



# Clarifying The CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention

## Citation

Livingston, Steven. "Clarifying The CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention." Shorenstein Center Research Paper Series 1997.R-18, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, June 1997.

## Permanent link

<https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37371065>

## Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, WARNING: No applicable access license found.

## Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.  
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

**CLARIFYING THE CNN EFFECT:  
An Examination of Media Effects  
According to Type of Military  
Intervention**

by

**Steven Livingston**

Research Paper R-18  
June 1997

The Joan Shorenstein Center  
**PRESS • POLITICS**



**•PUBLIC POLICY•**

Harvard University  
John F. Kennedy School of Government

**CLARIFYING THE CNN EFFECT:  
An Examination of Media Effects  
According to Type of Military  
Intervention**

**by**

**Steven Livingston**

**Research Paper R-18  
June 1997**

Copyright © 1997, President and Fellows of Harvard College  
All rights reserved

# CLARIFYING THE CNN EFFECT: AN EXAMINATION OF MEDIA EFFECTS ACCORDING TO TYPE OF MILITARY INTERVENTION

by Steven Livingston

## Introduction

In recent years, observers of international affairs have raised the concern that media have expanded their ability to affect the conduct of U.S. diplomacy and foreign policy. Dubbed the "CNN effect" (or "CNN curve" or "CNN factor"), the impact of these new global, real-time media is typically regarded as substantial, if not profound.

Two key factors have joined to bring this about. One is the end of the Cold War. With its passing the United States lacks an evident rationale in fashioning its foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> The other factor is technological. Advances in communication technology have created a capacity to broadcast live from anywhere on Earth. As a result, the vacuum left by the end of the Cold War has been filled by a foreign policy of media-specified crisis management.

While William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer's *World* may have created the climate for war with Spain in 1898, the extent, depth, and speed of the new global media have created a new species of effects. It is this global, real-time quality to contemporary media that separates the "CNN effect" from earlier media effects on foreign policy. Yet exactly what those effects are, when they are likely to be seen, and even whether they exist at all is the subject of intense debate.

Despite numerous symposia, books, articles, and research fellowships devoted to unraveling the CNN effect, success at clarifying it—this paper will argue—has been minimal. In part, this may be due to the imprecise use of the term "CNN effect." Writers too often and too easily slip back and forth between related but otherwise conceptually distinct understandings of the effect or effects in question. The first objective of this paper is to clarify exactly what is meant by the CNN effect. The second objective concerns

policy. Just as we must speak more precisely regarding the *type of effect* we might expect to find as a result of media coverage, so too must we speak more precisely about *foreign policy*. Rather than treat foreign policy as an undifferentiated monolith, we need to discriminate between different foreign policies, each with its own objectives, means, potential and actual costs (measured in dollars, lives, and political prestige) and sensitivities to media and public pressures. We must develop, in other words, a greater appreciation for the possibility that *different foreign policy objectives will present different types and levels of sensitivity to different types of media*. A typology of policy-media effects will be developed in the last half of this paper that demonstrates several different potential consequences for policy, some harmful, some salubrious, depending upon the nature of the policy objectives and media content. A matrix of media effects, policy types, and objectives is offered last.

## Differentiating Several CNN Effects

For many journalists, policy-makers, and scholars, there really is little doubt that media profoundly affect the foreign policy process. Former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, for example, has argued that in the post-Cold War era the United States has come to make foreign policy in response to "impulse and image." "In this age image means television, and policies seem increasingly subject, especially in democracies, to the images flickering across the television screen."<sup>2</sup> A commonly-cited example is the Clinton administration's response to the mortar attack on a Sarajevo market in February 1994 that killed sixty-eight people.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the frequency, volume, and intuitive appeal of this argument, a growing number of scholars and commentators have begun to question whether media actually do have the ability to affect the foreign policy process as presumed.<sup>4</sup> The key variable to media's effect on foreign policy is not the presence or absence of cameras, but rather the presence or absence of political leadership. James Hoge, Jr., editor of *Foreign Affairs*, for example, argues that while a CNN effect of some sort may have once existed immediately following the end of the Cold War, it no longer does, or at least not to the same extent.

---

*Steven Livingston* was a Fellow at the Shorenstein Center in the Spring of 1996. He is Associate Professor of Political Communication and International Affairs and can be reached at: The School of Media and Public Affairs, The George Washington University, 801 22nd Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20052. Telephone: (202)-994-5888. [sliv@gwis2.circ.gwu.edu](mailto:sliv@gwis2.circ.gwu.edu)

It seems to me that about two years ago we reached the high-water mark on standing in awe over the potential CNN effect on things. Since then, there have been a lot of conferences and things written that have essentially gotten us to where we are today, which is that television news has a tactical effect from time to time, but not a strategic one; that it operates more when humanitarian issues are at hand than when actual security issues are.<sup>5</sup>

Hoge's point is important. Whether his specific assertions are correct is less important than the approach he takes to the question. He is suggesting that effects on policy are conditional and specific to policy types and objectives.

A reading of the growing literature suggests at least three conceptually distinct and analytically useful understandings of media's effect on the foreign policy process.

We may speak of the CNN effect as 1) a *policy agenda-setting agent*, 2) an *impediment* to the achievement of desired policy goals, and 3) an *accelerant* to policy decisionmaking. Each roughly corresponds to various stages of the useful, though slightly contrived, notion of a linear policy process. The initial formulation of policy corresponds with concerns that media are policy agenda-setting agents. Secondly, policy implementation corresponds with concerns that media may serve as accelerants of the process or impediments to the achievement of policy objectives. (Figure One provides an outline of these effects.)

It is important to keep in mind that each of these possible effects may be evident over

time—sometimes a very short time—on a single policy issue. It is possible, for example, that media as “policy agenda-setters” may raise the prominence of an issue, placing it before higher-level policymakers. It may then shorten the time those policymakers have to deal with or resolve the issue (accelerant). Finally, it may then—with coverage of some traumatic event or disclosure of tactically important information, impede the development or implementation of policy meant to address the problem. U.S. policy in Somalia, in some measure, fits this mold. These are, nevertheless, analytically distinct effects, and as I will argue later, each is likely to be associated with different types of policy. Each will be taken up in turn.<sup>6</sup>

### *Media as Accelerant*

One of the potential effects of global, real-time media is the shortening of response time for decisionmaking. Decisions are made in haste, sometimes dangerously so. Policymakers “decry the absence of quiet time to deliberate choices, reach private agreements, and mold the public's understanding.”<sup>7</sup> “Instantaneous reporting of events,” remarks State Department Spokesperson Nicholas Burns, “often demands instant analysis by governments . . . In our day, as events unfold half a world away, it is not unusual for CNN State Department correspondent Steve Hurst to ask me for a reaction before we've had a chance to receive a more detailed report from our embassy and consider carefully our options.”<sup>8</sup>

Former Secretary of State James A. Baker, III highlights this understanding of the CNN effect.

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>Accelerant</b>            | Media shortens decision-making response time. Television diplomacy evident. During time of war, live, global television offer potential security-intelligence risks. But media may also be a force multiplier, method of sending signals. Evident in most foreign policy issues to receive media attention. |
| <b>Impediment</b>            | Two types: 1. Emotional, grisly coverage may undermine morale. Government attempts to sanitize war (emphasis on video game war), limit access to the battlefield.<br>2. Global, real-time media constitute a threat to operational security.  |
| <b>Agenda Setting Agency</b> | Emotional, compelling coverage of atrocities or humanitarian crises reorder foreign policy priorities. Somalia, Bosnia and Haiti said to be examples.   |

**Figure 1. Conceptual Variations of CNN Effect**

"The one thing it does," he says, "is to drive policymakers to have a policy position. I would have to articulate it very quickly. You are in a real-time mode. You don't have time to reflect."<sup>9</sup> His adviser and former press secretary, Margaret Tutwiler, echoes his assessment: "Time for reaction is compressed. Analysis and intelligence-gathering is out" in the new world of global media.<sup>10</sup>

Richard Haass, former member of the National Security Council and one of President Bush's closest advisers during the Persian Gulf conflict, also notes this effect, saying that CNN has changed the concept of a daily news cycle. "We no longer have the old rhythms, everything is telescoped. So, if he (Saddam Hussein) was going to get out there at 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon, we had to get out by 4:30 or 5:00 in order to make sure that the evening news was not a disaster or that people in the Middle East some seven or eight hours ahead didn't go to sleep thinking that somehow Saddam had made some great new offer, when in fact he really hadn't."<sup>11</sup>

Understood as an accelerant to the policy process, global, real-time media have also had an effect on the operation of the foreign policy bureaucracy, particularly intelligence agencies and desk officers in the State Department. Former presidential press secretary Marlin Fitzwater remarked, "In most of these kinds of international crises now, we virtually cut out the State Department and the desk officers . . . Their reports are still important, but they don't get here in time for the basic decisions to be made."<sup>12</sup> Intelligence agencies now must compete with news organizations, thus speeding up their assessments, and be prepared to defend their assessments against the evidence presented on television or other real-time media, such as the Internet and telephone.

