effect, including case studies, comparative analysis, models of foreign policymaking and international relations, and paradigms. Researchers used the case study methodology to investigate television's impact on several humanitarian interventions, including Northern Iraq (Kurdistan), Somalia, and Kosovo. Three major works dealt with the Anglo American intervention in Northern Iraq: Schorr (1991) examined television's impact on U.S. policy; Shaw (1996) analyzed the British media's influence on British decisions; and Miller (2002) explored media influence on both the British and American policies. Livingston and Eachus (1995) and Mermin (1997) studied the U.S. intervention in Somalia. Freedman (2000), Livingston (2000), Hammond and Herman (2000), and Thussu (2000) investigated the CNN effect on NATO's intervention in Kosovo. A few studies explored the opposite phenomenon, the lack of intervention despite coverage, as was the case in Rwanda (Livingston & Eachus, 1999), or the absence of both coverage and intervention as was the case in Sudan (Livingston, 1996).

A few scholars conducted comparative analyses of several intervention cases. Jakobsen (1996) investigated the role of the CNN effect and other factors in decisions to intervene in the following crises: Kuwait, Northern Iraq (Kurdistan), Somalia, Rwanda, and Haiti. Strobel (1997) explored the CNN effect in peace operations in the Balkans, Somalia, Rwanda, and Haiti, while Mermin (1996, 1997, 1999) investigated the effects media coverage had on U.S. military interventions in crises of the post-Vietnam era, including

Grenada, Panama, the bombing of Libya, the Gulf War, Somalia, and Haiti. Robinson (2000a, 2001, 2002) analyzed the CNN effect in Northern Iraq, Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, and Kosovo.

A series of books and studies dealt with CNN's influence within the more general context of foreign policymaking and international relations. These studies were written from the perspectives of journalists, officials, and scholars. Pearce (1995), a journalist, focused on the tension between diplomats and reporters, while foreign policy officials Newsom (1996) and Buckley (1998) examined the issue from the perspective of the foreign affairs bureaucracy. Hopkinson (1995) and Neuman (1996) placed the CNN effect within a broad historical context of technological innovations in communications, and Taylor (1997) traced the effects of global communications on international relations since 1945. Seib (1997, 2001, 2002) placed the topic in a broad historical communication setting. Edwards (1998), Carruthers (2000), Badsey (2000), and Belknap (2002) wrote about the CNN effect within the context of media–military relations. Several books dealt specifically with the media's roles in humanitarian interventions (Girardet & Bartoli, 1995; Rotberg & Weiss, 1996; Minear et al., 1996; Gow, Paterson, and Preston, 1996). These books present various historical interpretations of the media's roles but often oscillate between normative approaches, which prescribe what the media should do, and empirical approaches, which inform what the media are actually doing.

Three studies have elevated the debate about the CNN effect to a higher paradigmatic level. O'Neill (1993) suggested for the first time a new paradigm of world politics that accorded global television a decisive and dominant role. He argued that television and public opinion have democratized the world and that CNN's real-time coverage has destroyed the conventional diplomatic system and determined political and diplomatic outcomes. Ammon (2001) and Edwards (2001) also claimed that the media, particularly television, have completely transformed world politics. Both respectively used post-modern terms to describe their new paradigms of media domination: *telediplomacy* and *mediapolitik*.

Theoretical Frameworks and Methodologies

In studying directly and indirectly the CNN effect, scholars have employed theories, models, hypotheses, and concepts from several social sciences including communication, psychology, sociology, political science, and international relations. Researchers used qualitative and quantitative methodologies and techniques including content analysis of media coverage and interviews with policymakers. Journalists mainly employed interviews with policymakers and their colleagues in the media because interviewing is an essential part of their daily professional work. Scholars have used interviews, but also content analysis, and placed the data within models and theories of both communication and international relations. Studies based solely on interviews, however, raise reliability and validity questions. The answers may reflect how policymakers would like to be remembered and not how they really made policy.