While often treated as a detriment to good policy, Haass has argued that the availability of global, real-time television can just as well be considered an asset.

People are looking at the media's impact as a downer, . . . a problem for policymakers to cope with. That is true. But it was also an opportunity. One of the things about the "CNN effect" for people like me at the time (of the Persian Gulf war) was it gave you some real opportunities. One was penetration. CNN gave you tremendous access to markets that normally you couldn't get to.<sup>13</sup>

Besides the Middle East, it was useful, said Haass, in "sending signals into Europe. And it gave us a real capacity to reach people at home. The media which brought information in instantaneously also gave us the chance to respond and to get our message out instantaneously." This had consequences, in Haass's view, but not of the sort supposed by those lamenting the CNN effect. "We felt we could manage public opinion in this country and that we could manage the alliance, or the coalition dimensions of the war, as well as get to the Iraqi people and the Arab world. Much of the time, global, real-time media offered opportunities for a policymaker, rather than only presenting problems."<sup>14</sup> This more inclusive understanding of the CNN effect was evident even at the dawn of the global reach of media over thirty years ago.

During the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the Kennedy administration had several days during which the public knew nothing of the threat looming over the horizon. According to historian Michael Beschloss, Kennedy's successors might well look back longingly at the episode, for "Kennedy had the luxury of operating in what they would probably consider to be the halcyon age before modern television news coverage."<sup>15</sup> Kennedy used the first six days of the crisis to convene his advisers and rationally consider the options "in quiet, without public hysteria."<sup>16</sup>

What is often overlooked, however, is the constructive role played by the "real-time, global media," such as they were in 1962, in ending the crisis. At the time, government-to-government communication between Moscow and Washington was so primitive, according to Beschloss, it took six to eight hours to send and translate messages. In an attempt to overcome this barrier, and to side-step the KGB and Soviet military, Khrushchev began sending messages to the Americans via Radio Moscow, which he knew was constantly monitored by the United States. Robert McNamara recalled that on Sunday, October 28, the day the crisis was finally defused,

He (Khrushchev) instructed that the public radio transmitter in Moscow be held open for his message. And his message was sent over that so that it would avoid the long interval of coding and decoding . . . It was to eliminate that time gap of six or eight hours that Khrushchev insisted that the final message be transmitted immediately, because he feared that we were engaged at that moment in time in initiating military action.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, CBS News Moscow correspondent Marvin Kalb, having anticipated Khrushchev's announcement, secured a line to New York to coincide with the key Radio Moscow broadcast that morning. As Kalb simultaneously translated Radio Moscow's announcement, President Kennedy and his advisers listened in the White House.<sup>18</sup>

Ironically, it seems, the pre-global television "halcyon age" included a scramble to find a means to achieve what is today one of the chief characteristics of the CNN effect: accelerated, real-time diplomacy.

Today, the instantaneous transmission of diplomatic signals via global media is routine. Tutwiler points out that other governments watched her briefings with great care, looking for nuanced policy shifts. Consequently, the State Department would use this to their advantage to inform their counterparts overseas of U.S. reactions or intentions.<sup>19</sup> State Department spokesperson Nicholas Burns does the same thing.

I sometimes read carefully calibrated statements to communicate with those governments with which we have no diplomatic relations—Iraq, Iran, Libya and North Korea . . . . Given the concentration of journalists in Washington and our position in the world, the U.S. is uniquely situated to use television to our best advantage, with our friends as well as our adversaries.<sup>20</sup>

While the new environment constitutes a significant change to the slower, more deliberate processes of yesteryear, it is less clear whether this is necessarily injurious to sound policymaking. Rather than a liability, a resourceful diplomat may just as well find global, real-time media an asset.

### *Media as Impediment*

There are at least two types of media-related policy impediments. One is rooted in the inhibiting effects of emotional coverage and operates through the agency of public opinion, both actual and latent. The other is rooted in the potential for global, real-time media to compromise operational security, the veil of secrecy especially needed with some types of military operations. We will take up each of these types in order.

#### **a) As an Emotional Inhibitor**

Following the decisive American military victory in the Persian Gulf, President Bush enthusiastically remarked, "By God, we've

kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all."<sup>21</sup> At the heart of the Vietnam syndrome was the concern that media coverage had the potential to undermine public support for an operation and erode troop morale on the ground. As such, perceived American credibility and resolve in the world was undermined.

Yet two years later, in October 1993, pictures of a dead American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu revived some of the same fears and concerns evoked by Vietnam. The Clinton administration's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Somalia as soon as possible was the more immediate result.<sup>22</sup> As *The New York Times* put it, the recent fighting "crystallized American public opinion on an issue that previously was not particularly pressing to the average citizen. And the pictures of a dead American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu seem to have made it all but impossible for Mr. Clinton to change many minds." Indeed, public opinion polls found that more than half the respondents did not approve of President Clinton's handling of the situation in Somalia.<sup>23</sup>

During the Gulf war, fear of an unsanitized presentation of the carnage of battle was perhaps central to the military's efforts to control the media through the use of press pools and military escorts. John J. Fialka, a *Wall Street Journal* correspondent, remarked, "We were escorted away from most of the violence because the bodies of the dead chopped up by artillery, pulverized by B-52 raids, or lacerated by friendly fire don't play well, politically."<sup>24</sup> Military planners insisted, on the other hand, that they were motivated by a legitimate concern for operational security, as well as a concern for the well-being of the journalists. They further pointed to the logistical difficulties encountered in accommodating the large number of journalists who wanted to cover the war.

But for many the impression remained that at the heart of the military's concern was the capacity of media to undermine public and political support for an operation involving casualties. Ted Koppel, speaking of the Persian Gulf war, remarked, "I'm not sure the public's interest is served by seeing what seems to have been such a painless war, when 50,000 to 100,000 people may have died on the other side. Obviously this was done so they could maintain the closest possible control over public opinion, to increase support for the war."<sup>25</sup>

Control of the reporter was a central component of the military's effort to limit the potential

for public relations damage. Just before the ground war there were 25 to 30 pool reporters to cover six Army and two Marine divisions near the Kuwaiti border. No reporter from *The New York Times* bureau in Saudi Arabia was given official access to a pool slot before February 10.<sup>26</sup>

Use of officially sanctioned pools had a particularly pronounced effect on the availability of pictures during combat. One editor at the time was quoted as remarking, "The pictures coming out of pool arrangements are quite ordinary. There are no negative aspects to the war."<sup>27</sup>

Tomorrow's wars will most likely look more like the conflicts in Somalia, Bosnia, and Haiti, and less like the Gulf war. In such circumstances, journalists will already be in the zone of conflict, making their control far more difficult for military planners. Yet, in the long-run, pictures may not matter as much as context and leadership. The key variable may be the presence of a clearly articulated policy and a public sense that the policy is "worth it." Colin Powell expressed this point:

They're (the American people) prepared to take casualties. And even if they see them on live television it will make them madder. Even if they see them on live television, as long as they believe it's for a solid purpose and for a cause that is understandable and for a cause that has something to do with an interest of ours. They will not understand it, if it can't be explained, which is the point I have made consistently over the years. If you can't explain it to the parents who are sending their kids, you'd better think twice about it.<sup>28</sup>

Media scholars suggest that government officials and agencies are becoming more sophisticated in their effort at offering the sort of credible "explanations" referred to by Powell and that in most circumstances they are assisted in their efforts by the American media.<sup>29</sup> For example, political scientist W. Lance Bennett has found that the media closely "index" their coverage to the contours of official debate and controversy.<sup>30</sup> That is, the levels of criticism directed at government policy rises and falls in accordance with the intensity of criticisms emanating out of other institutionally-based official sources. As Bennett and political scientist Jarol Manheim put it, "As a practical matter, news organizations routinely leave policy framing and issue emphasis to political elites (generally, government officials)."<sup>31</sup>

## b) As a Threat to Operational Security

While it may still be an open question whether media content, live or otherwise, has the ability to hinder the pursuit of desired policy goals because of their emotional freight, the fact remains that some operations are extremely sensitive to media exposure. Maintaining operational security during conventional war and tactical operations, such as anti-terrorism operations, is essential. In these circumstances, media have the technological capacity to hinder some types of operations simply by exposing them.

This is true, for example, in conventional warfare. As communication equipment becomes more mobile and global in its reach, and real-time reporting of all types becomes more pervasive, the danger to operational security will become more pronounced. "It isn't like World War II, when George Patton would sit around in his tent with six or seven reporters and muse," with the results "transcribed and reviewed" before being released, remarks Powell. If a commander "in Desert Shield sat around in his tent and mused with a few CNN guys and pool guys and other guys, it's in 105 capitals a minute later."<sup>32</sup> In the process of covering an operation, news organizations may reveal information that leads to unnecessary casualties and even the possible failure of a mission.

This is not to say that journalists will seek (or have sought) to deliberately expose operations. The disclosures are inadvertent. Retired general Norman Schwarzkopf has told of such a case.