Communication frameworks include general theories such as agenda setting (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997) and framing (Reese, Gandy, & Grant, 2001) and specific theories that deal with press-government relations such as the "indexing hypothesis" (Bennett, 1990) and the "manufacturing consent" theory (Chomsky & Herman, 1988). The two specific theories are particularly relevant because they view media coverage as reflecting only governmental interests and opinion, and therefore they contradict the CNN effect.

The "indexing hypothesis" suggests that reporters index the slant of their coverage to reflect the range of opinions that exist within the government. If this hypothesis is valid, then the media serve primarily as a tool in the hands of policymakers. Zaller and Chiu (1996, 2000) applied the "indexing hypothesis" to 42 foreign policy crises from the beginning of the Cold War until the 1999 Kosovo crisis. Mermin (1996, 1997, 1999) applied the same hypothesis to U.S. interventions in the post-Vietnam era. His evidence supports the "indexing hypothesis" for both the Cold War and the post–Cold War periods. Zaller and Chiu's evidence on media-government relations in the United States during the Cold War supports the "indexing hypothesis," but their findings for the post–Cold War period are more mixed. The difference between the results of the two studies is attributed to the use of different coding schemes. Zaller and Chiu (2000, pp. 80–81) tallied negative coverage about all aspects of a policy, including premises, implementation, costs, and political support, while Mermin tallied only negative coverage that directly challenged the premises of a policy. This methodological debate exposes a weakness in the "indexing hypothesis," and, at least currently, the findings for indexing in the post–Cold War era are not clear.

The "manufacturing consent" theory or the "propaganda model" argues that the powerful control both the media and the government through economic power, and consequently are able to use the media to mobilize public support for governmental policies. According to this theory, the media "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" (Herman, 1993, p. 25). Scholars use evidence on media conglomerates and status quo–oriented conservative coverage to validate this theory. Herman and Peterson (2000) and Thussu (2000) applied the manufacturing consent theory to the Kosovo crisis. This "neo-Marxist" theory, however, is based primarily on circumstantial evidence, and while it may serve as a tool to analyze American media coverage of conflicts during the Cold War, it is much less relevant to the conflicts of the post–Cold War era (Compaine, 2002).

Shaw (1996) and Miller (2002) employed behavioral sciences theories to investigate the CNN effect in the Northern Iraq–Kurdish crisis. Shaw used the sociological "global civil society" concept, where various supranational and subnational organizations, movements, and individuals assume the responsibility to represent victims of national or international oppression and violence. Within the boundaries of this concept, Shaw argued that the media, more than any other societal institution, represent the victims of violence and war. Shaw assumed that the media affect policy through public opinion and therefore meticulously surveyed coverage of the Kurdish crisis both in the British print and the electronic media, analyzed national public opinion polls, and independently conducted an opinion survey in two locations in Britain. He then used a triangular correlation between coverage, public attitudes, and shifts in official policy to support his basic hypothesis about media effects on British policy. The problem with this approach is that it makes assumptions about media influence on public opinion and the influence of public opinion on policy. These assumptions are controversial and cannot be used without independent verification. Furthermore, Shaw ignored the actual policymaking process and looked at policy only as an outcome.

Unlike Shaw, Miller (2002) focused on the policymaking process and consequently was able to distinguish between government rhetoric and sequences of actual policymaking and between media coverage and media pressure. He used the "positioning hypothesis" from discursive psychology to examine the linkages between media coverage and policy in Britain and the United States. The "positioning hypothesis" allows a researcher to

analyze verbal exchanges between institutions such as the media and the government through questions in press conferences and official responses. Miller acknowledged (pp. 49–50) weaknesses in his measurement technique, but his approach is sophisticated and very promising.

Political scientists have used theories of international relations such as the "realist approach" and "substitution theory" to study factors that determine military intervention. The classic realist approach argues that, in foreign affairs, states pursue rationally only power and national interests. Thus, the realist approach would rule out humanitarian considerations and global television coverage as sufficient causes for humanitarian intervention. Persuasive application of the realist approach to humanitarian interventions would invalidate the CNN effect. Gibbs (2000) applied the realist approach to the intervention in Somalia and produced an explanation that negates the CNN effect and instead emphasizes American national interests.

Regan (2000) applied "substitution theory" to analyze military intervention. Through quantitative data, this theory attempts to accurately document and explain changes in foreign policy. Regan wanted to explore the conditions under which the U.S. changes its intervention strategies in civil conflicts and the types of interventions that are substituted once the decision to change has been made. He found media coverage to be a highly influential domestic variable. Yet, Regan chose to analyze only press coverage, the reporting of the *New York Times*, and only the amount of coverage measured in column inches. He equated the amount of reporting with the degree of public concern for a particular conflict. This procedure suffers from several shortcomings that characterize other similar works of political scientists who don't sufficiently consult communications research. First, most people get the news from television, not from the press (Graber, 2001, p. 3). Second, the amount of media attention doesn't necessarily represent the level of public concern. Sometimes, it is exactly the opposite (Gilboa, 1993). Third, the measuring of media attention alone is insufficient. The direction of coverage, positive, negative, or neutral, must be decoded and calculated to allow any meaningful evaluation of the media's influence. Fourth, coverage alone is a poor proxy measure for media pressure on policymaking (Miller, 2002, p. 5).

Any progress in the study of the CNN effect required two interrelated comparative analyses: (a) an assessment of global television's impact on a specific foreign policy decision in comparison to the relative impact of other factors and (b) application of this procedure to several relevant case studies. Only a few researchers have systematically followed this procedure. One of them was Jakobsen (1996), who examined the impact of the following factors on humanitarian intervention decisions: a clear humanitarian and/or legal case, national interest, chance of success, domestic support, and the CNN effect. He then examined the relative influence of these factors on decisions to intervene in the following crises: Kuwait, Northern Iraq (Kurdistan), Somalia, Rwanda, and Haiti.

Livingston (1997) and Robinson (2000a) developed models for the study of the CNN effect that effectively combine models of communication, international relations, and decision making. Livingston successfully applied communication concepts to a typology of military interventions developed by Haass (1994). He identified three variations of CNN effects—an accelerant to decision making, an impediment to the achievement of desired policy goals, and a policy agenda-setting agent—and then showed how these effects operate differently in eight types of interventions: conventional warfare, strategic deterrence, tactical deterrence, special operations and low intensity conflict, peacemaking, peacekeeping, imposed humanitarian operations, and consensual humanitarian operations. This distinction is useful, and the framework is sophisticated. Livingston

(2000) demonstrated the usefulness of this framework by applying it, particularly the impediment effect, to NATO's intervention in Kosovo.

Robinson (2000a, 2002, pp. 25–35) developed an excellent policy-media interaction model that predicts that media influence is likely to occur when policy is uncertain and media coverage is critically framed and empathizes with suffering people. When policy is certain, media influence is unlikely to occur. Robinson effectively applied this model to the crises in Bosnia and Kosovo. Despite weaknesses in defining and measuring "influence" and "framing," this model could be useful and effective.

Finally, two new paradigms also provide a theoretical framework for the study of the CNN effect. Ammon (2001) claimed that paradigmatic changes both in communication and diplomacy produced a new paradigm of world politics, which he called "telediplomacy." He explained that the emergence and expansion of real-time global news coverage caused the shift in communication, while the "new diplomacy," mostly characterized by openness, caused the shift in foreign policymaking. The result, telediplomacy, has displaced the existing diplomatic methods, and for the first time in human history, under certain conditions, it also drives policy and determines diplomatic outcomes (p. 152).