It was reported (by an American television network) that at this time, right now, we are witnessing an artillery duel between the 82nd Airborne Division and the Iraqis. If they (the Iraqis) had any kind of halfway decent intelligence, they would have made note of the time . . . and through their intelligence network they would have pinpointed the location of the 82nd Airborne. Until that time everything they ever saw of the 82nd was on the east coast. All of a sudden they would have found the 82nd way to the west and it would certainly have telegraphed something to them.<sup>33</sup>

Shortcomings in Iraqi military intelligence meant they were not able to take advantage of a key piece of information that would have informed them the American military was massing 200 miles west of Kuwait City.

In summary, there are two understandings of media effect-as-policy-impediment. One is psychological and concerns the corrosive effect



some types of media content may have on public opinion, particularly public support for war. The seriousness of this potential effect is open to question. As Colin Powell remarked, pictures of dead American soldiers, as one example, may just make the American public “madder.” The other, and potentially far more profound effect involves violations of operational security, as we have just reviewed.

## Media as Agenda Setting Agents

Of the presumed media effects on foreign policy, perhaps the most disturbing is the suggestion that the U.S. foreign policy agenda itself is at times merely a reflection of news content. This is not to say that issues are necessarily created *ex nihilo* by media content, but rather that priorities are reordered by coverage.<sup>34</sup> What would have been handled by mid-level officials in a routine fashion instead become the focus of high-level decisionmaking. Former Secretary of State James Baker makes the point this way,

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. And so, you have to ask yourself, does that mean you should do foreign policy by television? Are we going to define crises according to what is covered, by what the editors decide to cover? I don't think we should do that.<sup>35</sup>

This has been a constant theme of criticism since the end of the Cold War. James Schlesinger argues this when he remarks, “National policy is determined by the plight of the Kurds or starvation in Somalia, as it appears on the screen.” Jessica Mathews makes the same point this way, “The process by which a particular human tragedy becomes a crisis demanding a response is less the result of a rational weighing of need or of what is remediable than it is of what gets on nightly news shows.”<sup>36</sup>

Most of the post-Cold War interventions—Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia—have been done in the name of humanitarianism, what Michael Mandelbaum has referred to as “the foreign policy of Mother Teresa,” or foreign policy as “a branch of social work.”<sup>37</sup> In his view, foreign policy as social work, particularly during the

Clinton administration, has tended to be about peripheral issues. It intends

to relieve the suffering caused by ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, starvation in Somalia, and oppression in Haiti. Historically the foreign policy of the United States has centered on American interests, defined as developments that could affect the lives of American citizens. Nothing that occurred in these three countries fit that criterion.<sup>38</sup>

It is debatable whether this is a fair criticism of the Clinton administration's foreign policy. In particular, Mandelbaum's reliance on a traditional values/national interests dichotomy is problematic, as Stanley Hoffmann pointed out in his response to the argument.<sup>39</sup> National interests are not self-evident, but are instead constructs—the choices and preferences made by national leaders. Because the selections are often controversial, “those who support them cover them with the mantle of the national interest, and those who do not back them argue, like Mandelbaum, that they deal with developments that “could (not) affect the lives of . . . citizens” and thus are not in the national interest.”<sup>40</sup>

Whatever its shortcomings, Mandelbaum's argument does point us to the fact that of all the humanitarian crises found at any given point in time, the inclination will be to address those which happen to be featured on television, rather than those which are the more severe, or those with the greatest likelihood of successful redress by outside intervention. To put it another way, media-as-agenda-setting-agent argues that the choices and selections of national interests are too heavily weighted in favor of what happens to get covered by CNN or other media.

These are important considerations, for clearly the conditions that have given rise to humanitarian interventions by the United States in the past are only likely to grow more severe in the future. According to a 1996 study by the United States Mission to the United Nations, regional conflicts in the mid-1990s have put 42 million people around the world at risk of disease and starvation.<sup>41</sup> If media coverage of crises has had an effect on U.S. foreign policy in the past, as some argue, then the potential for similar effects in the future are great.

Television, for a variety of commercial and professional reasons, is drawn to the dramatic visuals found in most—but *not all*—humanitarian emergencies. The pitched battles between gun-totting teenagers in the streets of some hitherto unheard of place, massive flows of

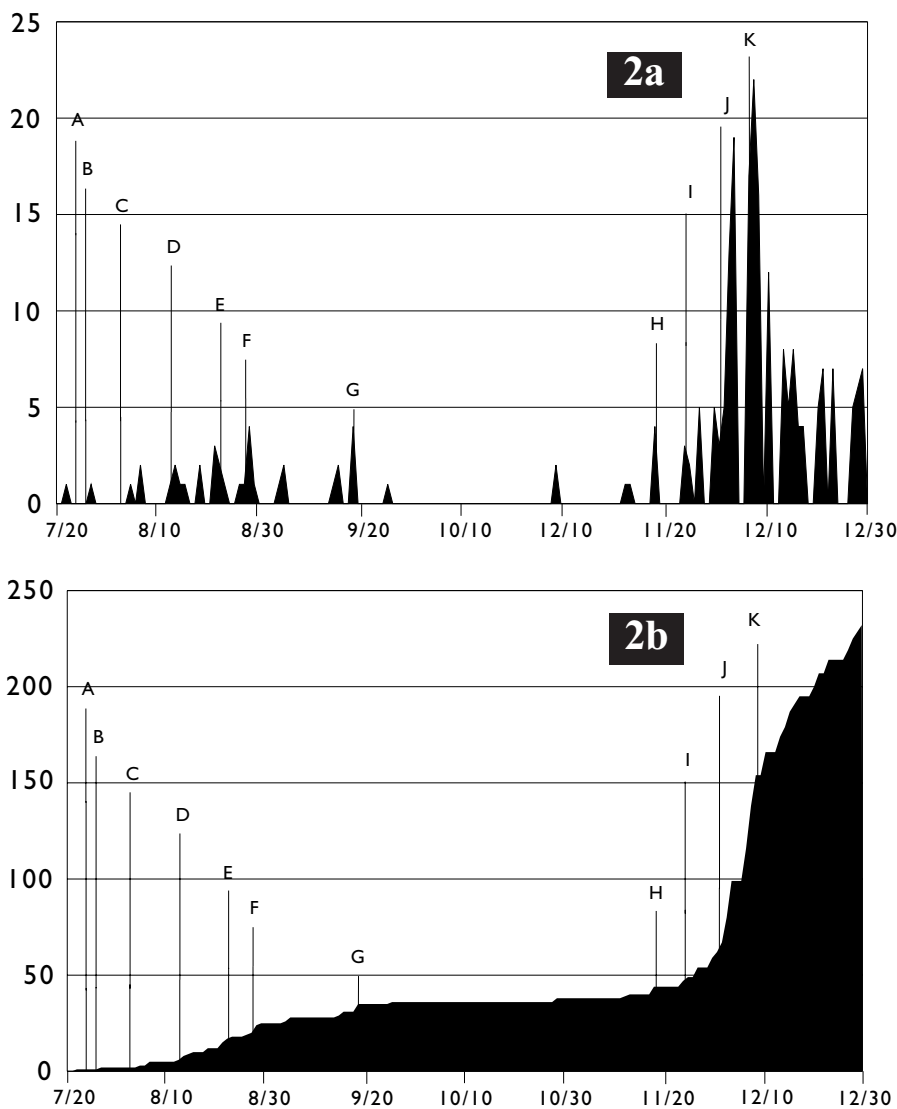
refugees, the pathos of a starving child, all make for compelling television. Once engaged, once the U.S. foreign policy priorities align themselves with media coverage, the other two manifestations of the CNN effect may come into play. Decisionmaking may be accelerated and rash. Events may cascade out of control, leading to confrontations for which the public and policymakers themselves are psychologically unprepared. "Vivid imagery," in such a scenario, drives both ends of policy, to reiterate an earlier quote. First there is the politics of "humanitarian intervention and then of disillusioned withdrawal."<sup>42</sup>

While this version of the CNN effect has the most profound potential consequences, it is also the most problematic for several reasons.

First, what few empirical investigations exist have not borne out the contention. Andrew Natsios, the Bush administration official who headed-up the relief effort in Somalia, has argued that if one examines the record of American policy involvement in overseas

humanitarian crises, one comes away with the conclusion that "the so-called CNN effect has taken on more importance than it deserves as an explanation for responses emanating from the policymaking process in Washington."<sup>43</sup>

The majority of humanitarian operations are conducted without media attention. In 1991, for example, the United States Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and Food for Peace Program had shipped some 12,000 tons of food to Somalia. This was well before the news media discovered the crisis there in August of the following year.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the eventual media coverage itself was the *consequence* of official actions. Specifically, it resulted from the efforts of one part of the foreign policy community (Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, and its allies in Congress and portions of the State Department) to persuade other elements of the foreign policy community (primarily senior decision makers in the White House) to sign on to



**Figure 2.**  
**Aggregated Broadcast**  
**Network News Coverage**  
**of Somalia:**  
**July-December 1992**

(a) Daily story count; (b) cumulative story count. A, U.N. secretary general's report to Security Council; B, U.N. Security Council's report on Somalia; C, OFDA press conference: Washington, DC; D, White House announces relief effort; E, U.S. airlift commences; F, first flights into Somalia; G, President Bush advocates use of security forces; H, Bush approves 28,000 U.S. troops; I, secretary of state tells U.N. that United States will send troops; J, U.N. Security Council authorizes troops; K, first U.S. troops go ashore in Somalia.

desired policy goals. The media were used by some officials to get the attention of other officials, a tried and true practice of bureaucratic politics that predates CNN by many years.<sup>45</sup> The great majority of Somalia coverage *followed* rather than preceded official action.