Edwards (2001) developed a new mediapolitik paradigm in order to fill the void in theories and models of linkages between media and politics. This framework is designed to "examine the reality of media power and its impact on the politics of the nations of the world" (p. 276). Edwards's book is very broad and includes interesting observations on media-government relations in several countries. The model, however, is not well defined and is often confusing. Mediapolitik operates in different political systems—liberal democratic, authoritarian, and totalitarian—but there are also variants, such as "Japanese mediapolitik," that do not belong to any of these systems. Edwards argues that the role the mass media play in politics depends upon four criteria (pp. 60–63): a significant media infrastructure, a large reading and viewing public, public officials who sought to use the media to their ends, and a mass media that reversed public policy. The last condition lies at the heart of the CNN effect theory, but it is not clear whether all of these conditions must be present for mediapolitik to exist or whether they merely determine the level of this phenomenon.

Findings

Scholarly and professional studies of the CNN effect present mixed, contradictory, and confusing results. On the formulation of U.S. policy toward the Kurdish crisis, Schorr (1991) concluded: "Score one for the power of the media, especially television, as a policy-making force. Coverage of the massacre and exodus of the Kurds generated public pressures that were instrumental in slowing the hasty American military withdrawal from Iraq and forcing a return to help guard and care for the victims of Saddam Hussein's vengeance" (p. 21). The language of this conclusion is strong, but the evidence on the linkage between coverage, public opinion, and policy is very weak. Shaw (1996) reached a similar conclusion about the British policy toward the same crisis: "In Kurdistan it was the British media and public opinion which forced governments' hands" (p. vii). He added that "the Kurdish crisis is the only clear-cut case, of all the conflicts in the early 1990s, in which media coverage compelled intervention by the Western powers" (p. 156). Yet, the correlation he found between media attitudes and public opinion is not sufficient to establish a cause-effect relationship as well as a connection between public opinion and policy change. This could have been accomplished only by an additional examination of the policymaking process that Shaw avoided.

Miller (2002) focused on the policymaking process, and his findings contradict the conclusions of Schorr and Shaw. He argued that the United States and Britain did not change their policies in the Kurdish crisis, but only "adapted them to accommodate the refugee crisis and the pressures on Turkey" (p. 46). He concluded that "had moral action by the Bush administration been *contradictory* to other coalition interests; had no other explanations for U.S. policymaking been available; and had the administration *changed* its policies rather than adapt them to new realities, we may have been able to argue for a CNN effect. However, this was not the case" (p. 47).

The U.S. intervention in Somalia has been the second battleground for studies of the CNN effect, and it also has yielded similar controversial results. Cohen (1994) wrote that 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" (pp. 9–10). Mandelbaum (1994, p. 16) also wrote that "television pictures of starving people" propelled the U.S. intervention, and Shattuck (1996) emphasized the "curve effect": "The media got us into Somalia and then got us out" (p. 174). But Livingston and Eachus (1995) concluded that the U.S. decision to intervene militarily in Somalia "was the result of diplomatic and bureaucratic operations, *with news coverage coming in response to those decisions*" (p. 413, emphasis added). Mermin (1997) called Cohen's claim "a myth" and later (1999) added: "The case of U.S. intervention in Somalia, in sum, is not at heart evidence of the power of television to move governments; it is evidence of the power of governments to move television" (p. 137). Similarly, Riley (1999) argued that in the cases of Somalia and Rwanda, leaders set the media's agenda, not the other way around. Wheeler (2000, p. 300) and Robinson (2001, p. 941) also agreed that the media had respectively an "enabling" or a "weak" effect on the decisions to intervene in Kurdistan and Somalia.