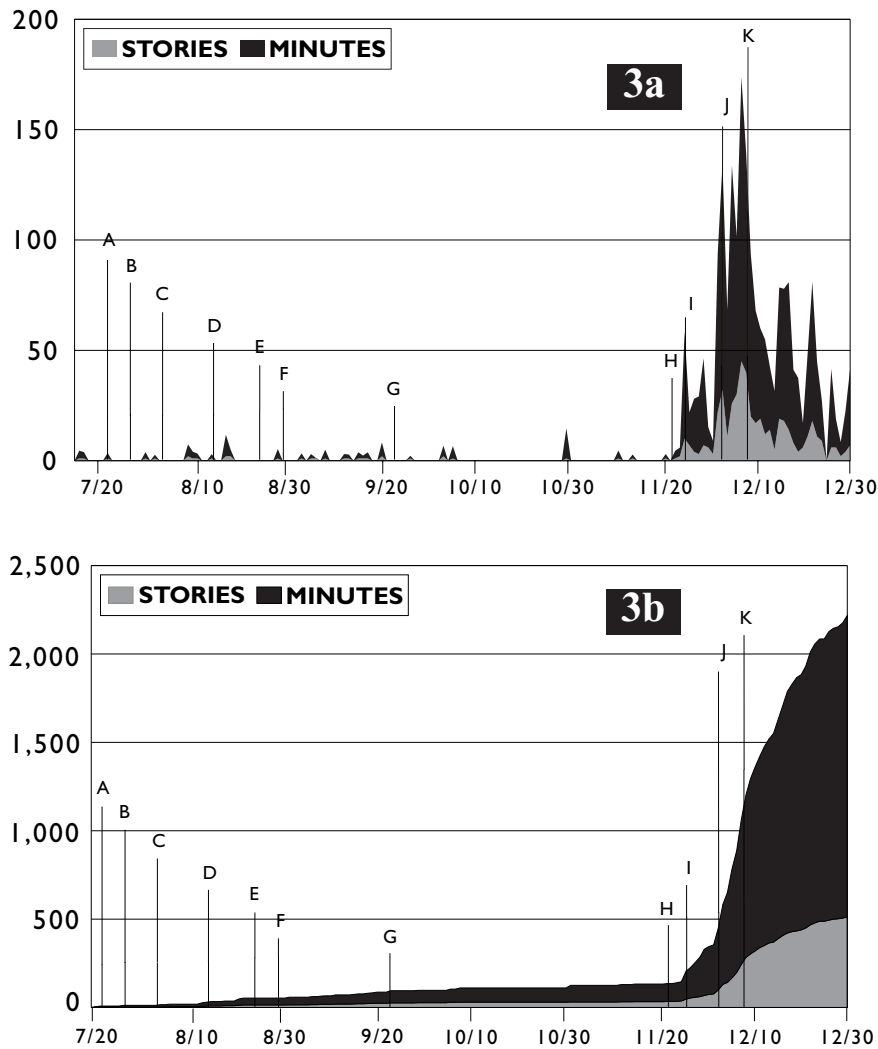
Of the events noted on the timeline presented in Figures two (a) and two (b), the White House's August 14 announcement (point designation "D") that it would use U.S. aircraft to send relief supplies precipitated the first wave of American news media attention to Somalia, which jumped fivefold almost overnight. As an executive at NBC said at the time, "With the international relief effort growing, the Somalia situation is likely to be examined more often by the network news shows in the coming weeks. We're going to cover it more."<sup>46</sup> The announcement of the planned deployment of troops two

months later (point designation "H") caused a second expansion of coverage. In both instances, media attention *followed* official actions.

This trend was even more pronounced with CNN coverage, evident in Figures three (a) and three (b).

CNN coverage of Somalia prior to the announcement of the airlift of emergency food and medicine in August (notation E) was sporadic to non-existent. By logical necessity, it is difficult to conceive how media could have been the cause of policy developments in Somalia in 1992.<sup>47</sup> Media were doing as they have for generations: they followed the troops.

While disease and starvation are commonly seen by American journalists in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world,<sup>48</sup> they are not common news stories. In fact, it may be that journalists tend to dismiss humanitarian crises



**Figure 3.**  
**CNN Daily Coverage**  
**of Somalia:**  
**July-December 1992**

(a) Daily count by minutes and story; (b) cumulative count by minutes and story. A, U.N. secretary general's report to Security Council; B, U.N. Security Council's report on Somalia; C, OFDA press conference: Washington, DC; D, White House announces relief effort; E, U.S. airlift commences; F, first flights into Somalia; G, President Bush advocates use of security forces; H, Bush approves 28,000 U.S. troops; I, secretary of state tells U.N. that United States will send troops; J, U.N. Security Council authorizes troops; K, first U.S. troops go ashore in Somalia.

Figures 2a, 2b, 3a and 3b from Steven Livingston and Todd Eachus, 'Humanitarian Crises and U.S. Foreign Policy: Somalia and the CNN Effect Reconsidered,' *Political Communication*, Volume 12, pp. 413-429.

because they are so much a part of the landscape in some regions of the world. In 1993, when approximately 50,000 people were killed in political fighting between Hutus and Tutsis in Burundi, American broadcast television networks ignored the story. When regional leaders met in Dar es Salam in April 1994 in an attempt to reach a regional peace accord, only CNN mentioned the meeting. Yet a more sophisticated analysis of events in Rwanda that same month required understanding that fear of successful peace talks encouraged Hutu extremists in Rwanda to launch their campaign of carnage against Tutsis and Hutu moderates who favored accommodation.<sup>49</sup>

Overall, the *lack* of media coverage of humanitarian emergencies is most striking.<sup>50</sup> Figure four presents the percentage of mentions of all 13 of the most severe humanitarian emergencies combined and total individual mentions in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, ABC News programming, CNN news programming, and NPR's "All Things Considered" and "Morning Edition" from January 1995 to mid-May 1996.

This figure, of course, does not capture changes in news coverage over time, as Figures Two and Three did regarding Somalia, but it does clearly indicate the tendency of the American news media to give uneven attention to humanitarian crises. This is seen in the cases of Liberia and Sierra Leone. Next to Tajikistan, they each

received the least attention by the news organizations represented here.<sup>51</sup> Afghanistan and the Sudan have more people at risk than Bosnia, but together they received only 12 percent of the total media coverage devoted to Bosnia alone. Tajikistan, with one million people at risk, has a little over one percent of the media coverage devoted to Bosnia alone. Put another way, of all news stories between January 1995 and May 1996 concerning the thirteen worst humanitarian crises in the world—affecting nearly 30 million people, nearly half were devoted to the plight of the 3.7 million people of Bosnia.<sup>52</sup> This is not to dismiss their condition, but only to make the point that media coverage of humanitarian crises is not uniform, and, more importantly is typically triggered by official actions and associated with the presence of U.S. troops.

The second reason the CNN effect may have "taken on more importance than it deserves," to use Natsiosis's characterization, is that if one looks more closely at some of the more prominent post-Cold War U.S. "humanitarian" interventions, one is likely to find equally compelling geostrategic reasons for the intervention. This was certainly true of the response to the Kurdish refugee crises along the Iraqi border with Turkey following the Persian Gulf war in the spring of 1991.

President Bush's National Security Adviser, Brent Scowcroft emphatically makes this point:

| Figure Four<br>Percentage and Frequency of Total at Risk Per Country<br>&<br>Percentage and Frequency of Total Coverage by News Organization<br>of Each Listed Country |                            |                              |                             |                            |                            |                            |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Country  | Percent at Risk (millions) | Percent of Mentions in Times | Percent of Mentions in Post | Percent of Mentions by ABC | Percent of Mentions by CNN | Percent of Mentions By NPR |
| Afghanistan  | 14 (4)                     | 4.7 (274)                    | 4.8 (225)                   | 1.5 (19)                   | 1.2 (57)                   | 2.9 (57)                   |
| Sudan  | 14 (4)                     | 3.3 (190)                    | 3.5 (166)                   | 0.6 (8)                    | 1.1 (54)                   | 1.5 (31)                   |
| Bosnia   | 13 (3.7)                   | 45.8<br>(2,633)              | 43.7<br>(2,046)             | 66 (833)                   | 66.7<br>(3,062)            | 61.3<br>(1,204)            |
| Ethiopia   | 11 (3 - 4)                 | 0.2 (15)                     | 0.2 (10)                    | 0 (0)                      | 0 (3)                      | 0.3 (6)                    |
| Angola   | 9 (2.5)                    | 2.0 (120)                    | 3.0 (144)                   | 0.7 (9)                    | 0.4 (22)                   | 1.7 (34)                   |
| Rwanda   | 9 (2.5)                    | 6.9 (401)                    | 5.9 (277)                   | 3.9 (49)                   | 9.8 (150)                  | 6.0 (118)                  |
| Sierra Leone   | 6 (1.8)                    | 1.0 (63)                     | 1.6 (78)                    | 0.3 (4)                    | 0.5 (26)                   | 1.0 (20)                   |
| Liberia  | 5 (1.5)                    | 2.8 (164)                    | 3.2 (150)                   | 2.5 (32)                   | 1.0 (49)                   | 2.3 (46)                   |
| Iraq   | 5 (1.3 - <4)               | 14.6 (839)                   | 14.5 (679)                  | 11.9 (150)                 | 11.7 (540)                 | 10.2 (201)                 |
| Haiti  | 3 (0.9 - 1.3)              | 11.3 (654)                   | 11.1 (522)                  | 7.0 (89)                   | 6.8 (316)                  | 6.7 (132)                  |
| Eritrea  | 4 (1)                      | 0.4 (28)                     | 0.4 (21)                    | 0 (0)                      | 0 (3)                      | 0.2 (4)                    |
| Somalia  | 14 (4)                     | 5.4 (312)                    | 6.6 (309)                   | 5.5 (69)                   | 6.4 (294)                  | 5.1 (102)                  |
| Tajikistan   | 5 (1)                      | 0.7 (45)                     | 1.1 (52)                    | 0 (0)                      | .2 (13)                    | 0.4 (9)                    |
| Totals   | 100<br>(28.2)**            | 99.1<br>(5,738)              | 99.6<br>(4,679)             | 99.9<br>(1,262)            | 99.2<br>(4,589)            | 99.6<br>(1,964)            |

**Figure 4.**  
Percentage and Frequency of  
Total at Risk Per Country  
&  
Percentage and Frequency of  
Total Coverage by News  
Organization of Each Listed  
Country

\* Due to rounding, percentages do not necessarily add to 100% for any column.

\*\* Calculated with low end figures where a range has been given in the total estimated at risk.

Populations at risk data were provided by the United States Mission to the United Nations, "Global Humanitarian Emergencies, 1996." Media Coverage data were obtained by author using Nexis-Lexis.

"We were actually quite cynical about media's impact. Media are too fickle (to have an impact)." Media attention to any given crisis could therefore be ridden-out by policy makers. Geopolitical factors, in Scowcroft's view, were more important concerning the implementation of Operation Provide Comfort. "Without Turkey factored in, with just television pictures, I don't know what our response would have been. We were very sensitive to Turkey's anxiety about allowing the Kurds to stay. That was fundamentally what motivated us."<sup>53</sup> Turkey, a staunch American ally and a member of NATO, has been in a long and bloody guerrilla war with elements of its own Kurdish population in eastern Turkey. The idea that thousands of Kurdish refugees from Iraq might become permanently located in or near the border was anathema to the Turkish government.

James Baker made the same point, "Once they (the Iraqi Kurdish refugees) all went into Turkey, it was important to get them back to Iraq."<sup>54</sup> When Saddam Hussein's surviving forces ruthlessly crushed first the Shiite rebellion in the south and then the Kurdish rebellion in the north in March 1991, the policy of the United States was to let the rebellions fail, despite the gruesome pictures coming out of northern Iraq at the time. When asked if it was accurate to suggest that U.S. policy at the time was to not get involved, regardless of what the pictures showed," Baker responded, "That's right. I think that is an accurate description. It would have been a mistake to be involved."<sup>55</sup> For geopolitical reasons, the United States allowed the rebellions to fail and implemented a policy designed to resettle the Kurdish refugees back in their towns and villages in northern Iraq. This was not done because of pictures. It was done because Turkey, a staunch ally during the Persian Gulf war and NATO partner, needed it done for its stability and for the stability of the entire region.

The third reason the CNN effect as agenda setter may be overstated is the formal policy requirements put into place following events in Somalia in 1993. Under the provisions of Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD 25), issued in May 1994, approval of the use of U.S. forces for humanitarian relief missions became more difficult. Before forces may be used, a series of strict conditions must be met, including: a clear statement of American interests at stake in the operation, the approval of Congress, the availability of funding for the operation, a fixed date of withdrawal of U.S. forces, and an

agreed upon command and control structure.<sup>56</sup>

The first application of PDD 25 was in Rwanda. The U.S. Representative to the UN, Madeleine Albright, insisted it would have been "folly" for a UN force to venture into the "maelstrom" of killing.<sup>57</sup> Despite the biblical proportions of the bloodshed, the United States did not intervene until later, when Hutu refugees in camps in Zaire—some of whom were the perpetrators of the massacre in the first place—began dying from the effects of dehydration, malnutrition, and disease. But "feeding and watering," as it is sometimes called in the Pentagon, and what we will call a "consensual humanitarian operation" below, is a considerably different policy objective than shooting and pacifying, as would have been necessary to stop the bloodshed and possibly avoid the exodus of refugees. It would have involved far higher risks and potential costs, measured on several scales.

There are at least three understandings of the CNN effect: media as an accelerant to the process, as an inhibitor, and as an agenda setter. The next step is to clarify further the relationship between these various possible effects and different policy types.

## Types of Intervention

Eight types of military interventions and their possible relation with one or another of the media effects outlined above will be reviewed next. The objective simply is to illustrate the thesis, not to offer a comprehensive review of potential media effects on all policy types. It is intended to stimulate thought anchored in a more refined understanding of media and policy interaction. The policy types reviewed are conventional warfare, special operations and low-intensity conflict (SOLIC), strategic deterrence, tactical deterrence, peace-making, peacekeeping, imposed humanitarian operations, and consensual humanitarian operations.<sup>58</sup>

As one moves from top to bottom of Figure Four, one sees reduced potential costs resulting from failure, measured in money and lives, and—less precisely—in political prestige, international standing, and confidence felt by alliance partners. Beginning with peace making, as one moves toward the bottom of the figure, one finds policies designed to respond to crises stemming from war or other human-created conditions. Failed states or civil wars such as in Somalia, the Sudan, and Zaire offer examples.

| <b>Figure 5.<br/>Intervention Types and Accompanying Media Considerations</b> |   |  |  |  |   |
|---|---|--|--|--|---|
|   | Policy Goals & Objectives   | Likely Media Interest  | Government Policy  | Likely Media Effects   | Public Opinion  |
| <b>Use of Force</b>   |   |  |  |  |   |
| <b>Conventional Warfare</b>   | Destruction of enemy and his war-fighting capability.   | Extremely high.  | High degree of attempted media control. "Indexed" news                               | Accelerant, impediment (both types).   | High public interest and attentiveness to it                                |
| <b>Strategic Deterrence</b>   | Maintain status quo. Ex.: Cold war. Korean Peninsula.   | Moderate to high interest. Routinized coverage.  | Routine news interaction. White House, DoD, State briefings, etc.                    | During stability, little effect. Accelerate during periods of instability.   | Scrutiny only by attentive public. Expansion of base during instability.    |
| <b>Tactical Deterrence</b>  | Meet challenge to status quo. Example: Desert Shield. PRC-Taiwan, March 1996.                     | Moderate to high interest but episodic.  | Controlled but cooperative. Force multiplier.  | All three effects, but not necessarily injurious.  | Attentive public scrutiny. Latent public opinion a concern to policy makers |
| <b>SOLIC</b>  | Counterterrorism, hostage rescue, specialized operations.   | High interest, particularly hostage situations, some terrorism.                                    | Secrecy. Barring of all access.  | Impediment (Operational security risk).  | Little to no public awareness in most cases.                                |
| <b>Peace Making</b>   | Third party imposition of political solution by force of arms. Example: Late Somalia, Yugoslavia. | High interest at initial stages of operation. Variation afterward dependent on level of stability. | Volatile conditions. Danger in reporting. Access with risk. Impediment (both types). | Attentive public scrutiny. Latent public opinion a concern to policy makers  |   |
| <b>Peace Keeping</b>  | Bolster an accepted political solution by presence of third party.                                | Moderate interest unless accord is destabilized.   | Generally unrestricted access to theater of operation.                               | Impediment (emotional impediment most likely).   | Attentive public scrutiny. Latent public opinion a concern to policy makers |
| <b>Imposed Humanitarian Operations</b>  | Forceful, apolitical aid policy   | Low /moderate interest unless violence ensues.   | Volatile conditions. Reporting risky.  | Impediment (emotional impediment most likely). Attentive public scrutiny. Latent public opinion a concern to policy makers |   |
| <b>Consensual Humanitarian Operations</b>                                     | Agreed humanitarian assistance.   | Initial operation met by moderate to low interest.   | Unrestricted, even encouraged media coverage.  | Media effect unlikely.   | Attentive public scrutiny.  |
| <b>Operations Other Than War</b>  |   |  |  |  |   |

### 1) *Conventional Warfare*

The stakes are highest in conventional warfare, which also generates the greatest media and public interest. Reprising the difficulties found between the military and the media in wartime is not necessary here.<sup>59</sup> Experience in recent wars indicates that when and where possible, the military will attempt to control the movements of journalists and the content of their reports, behavior rooted in the two concerns outlined above: fear that the "wrong" pictures will undermine public or congressional support for the effort and, second, that journalists will inadvertently disclose tactical or strategic information to the enemy.

Pool systems, prior clearance of dispatches, and other forms of censorship will continue to be a part of military planning for conventional

warfare. At the same time, high public interest and the journalist's ambition and sense of independent professionalism will lead to efforts to avoid and undermine the military's attempts to control them. The media will be assisted in these efforts by the greater mobility provided to them by smaller, light-weight equipment capable of point-to-point transmissions from anywhere to anywhere on Earth.

In conventional warfare, media are most likely to serve as accelerants and impediments in the policy process. It is highly unlikely that media content alone might in some fashion lead the United States into a conventional war. The degree to which media serve as accelerants to decisionmaking in war, and the degree to which this is necessarily injurious cannot be answered in the abstract. The answer depends on the cir-

cumstances and the resourcefulness of the policymakers. The same is true of the possibility that pictures may undermine public support for the war. As Colin Powell remarked, pictures may just as well make people "madder."

The media effect of greatest concern to the military in conventional warfare is their ability to provide adversaries sensitive information. In an era of highly mobile, decentralized, global, real-time media, the risks to operational security are considerable.

## 2) *Strategic Deterrence*

Deterrence may be defined as "the persuasion of one's opponent that the costs and/or risks of a given course of action he might take outweigh its benefits."<sup>60</sup> Persuasion, of course, involves communication. The idea is to communicate a willingness to use force with the hope that, ironically, it will negate the necessity to do so. The movement of force and a projected willingness to use it is an important component of deterrence. It can take the form of a long-term deployment, such as was the case in Western Europe during the Cold War, the continued positioning of forces on the Korean Peninsula, the more recent stationing of U.S. troops in Macedonia, and the stationing of mostly Air Force units in southern Turkey. The objective is to maintain the status quo.<sup>61</sup>

Typically, media coverage of strategic deterrent operations during times of relative stability will be highly routinized. Regular correspondents assigned to institutional settings such as the State Department, the Defense Department, White House, and foreign correspondents in the regions of the operation, will monitor usually incremental developments over an extended time period. The level of media and public interest will vary according to the perceived stability of the situation, that is, according to the perceived effectiveness of deterrence. Signs of instability, such as the rash of North Korean incursions into the demilitarized zone between the two Koreas in 1996, will spark an increase in attention. The likely media effect is subtle. Elite debate and dialog in columns and opinion journals regarding the best way to maintain (or perhaps dissolve) the status quo is most common. Except during times of crisis, foreign policy debate of this sort is commonly left to the "attentive public" and policy elite. Television, with a few exceptions, does not dwell on such matters, again except during times of instability, such as when the Eastern Bloc and Soviet Union collapsed.

## 3) *Tactical Deterrence*

Deterrence may also come in the form of a rapid response to tactical developments, such as the deployment of a Navy carrier group or rapid reaction force to some trouble spot in the world. In these circumstances media interest is likely to be extremely high, as is almost always the case of troop deployments in circumstances of potential conflict.

With tactical deterrence, global media are often important and valuable assets to the military, particularly when time is short and conditions are critical. Admiral Kendell Pease, Chief of Information for the United States Navy, has called global media in such circumstances a "force multiplier." After showing a CNN video clip of carrier-based U.S. fighter-bombers taking off on a practice bombing run against an implied Iraqi target during Desert Shield, Pease explained that the Navy had arranged for a CNN crew to be aboard the carrier to film the "hardware in use" and to "send a message to Saddam Hussein." The Iraqis, the Navy realized and counted on, monitored CNN.<sup>62</sup> "The same thing is going on now," said Pease "in Taiwan."<sup>63</sup> Prior to Taiwan's March 1996 elections, which China opposed and threatened to stop with military force if necessary, the Clinton administration sent two aircraft carrier groups to the seas off Taiwan. Television crews accompanying the Navy ships sent pictures of the American defenders to the Chinese and the rest of the world.

By using media as a "force multiplier" in conjunction with deterrent force, U.S. policy makers are, in effect, attempting to create a "CNN effect" in the policymaking of a potential or actual adversary. As Richard Haass noted at the beginning of this paper, global, real-time media should not be regarded solely as an impediment or obstacle to policy makers. It may just as well be an asset.

## 4) *SOLIC*

Special operations and low-intensity conflict (SOLIC) is a general term applied to an array of military missions employing highly trained and specialized commando forces. Navy Seals, Army Rangers, special operations wings of the Air Force, and the Delta force offer examples of units typically involved in SOLIC. SOLIC missions include counter-terrorism operations, hostage rescue, and during conventional warfare, infiltration into enemy territory. During the Persian Gulf war, many of the Scud missile

batteries in Iraq were destroyed by special operations units, rather than by airstrikes.

SOLIC operations take place in hostile environments, are usually limited in scope, and are conducted in an envelope of extreme secrecy. In fact, for years the most elite of the American military units involved in counter-terrorism/hostage rescue operations, Delta Force, was not publically acknowledged. The necessity of secrecy makes SOLIC operations the most sensitive to media coverage. The disclosure of an operation would, in all likelihood, lead to its termination. It is unlikely other forms of media effects would be associated with SOLIC, though it is conceivable that special operations units may be activated, for example, in response to some highly publicized situation involving hostages.

### 5) *Peacemaking*

With peacemaking operations we begin a discussion of several "non-traditional" military missions, each differentiated by subtle but important features. Peacemaking, also sometimes referred to as "robust peacekeeping" and "aggravated peacekeeping," presupposes that one or more parties to a conflict are not interested in peace and do not agree to the presence of outsider peacekeepers. Ergo, such an outside force is a heavily armed. On the other hand, while there is little or no peace in a peacemaking environment, there is considerable restraint in the use of force. Peacekeeping is distinguished from conventional war by its objectives in using violence, if necessary. In war, the objective is to inflict massive destruction on an enemy. In peacemaking, the goal is to create the conditions necessary for the implementation of an accord. In a sense, the goal of *peacemaking* is to create the environment required for *peacekeeping* operations discussed below.

The hostile, unstable nature of the peacemaking environment means media and public interest is likely to be extremely high, at least initially. As with peacekeeping, if and when a sense of stability is established, media interest will diminish accordingly. Also as with peacekeeping, the most likely potential media effect with peacemaking is as an emotional impediment. Casualties may undermine public and elite support for the operation. Knowing this, opponents of peace may deliberately target peacemaking forces. Due to the hostile nature of the environment and the potential for open conflict between the peacemakers and one or more of the hostile forces in the war, operational

security is also a concern. Descriptions of peacemaker capabilities may serve as a "force multiplier," but if it is too detailed it may just as well suggest vulnerabilities of the peacemaking force. Furthermore, it is feasible that in highly unstable, fluid situations, media content may accelerate decisionmaking. Finally, it seems unlikely, particularly after implementation of PDD 25, that media content *alone* will lead to U.S. involvement in risky peacemaking operations.

### 6) *Peacekeeping*

In peacekeeping missions, lightly-armed forces are deployed in a "permissive environment" to bolster a fragile peace. A permissive environment is one in which the outside military force is welcome in sufficient measure by all combatants to allow for relative safe operation. Haass describes peacekeeping as the deployment of force "in a largely consensual framework in which there are at most only periodic, relatively isolated, and small-scale breakdowns of the peace."<sup>64</sup> Their role is relatively passive.

As with all U.S. troop deployments, the news media will show considerable interest in peacekeeping operations, though after a period of apparent stability, media interest is likely to flag. U.S. peacekeeping forces in Macedonia offer an example. Coverage, to the degree there is any, will be limited to the elite press, such as *The New York Times*. Television, at best, will pay only passing interest. Media interest will rise in direct proportion to the sense of potential instability. Put another way, the more fragile the peace the peacekeepers are there to protect, the greater will be media and public interest. If the situation appears unstable, and political leaders have not made the case that American national interests are involved in preserving the peace, media coverage of casualties may quickly undermine support for the mission. Here the media effect is an emotional impediment. Operational security, though a concern, is not central. Peacekeeping missions are often "transparent" in any case, an openness in operations that is meant to suggest evenhandedness.

### 7) *Imposed Humanitarian Interventions*

As the title implies, imposed humanitarian interventions differ from peacekeeping operations in that the scope of their objectives is more limited. Examples of imposed humanitarian interventions are Somalia after December 1992 but before the summer of 1993, Iraq since April 1991, and in and around Sarajevo in 1994. The objectives are limited to providing food,



medicine, clean, safe water, and a secure but limited geographical location.<sup>65</sup> Whereas the mission of a peacekeeping operation is to maintain a fragile status quo (peace), and the mission of a peacemaking operation is to impose a political solution, by force of arms if necessary, on one or more sides to a conflict, the mission of an imposed humanitarian intervention is to feed and care for a population in need.