Using the realist approach to international relations, Gibbs (2000) presented an alternative explanation of the U.S. intervention in Somalia. He argued that policymakers employed humanitarian justifications but were much more concerned with strategic and economic interests. Somalia was close to shipping routes in the Red Sea and to the strategically important Bab-el-Mandeb straits, and Conco, an American oil company, had been investing in oil explorations. U.S. policy varied considerably over time, from cooperation to confrontation with the local warlord Mohammed Aideed, based on his will and ability to protect these interests. Gibbs concludes that national interests caused this intervention, not the CNN effect or humanitarian considerations.

The comparative research also produced contradictory and confusing results. In his pioneering work, Gowing (1994) argued that CNN's coverage has drawn attention to crises and may have evoked emotional public reactions. But based on interviews with policymakers in several countries, he concluded that they resisted pressure to act solely in response to television news reports. He noted that, in 1991, the United States and Western governments refrained from intervention in the Bosnian crisis despite substantial news coverage of atrocities. In a later study (2000, p. 212), he used the reversal of U.S. policy toward the 1996 catastrophe in Burundi to demonstrate the opposite example: willingness to intervene despite the absence of television coverage.

In his analysis of factors affecting humanitarian intervention in several crises, Jakobsen (1996) discovered that CNN's coverage was an important factor because it placed the crises, on the agenda, but still the decision to intervene "*was ultimately determined by the perceived chances of success*" (p. 212, emphasis added). In a more recent study (2000), he further argued that "in situations when governments are reluctant to use force,

interventions are unlikely to follow unless they can be conducted quickly with a low risk of casualties. Since this is rarely the case, media pressures on reluctant governments [are] most likely to result in minimalist policies aimed at defusing pressure for interventions on the ground" (p. 138).

Robinson (2000a, 2002, pp. 25–35) predicts that media influence is likely to occur in humanitarian intervention cases when policy is uncertain and media coverage is critically framed and empathizes with suffering people. When policy is certain, media influence is unlikely to occur. He applied his policy-media interaction model to the crises in Bosnia and Kosovo and found that U.S. policy to defend the Gorazde "safe area" in Bosnia was influenced by the media because Clinton's policy was uncertain and the media strongly criticized him. In the Kosovo case, however, Clinton's air-war policy was clear, and consequently the media failed to expand the operation to include ground troops.

According to Ammon's telediplomacy paradigm (2001, pp. 91–95), five conditions determine whether television coverage can force intervention on policymakers: a specific issue such as a global crisis or a humanitarian emergency, with a fast breaking event, which is characterized by a leadership vacuum, media autonomy, and high visibility, which means that the event can attract the attention of real-time global television. Ammon applied his model to three crises: the Kurdish crisis, where he thought all of the five conditions of his model were present and global television forced intervention on the U.S. and its allies; the simultaneous Shiite uprising in Southern Iraq, where several conditions were missing and therefore television coverage did not affect policy; and the 1994 civil war in Rwanda, where despite the presence of all of the five conditions, real-time global coverage did not affect policy. He explained (pp. 117–118) that television coverage of the crisis in Rwanda only portrayed "dead corpses," not "living victims," and that intervention in this country "entailed risks that exceeded those justified by national interest or any reasonable degree of humanitarian concern." Conditions that were not included in the original model determined the outcome of the Rwanda case, thus exposing a major structural weakness in Ammon's paradigm. Moreover, meeting all of the five plus conditions would be extremely difficult and would happen only in rare situations. A television based new paradigm of world politics cannot be founded on rare exceptional cases.

Edwards applied his model to many countries around the globe and to major events including the protests in Tiananmen Square, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the democratization of Eastern Europe, the end of apartheid in South Africa, the end of the Pinochet regime in Chile, the Gulf War, and the civil wars in the Balkans and Africa. He claimed that the mass media played a decisive role in all of these events and processes. He used the term "CNN phenomenon" to describe the connection between mediapolitik and CNN: "What a computer does within an office, CNN does around the world, giving millions of viewers on different continents the same information at the same moment" (pp. 312–314). Yet, the empirical connection between this effect and mediapolitik in different countries is not sufficiently developed.