In large measure, in these circumstances the military is used for their technical capabilities, such as water purification, field medicine, and, most importantly, logistical capabilities. With strategic airlifters, the American military is unmatched in its ability to move massive amounts of cargo great distances to almost any sort of terrain.

Media interest is likely to be quite high, particularly at the beginning with the introduction of U.S. troops, as discussed earlier. This will be particularly true if correspondents can operate safely in the secure zone established by the military. One of the very legitimate and understandable reasons so little coverage was given to the massacres in Rwanda prior to the Goma refugee coverage was the inability of journalists to move about safely in Rwanda.<sup>66</sup>

Though media content alone is not likely to lead to an imposed humanitarian intervention, it cannot be ruled out. The media effect of greatest potential in imposed humanitarian missions is as an impediment. The argument for continuation of a policy with possibly little or no direct American interest would be difficult to sustain in the face of pictures of the injured and dead.

#### 8) *Consensual Humanitarian Interventions*

Consensual humanitarian intervention, as the name implies, involve the use of the military in addressing the urgent needs of a distressed population. As with imposed humanitarian interventions, consensual humanitarian interventions are intended to save lives, not alter political circumstances on the ground through the use of force.<sup>67</sup> The U.S. response to a devastating cyclone that hit Bangladesh on May 3, 1991 offers an example. In the midst of Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq, the U.S. military sent military teams to assist the survivors. U.S. assistance to refugees in Goma, Zaire in 1994 is another example of a consensual humanitarian intervention.

Consensual humanitarian interventions are relatively low-cost, not only in material resources but also in terms of the potential political capital at stake. Because American soldiers are working in a relatively permissive environment, political leaders face relatively little risk in deploying them on such a mission. What risk there is may be found in a general sense of unease that pervades such missions, at least with some, over the possibility that "mission creep" will lead to a deeper involvement, as happened in Somalia. If truly consensual, and if it remains so, there will probably be little sustained media interest in the story.

#### *Shifts in Media-Policy Effects*

Each operation outlined above tends to offer different sensitivities to media content. Further, the potential effects in question are interactive. Shifts in policy will produce changes in media coverage, just as media coverage may change policy. U.S. policy in Somalia offers an example of the dynamic interactive nature of foreign policy making and media coverage.

From late 1991 to about July 1992, the U.S. policy response to the worsening conditions in Somalia was non-military in nature, with relief operations working through the auspices of non-governmental organizations, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and UN agencies. As noted above, during this time there was practically no media attention to Somalia. In August 1992, the Bush administration undertook a *consensual humanitarian intervention*, transporting relief supplies to Somalia using military cargo planes. A small contingent of security and other support personnel were also involved. With Todd Eachus, I have argued elsewhere that media content had no effect on this decision, contrary to popular belief. Instead, it resulted from a number of bureaucratic and domestic political (presidential campaign) considerations.<sup>68</sup> That is not to say that media did not play a role in the unfolding policy developments. With the introduction of American military personnel in August, media coverage of Somalia skyrocketed, not because conditions had worsened, but because Americans were there.

The continued fighting and banditry in Somalia made the environment there something less than consensual; not all of the players on

the ground agreed that giving food and other forms of aid to those in need was necessarily a good idea. As a result, in December the Bush administration sent in Marines to provide security. At that point the policy changed, for the third time, and became an *imposed humanitarian intervention*. Media attention, as Figure Two indicates, rose accordingly.

Then, by the summer of 1993, the Clinton administration and its counterparts in the UN allowed the mission in Somalia to become something else again. It drifted into becoming a *peacemaking* operation. The problem the administration created for itself in the process was found in the fact that it had not put an appropriate force structure on the ground—the troops and equipment necessary to achieve the new political mission. Whereas humanitarian missions, strictly speaking, do not pursue political objectives, at least not in theory, peacemaking missions do. More importantly, the Clinton administration failed to build the political support with Congress, opinion leaders, and the American public necessary for sustaining a more demanding political mission in Somalia. As a result, the policy was derailed in October 1993, as is often said, with the pictures of a dead American body on macabre display in Mogadishu. Different policies with different types and levels of media scrutiny produced different results.

## Conclusion

Each policy outlined above obviously has different objectives, actual and potential costs, and operational requirements. As a result, the level of interest media have and the potential consequence of that interest vary substantially. Before we can make theoretical and empirical progress in understanding the effects of media on foreign policy we must refine the debate to meaningful terms. The grand, interesting, and often heated debate about the “CNN effect” will continue to fail us, unless we distill it into its constituent parts. That means speaking more precisely about the likely effects relative to specific policies.

## Endnotes

1. James Schlesinger, "Quest for a Post-Cold War Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1992. On-line without pagination. See also Richard N. Haass, "Paradigm Lost," *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1995. On-line without pagination.
2. James Schlesinger, "Quest for a Post-Cold War Foreign Policy." See also Richard N. Haass, "Paradigm Lost," *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1995, on-line without pagination, and James F. Hoge, Jr., "Media Pervasiveness," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1994, on-line without pagination.
3. Charles Krauthammer, "Intervention Lite: Foreign Policy by CNN," *The Washington Post*, February 18, 1994, p. 25.
4. Nik Gowing, "Real-time Television Coverage of Armed Conflicts and Diplomatic Crises: Does it Pressure or Distort Foreign Policy Decision Making?," Working Paper 94-1, The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, p. 9. See also Johanna Neuman, *Lights, Camera, War: Is Technology Driving International Politics?* (St. Martins Press, 1995) and Warren Strobel, "The CNN Effect," *American Journalism Review*, May 1996, p. 32; Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, 103rd Congress, second session, April 26, 1994, p. 5. See also "For the Record," *The Washington Post*, April 27, 1994, p. A22.
5. The Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation-George Washington University conference on Military, Media, and Humanitarian Crises, held on the campus of The George Washington University, May 5, 1995.
  6. This does not exhaust the possibilities, of course. Murray Edelman pointed out in several important works (*Constructing the Political Spectacle*, *Political Language*) that the policy process often acts in reverse of what has just been implied. At times, particular policy goals are first identified by officials. Second, a problem of sufficient emotional or symbolic importance is then offered as a justification for adopting a set of favored solutions.

For example, reducing Iraq's ability to conduct hostile actions against its neighbors was a policy goal of the Bush administration in the fall and winter of 1990. The administration needed to find ways to frame American interests there as something more compelling than protecting oil. Secretary of State James A. Baker's "It's jobs, jobs, jobs" just didn't do the trick. Instead, the administration and its allies at Hill & Knowlton, a Washington public relations firm, were able to cast Saddam Hussein as Adolph Hitler and create emotionally compelling but factually unsound stories about Iraqi soldiers removing Kuwaiti babies from incubators (See William Dorman and Steven Livingston in *Taken By Storm*, W. Lance Bennett and David Paletz (eds.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994)). Desired policy was achieved by creating compelling news stories and frames.

I do not mean to suggest that the analytical framework offered here explains more than a portion of the foreign policy process. Not all policy is the result of media content. There are many sources of policy. And just as often as media influences policy, media themselves are the instruments of policymakers. If we assume some portion of policy and policy outcomes are the result of media content (knowing also that media content is itself often a reflection of policy), what might those effects be?
7. James F. Hoge, Jr., "Media Pervasiveness," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1994. On-line without pagination.
8. Nicholas Burns, "Talking to the World About American Foreign Policy," *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, Fall 1996. Vol. 1, No. 4. pp. 10-14.
9. Author interview with James A. Baker III, Houston, Texas, May 13, 1996. See also James A. Baker, III, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War & Peace, 1989-92* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995) p. 103.
10. Author interview with Margaret Tutwiler, Alexandria, Virginia, March 29, 1996.
11. The Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation-George Washington University conference on Military, Media, and Humanitarian Crises. May 5, 1995.
12. Frank J. Stech, "Winning CNN Wars," *Parameters*, Autumn 1994, p. 38.
13. The Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation-George Washington University conference on Military, Media, and Humanitarian Crises. May 5, 1995.
14. The Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation-George Washington University conference on Military, Media, and Humanitarian Crises. May 5, 1995.
15. Michael R. Beschloss, "Presidents, Television, and Foreign Crises," (Washington, D.C.: The Annenberg Washington Program, 1993) p. 9.
16. Beschloss, "Presidents, Television, and Foreign Crises," p. 10.
17. Ibid.
18. Author interview with Marvin Kalb, Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University, May 29, 1996.
19. Author interview with Tutwiler. See also Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 34.
20. Nicholas Burns, "Talking to the World About American Foreign Policy," *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, Fall 1996. Vol. 1, No. 4. pp. 10-14.