Various studies' findings essentially cast doubts about the two basic facets of the CNN effect: policy forcing and instant communication. Neuman (1996, p. 16) and Buckley (1998, p. 44) concluded that global communication has not changed the fundamentals of political leadership and international governance. Seib (2002) asserted: "There is a certain logic to the [CNN] theory, and it cheers journalists who like to think they are powerful, but there is a fundamental problem: It just ain't so, at least not as a straightforward cause-and-effect process" (p. 27). Natsios (1997, p. 124), Gowing (2000, p.

204), and Jakobsen (2000, p. 133) agreed that the CNN effect has been highly exaggerated, while Badsey (1997, p. 19) suggested that "although the CNN effect may happen, it is unusual, unpredictable, and part of a complex relationship of factors."

Several studies specified conditions under which global television is likely to force policy on leaders. These conditions exist both in policymaking and newsmaking processes. One study suggested that "vivid coverage will only create major international political resonance if, by chance, it hits a critical, often unpredictable void in the news cycle. Alternatively, there will be impact if it creates a moment of policy panic when governments have no robust policy and charts a clear course" (Gowing, 2000, p. 210). Other studies point to conditions such as policy uncertainty and pro-intervention media framing (Robinson, 2000a, 2000b, 2001), broadcast of dramatic images and an issue that is simple and straight-forward (Hopkinson, 1993, p. 33), slow and indecisive government reactions (MacFarlane & Weiss, 2000, p. 128), geopolitical interests (Natsios, 1996), and a policy vacuum (Seib, 2002, p. 28). The critical factor in all of these conclusions is leadership. If leaders don't have a clear policy on a significant issue, the media may step in and replace them. These situations, however, reflect more on leaders than on the media, and these conclusions don't require extensive research. Researchers have not adequately answered the question of whether global television can force leaders to alter a policy that they do have.

Discussion and Conclusions

The effort to explore the CNN effect represents an interesting case study in terminology and theorization. The concept was initially suggested by politicians and officials haunted by the Vietnam media myth, the confusion of the post–Cold War era, and the communications revolution. Despite evidence to the contrary (Hallin, 1986), many leaders still believe that critical television coverage caused the American defeat in Vietnam. Since then, many have viewed the media as an adversary to government policies in areas such as humanitarian intervention and international negotiation. Leaders' fascination with CNN also resulted from a perception of the media in general, and television in particular, as being the most important power broker in politics. *Mediademocracy, medialism, mediacracy, teledemocracy*, and *mediapolitik* are but a few fashionable terms coined to describe this new media dominated political system. Application of the same perception to foreign policy and international relations yielded similar terms and concepts such as the *CNN effect* and *telediplomacy*. This background helps to understand why global television has been perceived as having a power to determine foreign policy, primarily in severe crisis situations, and why policymakers feel they need to neutralize the media when they use force or embark on new diplomatic initiatives (Gilboa, 1998).

This study reveals considerable debate and disagreement on the concept and the methodologies used to test it. Scholars have adopted too many different definitions of the phenomenon and suggested too many different and sometimes contradicting CNN effects. These effects include "forcing" policy on leaders, "limiting" their options, "disrupting" their policy considerations, and "hindering" implementation, as well as "enabling" policymakers to adopt a policy and "helping" implementation by "legitimizing" actions and "manufacturing consent." Authors argued that the CNN effect has completely transformed foreign policymaking and world politics, and leaders have promoted CNN to a superpower status with decisive influence even on the UN Security Council. Others suggested the opposite, that the CNN effect has not dramatically changed media-government relations, doesn't exist, or has been highly exaggerated and may occur only

in rare situations of extremely dramatic and persistent coverage, lack of leadership, and chaotic policymaking.

The CNN effect theory has been defined very broadly, but to test it, this theory had to be operationalized in a very narrow way. When this is done, as has been demonstrated in several studies, it becomes easier to disprove many of its claims and implications. Several studies confuse cause-and-effect relationships between coverage and policy. It is clearly necessary to distinguish between cases where a government wishes to intervene, and therefore not only does not object to media coverage of atrocities but actually initiates or encourages it, and cases when a government is reluctant to intervene and consequently resists media pressure to do so. Global television cannot force policymakers to do what they intend to do anyway. As Compaine (2002, p. 5) observed: “In many places, governments are even more likely to be driving media coverage rather than the other way around, although it may suit governments to appear as if they bowed to public opinion.” Another problematic assumption confuses “control” and “pressure.” There is a difference between “forcing” policymakers to adopt policy and “pressuring” them to do so. The “forcing” framework suggests that the media is taking over the policymaking process, while the “pressuring” framework considers the media one of several factors competing to influence decisions. Several studies pursued the “forcing” argument but they only presented evidence of “pressure” to support it.

Most studies of the CNN effect assume a particular model of policymaking. They link media influence on policy to the impact of coverage on public opinion and to subsequent public pressure on leaders to adopt the policy advocated by the media. The media cover a terrible event; the public sees the pictures, whether starvation in Africa or refugees from Kurdistan, and demands that something be done. Seib (2002) summarized well this triangular mechanism: “Televised images, especially heart-wrenching pictures of suffering civilians, will so stir public opinion that government officials will be forced to adjust policy to conform to that opinion” (p. 27). Graber (2002) described the same process in the following way: “Media coverage becomes the dog that wags the public policy tail” (p. 16). This implied democratic policymaking model ignores several factors, most importantly perhaps the tendency of Americans and Europeans to pay scant attention to foreign affairs news. It also applies a particular model of democratic responsiveness that may apply to liberal Western democracies, but is rather limited in any attempt at broader application. The linkages between media coverage, public opinion, and policy aren’t yet sufficiently clear (Seaver, 1998), and researchers who wish to validate the CNN effect and rely on the assumption that the triangular mechanism is valid may be moving in the wrong direction.

Livingston (1997, p. 291) observed a few years ago that numerous attempts to clarify the CNN effect have only achieved minimal success. This observation is still true today, and there is a clear need to adopt a new research agenda for studying the effects of global communications not only those of CNN, on various areas of communications and international relations, not only on defense and foreign affairs. A new research agenda should address the following eight topics and issues that include both effects of geopolitical and technological changes on global networks and effects of global news coverage on several dimensions of international relations and communications.

1. *Effects of geopolitical changes*. Most researchers agree that the CNN effect surfaced from a major geopolitical change in world politics: the end of the Cold War. In the absence of an arch enemy and a strategic challenge, the guideposts of U.S. foreign relations became uncertain and confused. The terrorist attacks

on New York and Washington in September 2001 forced the United States to formulate a strategic purpose and a plan to achieve it on a worldwide scale. Within this context, the United States has conducted wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and threatens to battle any regime that employs terrorism or assists terrorist organizations. The new strategic environment of the global war against terrorism may have serious implications for the CNN effect that should be explored and assessed. Will the new strategic plan effectively eliminate or reduce the CNN effect, or not?