21. Maureen Dowd, "War Introduces a Tougher Bush to the Nation," *The New York Times*, March 2, 1991. How much this has proven to be the case is an open question.
- More recently, Thomas Friedman wryly remarked that if the Vietnam syndrome was eliminated in 1991, then it has been replaced by the "Gulf War syndrome." The Gulf War syndrome "says that the U.S. will engage in military operations abroad only if they take place in a desert with nowhere for the enemy to hide, if the fighting can be guaranteed to last no more than five days, if casualties can be counted on one hand, if both oil and nuclear weapons are at stake, if the enemy is a madman who will not accept any compromise, and if the whole operation will be paid for by Germany and Japan." Thomas Friedman, "Global Mandate," *The New York Times*, March 5, 1995, p. 15.
- On a more general level, the role of public opinion in U.S. foreign policy has been the subject of considerable debate. See Donald L. Jordan and Benjamin I. Page, "Shaping Foreign Policy Opinion: The Role of Television," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, June 1992, pp. 227-241; Philip J. Powlick, "The Sources of Public Opinion for American Foreign Policy Officials," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 39, 1995, pp. 427-451.
22. See B. Drummond Ayers, Jr., "A Common Cry Across the U.S.: It's Time to Exit," *The New York Times*, October 9, 1993, p. 1.
23. Ayers, "A Common Cry" p. 1. It may well have been the case that once the October battle occurred the Clinton Administration seized the opportunity to extricate itself from a situation not of its choosing. The pictures were less an impediment and more an opportunity, unfortunate as it otherwise was.
24. John J. Fialka, *Hotel Warriors: Covering the Gulf War* (Washington, D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1991), p. 2.
25. Fialka, *Hotel Warriors*, p. 1.
26. RW. Apple, "Correspondents Protest Pool System," *The New York Times*, February 12, 1991, p. 14.
27. "Editors Criticize Picture Limits," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1991, p. 14.
28. Barrie Dunsmore, *The Next War: Live!*, The Joan Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University, March 1996, p. 9. Edward N. Luttwak has questioned whether television plays a role at all in creating an intolerance of casualties, suggesting it is a "superficial explanation." He noted that the Soviets demonstrated such an intolerance, despite the fact that Soviet television was not allowed to show the sort of gruesome pictures that are of concern to some policy-makers in the U.S. He instead suggested that the smaller average size of families in contemporary post-industrial society has concentrated emotional familial capital into fewer children, therefore raising the level of sacrifice in war to intolerable levels. Edward N. Luttwak, "Where are the Great Powers?; At Home With the Kids," *Foreign Affairs*, (Summer 1994), on-line without pagination.
29. Jarol B. Manheim, "Managing Kuwait's Image During the Gulf Conflict," and William A. Dorman and Steven Livingston, "News and Historical Content: The Establishing Phase of the Persian Gulf Policy Debate," 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). See also Jarol B. Manheim, *Strategic Public Diplomacy & American Foreign Policy: The Evolution of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
30. W. Lance Bennett, "Marginalizing the Majority: Conditioning Public Opinion to Accept Managerial Democracy" in Michael Margolis and Gary Mauser (eds.), *Manipulating Public Opinion* (Pacific Grove, CA.:Brooks/Cole, 1989), pp. 320-361.
31. W. Lance Bennett and Jarol B. Manheim, "Taking the Media by Storm: Information, Cuing, and the Democratic Process in the Gulf Conflict," *Political Communication*, 10, 331-351.
32. Jason DeParle, "Long Series of Military Decisions Led to Gulf War News Censorship," *The New York Times*, May 5, 1991, p. 1.
33. Barrie Dunsmore, *The Next War: Live!*, p. 9.
34. Thanks to Jonathan Moore of the Kennedy School at Harvard for helping me appreciate this important distinction.
35. Author interview with James A. Baker, III., Houston, Texas, May 14, 1996.
36. Jessica Mathews, "Policy Vs TV," *The Washington Post*, March 8, 1994, p. A19.
37. Michael Mandelbaum, "Foreign Policy as Social Work," *Foreign Affairs*, January 1996, on-line without pagination.
38. Mandelbaum, "Foreign Policy as Social Work," unpaginated.
39. Stanley Hoffmann, "In Defense of Mother Teresa: Morality in Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, March 1996, on-line without pagination.
40. Hoffman, "In Defense of Mother Teresa."
41. United States Mission to the United Nations, *Global Humanitarian Emergencies*, 1996, p. 1.
42. David C. Unger, "Taking Haiti," *The New York Times Magazine*, October 23, 1994, p. 50. Jim Hoagland has also noted this "whipsaw effect" of media coverage. "A wave of emotion roiled up by horrific images that demand immediate action" is "pushed back by new sets of heart-rending images. A government initially lambasted for callousness is suddenly vulnerable to accusations of being foolhardy. This whipsaw effect is the politician's nightmare." Hoagland's larger point, however, is that this is a con-

dition created by the lack of a clearly articulated foreign policy. (Jim Hoagland, "Don't Blame CNN," *The Washington Post*, March 3, 1994, p. 29.)

43. Andrew Natsios, "Illusions of Influence: The CNN Effect in Complex Emergencies," in *From Massacres to Genocide: The Media, Public Policy, and Humanitarian Crises*, Robert I. Rotberg and Thomas G. Weiss (eds.), (The Brookings Institution, 1996), p. 150.

44. Steven Livingston and Todd Eachus, "Humanitarian Crises and U.S. Foreign Policy: Somalia and the CNN Effect Reconsidered," *Political Communication*, Vol. 12, 1995, pp. 417.

45. Livingston and Eachus, "Humanitarian Crises and U.S. Foreign Policy," p. 417.

46. Livingston and Eachus, "Humanitarian Crises and U.S. Foreign Policy," p. 426.

47. Events in 1993 presented another story. CNN-as-impediment almost certainly explains the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Somalia. My only point here is that CNN-as-agenda-setter does not serve as an acceptable explanation for the intervention in Somalia in 1992.

48. A point made clear to me in interviews of foreign correspondents in Nairobi, Kenya in May 1994.

49. Steven Livingston and Todd Eachus, "Too Little Too Late: American Television Coverage of the Rwanda Crisis of 1994," in Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke (eds) *Untitled* (Boulder, CO.: Westview Press, forthcoming).

50. Steven Livingston, "Suffering in Silence: Media Coverage of War and Famine in the Sudan," in *From Massacres to Genocide: The Media, Public Policy, and Humanitarian Crises*, Robert I. Rotberg and Thomas G. Weiss (eds.), (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1996), pp. 68-89. See also Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke, *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience*, "Early Warning and Conflict Management," (York, Ontario: Centre for Refugee Studies, York University), pp. 46-48.

51. The figures for Liberia are even more pronounced when one takes into consideration that most of the print news items, and nearly all of the broadcast news items, occurred in April and May 1996, at a time of heavy combat and American evacuation missions to the stricken capital of Monrovia. For *The New York Times*, 43 percent (71 of 164) of the news items to mention Liberia between January 1995 and mid-May 1996 were found in April and half of May 1996. For ABC News, nearly 88 percent (28 of 32) of its reports from Liberia came in April and half of May 1996.

52. Why Bosnia in 1995 and 96? To address this question well would require another study. But certainly high on the list of reasons for the coverage would be NATO's involvement and the deployment of U.S. troops there (as in Somalia).

53. Author interview with Brent Scowcroft,

Washington, D.C., March 27, 1996.

54. Author interview with James A. Baker, III, Houston, Texas, May 14, 1996.

55. Author interview with James A. Baker, III, Houston, Texas, May 14, 1996.

56. Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Policies* (Headline Series, Foreign Policy Association, 1995), p. 36.

57. Douglas Jehl, "US is Showing a New Caution on UN Peacekeeping Mission," *The New York Times*, May 18, 1994, p. 1.

58. Each intervention type has been adapted from Richard Haass's *Intervention: The Use of American Military Force in the Post-Cold War World* (Carnegie Endowment Book, 1994)

59. See Nancy Ethiel (series editor) and Steven Livingston (ed), *Reporting the Next War* (Chicago: The Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, 1992), *The Military and the Media: the Continuing Dialogue* (Chicago: The Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, 1993).

60. Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 11.

61. Even the Reagan Doctrine's claims to rolling back Communist control was careful not to risk the total destabilization of Europe. All-out war on the European continent was not an objective.

62. Author interview with Adm. Kendal Pease, Pentagon, September 1995.

63. Author telephone interview with Adm. Kendal Pease, March 12, 1996.

64. Richard N. Haass, *Intervention: The Use of American Military Force in the Post-Cold War World* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment, 1994), p. 57.

65. Haass, *Intervention*, p. 62.

66. I was in Nairobi during this time and saw firsthand the attempts made by correspondents such as Terry Leonard of the Associated Press to get into Rwanda. It was simply too dangerous.

67. Of course, this formulation might be criticized as missing the point that saving lives in political conflict is not apolitical in nature. Certainly in the case of the efforts to save the lives of largely Hutu refugees in Goma and elsewhere in Zaire, the results were not politically neutral. Some of these very refugees were responsible for the massacre of Tutsi and Hutu moderates in the weeks before.

68. Livingston and Eachus, "Humanitarian Crises and U.S. Foreign Policy," p. 41.

The Joan Shorenstein Center  
on the Press, Politics and Public Policy  
John F. Kennedy School of Government  
Harvard University  
79 John F. Kennedy Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138

Telephone (617) 495-8269 • Fax: (617) 495-8696

Web Site Address: <http://ksgwww.harvard.edu/~presspol/home.htm>