2. *Effects of technological changes*. Many of the original CNN effect studies concluded that coverage of humanitarian crises in the 1990s followed policy and not the other way around, primarily because of the heavy costs involved in dispatching reporters and shipping equipment to far away places. Consequently, CNN and other networks waited for government cuing before devoting the resources and time to any particular crisis. Today, however, innovations in communication technologies, including videophones and other lightweight equipment, have substantially reduced the costs of broadcasting from remote areas (Higgins, 2000). Global networks can independently initiate and pursue coverage. Will this change increase the potential for the CNN effect, or not?
3. *Effects on all conflict phases, not only on violence*. The focus on CNN's coverage of humanitarian crises and interventions has created several research gaps because it allowed scholars to ignore the effects global television is having on three other important conflict phases: prevention, resolution, and transformation. Global television tends to ignore these phases because they are less dramatic than violence, but this omission may have significant consequences for attempts to prevent violence and for conflict resolution steps that are taken when violence ends (Jakobsen, 2000). What are these possible consequences?
4. *Direct effects on policymaking*. The effects of global television coverage on policymaking are far more complex than is usually meant by the CNN effect. Most studies of this effect are based on the assumed triangular relationship between media coverage, public opinion, and policymaking. Yet, as demonstrated by Gilboa (2002a, 2002c, 2003) and Miller (2002), it is possible and even necessary to examine effects of global communication on policymaking that are more direct in their application and independent of public opinion. Furthermore, only a series of careful investigations of actual decision making processes, including an assessment of all of the factors involved, may shed light on the relative influence of news coverage.
5. *Effects on areas other than defense and foreign affairs*. Studies of the CNN effect have focused on policymaking in defense and foreign affairs, but global television is affecting, perhaps in different ways, areas such as economics, trade, health, culture, and the environment on a worldwide scale. Documenting and analyzing effects on policymaking and international interactions in these areas require separate investigations.
6. *Effects of a Western bias*. Even though global television networks provide international coverage, that reporting is filtered through a Western bias, as is the response of the public and policymakers to the coverage. China gets a lot of attention from CNN when the political repression is in response to a pro-democracy movement but less attention when the issues are more "localized." Massacres in the Balkans got more attention than those in the Central Lakes Region of Africa. Serious global health problems such as AIDS, where tens of

millions of people have died, attracted much less attention than the more violent humanitarian crises of the 1990s. It seems that the global networks are interested primarily in places of political, military, and economic interest to the United States and Europe. It would be very useful to investigate whether global news coverage is limited and less relevant to most of the people in the world.

7. *Meaning of global reach*. Global television networks broadcast news to hundreds of millions of people around the world. Yet, we don't know enough about how different audiences living in different cultural, economic, and political environments interpret a message that is broadcast globally by the global networks. Furthermore, it is necessary to investigate the impact of new and highly competitive networks such as Al-Jazeera and Fox News on global news contents and reception in various parts of the world.
8. *Effects on the work of editors and journalists*. Global television networks have affected the work of editors and journalists, not only that of policymakers and diplomats (Rosenstiel, 1994; Walsh, 1996; Hachten, 1998; Gowing, 2000, pp. 219–223; Gilboa, 2002a, pp. 22–25). Global networks increasingly use overseas video from sources they know very little about; editors push reporters to broadcast pictures even if they don't have all the facts and may not be familiar with the context of events; and journalists confuse reporting and personal opinions by making instant judgments and openly supporting a side to a conflict. It is also important to investigate the effects of the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington and the subsequent U.S. global war against terrorism on the conduct of journalists and the global networks (Zelizer & Allan, 2002; Hachten & Scotton, 2002).

It is necessary to develop more sophisticated models and methodologies and apply existing promising ones to promote research on all of these and other significant issues. The grand paradigms of O'Neill, Ammon, and Edwards are not likely to be very useful. On the contrary, a narrower definition of the media's role and research that combines communication theories with theories of international relations may yield more convincing results. Livingston's framework of "intervention types and media considerations" is an excellent analytical tool to analyze the different effects global news coverage may have on military interventions. Applications of Robinson's media-policy model and Miller's "positioning" approach are also very useful. It might also be helpful to view global news networks as an actor in national and international politics (Bennett & Paletz, 1994; Entman, 2000; Graber, 2002, pp. 159–194; Paletz, 2002, pp. 338–362; Gilboa, 2000, 2002b, 2002c). The global news networks play multiple roles in policymaking, diplomacy, and international relations. A new research agenda and rigorous application of existing and new frameworks are likely to provide answers to unresolved fundamental questions about the real and actual roles and effects of global news networks.

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