

The Other Side of the CNN Factor: the media and conflict

VIRGIL HAWKINS *Osaka University, Japan*

ABSTRACT *Although its influence is somewhat disputed, the CNN factor has become well known as the process by which the media influence foreign policy by evoking responses in their audiences through concentrated and emotionally based coverage, which in turn applies pressure to governments to act in response to a particular conflict. Intense coverage of one conflict, however, comes at the expense of other conflicts, some of which may be a great deal more pressing in nature. It is this “other side” of the CNN factor on which this paper focuses. Included in the study is a comprehensive statistical analysis of the amount of coverage throughout the year 2000 in Le Monde (France), the New York Times (USA), the Yomiuri (Japan) and CNN and BBC world news. The study argues that media agendas do influence a broad range of policy initiatives, and that, by extension, lack of media coverage contributes to lack of policy.*

KEY WORDS: *CNN Factor, CNN Effect, Media, News Coverage, Conflict, Agenda Setting, Foreign Policy*

Introduction

The CNN factor—and its effects on foreign intervention in armed conflict—is increasingly coming under academic scrutiny. The basic concept is as follows: concentrated and emotion-based media coverage of a select conflict, packaged in an oversimplified “morality play” format of good versus evil, evokes an emotional response among the citizens of a distant country, forcing that country’s government to take interest, and perhaps intervene, in some form, in the conflict.

While there is considerable controversy over the actual extent of the effect of media coverage on government policy in response to foreign conflict situations, it is generally recognised that, under certain conditions, the media can play a role in agenda setting, and the forming or changing of such policy. The CNN factor is seen as one of the factors that was responsible for a complete reversal of policy by the US and UK in northern Iraq, where they intervened to protect Kurdish refugees (Shaw, 1996). Although the role of the media in the intervention in and withdrawal from Somalia is criti-

cised as being exaggerated, even sceptics admit that the television news contributed to policy decisions in that country (Mermin, 1997, p. 402). More recently, saturation coverage of the conflict in Kosovo has also served to raise questions about the role of the media in intervention decisions.

As Peter Jakobsen (2000, p. 132) points out, however, the focus on the extent of the direct influence of the media on intervention decisions obscures an effect of media coverage that has a far greater impact on conflict management (or lack thereof). This effect stems from the failure of the media to cover most of the world’s conflicts. If we accept that media coverage can play a role in forming or altering government policy relating to foreign conflict, it follows that lack of media coverage can also be a factor in lack of policy. If the media play a role in policy agenda setting, then the media blackout of most of the world’s major conflicts can also be linked to the absence of those conflicts from the agendas of foreign countries.

This, in turn, can result in very little incentive for unaffected countries to become involved in

any form of conflict management, including the provision of aid, mediation efforts and, in exceptional circumstances, military intervention. A prominent example is Operation Assurance—the proposed intervention to facilitate humanitarian assistance to refugees in eastern Zaire in 1996 that was cancelled after developments on the ground led to a partial amelioration of the situation. In an interview, a former diplomat at the UN revealed to the author that the US—which had initially decided to participate—had decided against going ahead with the operation when it became clear that the media were not particularly interested. This paper is particularly concerned with the relationship between lack of media coverage and lack of foreign policy—which will be referred to here as “the other side of the CNN factor”. After examining the factors that influence media coverage, this paper will quantitatively demonstrate major imbalances in the amount of media coverage of conflicts and world affairs in general in the year 2000. It will then attempt to use the results to support the hypothesis that lack of media coverage of conflicts contributes to lack of government policy in that regard.

Factors Influencing Media Coverage

While the ability of the media to influence foreign policy is by no means a new phenomenon, its effects have become greatly pronounced since the 1980s, as was demonstrated by the response to saturation coverage of famine in Ethiopia (Annan, 1994). Determination of the issues that will or will not become news is made by “gatekeepers”—reporters in the field, bureau heads, producers and editors. In a world overflowing with events, incidents and information, these gatekeepers decide which parts to take up and to what degree, and to what extent that information will actually end up in the finished product as news. A number of factors influence how much coverage the media devote to certain issues or regions of the world. These include: competition in the media industry; advances in communication technology; accessibility; and the influence of the government—or “reverse CNN factor”. Some

of the factors have recently emerged or grown in importance, and most of them are interrelated.

Competition in the Media Industry

Increasingly fierce competition in the media industry has led to several changes in the gathering and packaging of news. Television news programmes and newspapers, vying for viewers and readers, respectively, have begun to treat news as a consumer item, and concentrate their efforts on creating a “product” that will be attractive to potential “buyers”. Such commercial demands mean that “the media have to resort to packaging news in a new form of tabloidism that mixes information with entertainment” (Minear et al., 1994, p. 35). In coverage of conflict, for example, intellectual analysis of the complexities of numerous distant conflicts is less likely to attract and maintain the interest of viewers/readers than an emotive, oversimplified portrayal of good versus evil in one or two conflicts, with a continuous emphasis on the suffering of the victims of oppression.

With necessarily lower budgets, and the subsequent lack of facility to adequately gather news, news programmes and newspapers are increasingly relying on wire services, such as Reuters, Associated Press and Agence France Presse. Such wire services have consequently found it necessary to alter their coverage to match the demands of their major customers, both in content and in style. This has wide-ranging effects on the coverage of international events in newspapers and the electronic media throughout the world.

Advances in Communications Technology

Advances in communications technology have greatly shortened the time required to bring news from the field to the viewer or reader at home. In particular, the development of satellite communications technology has allowed and led to an overwhelming preference for live broadcasts in the television media.

Ironically, technology has, in some ways, contributed to a situation in which remote

conflicts are less covered. With greater competition leading to budget cuts, priority is given to technological advancement, such that resources for newsgathering in the field are being diverted to the purchase and maintenance of high-tech equipment. Foreign correspondents are expected to cover larger areas of the globe, and, in the process, are becoming increasingly unspecialised, as they race from one humanitarian emergency to another, with little time or background knowledge to grasp the issues behind the conflicts they cover. Emotive images of suffering gathered by reporters who fly in and out of refugee camps within the space of a few hours have become the backbone of news coverage of conflicts. There are notorious stories of reporters who, upon arriving at refugee camps, shout at the refugees, "Is there anyone here who's been raped and speaks English?" (Knightly, 2000, p. 511).

Using portable satellite uplinks, reporters can, in theory, transmit images from anywhere in the world. At the same time, if the correspondent cannot reach the field in a short amount of time to cover the story, the technology is worth very little.

Accessibility

For media corporations to remain competitive, television news cannot be more than a day old, and is best live—deadlines have assumed a much greater importance. In the early 1990s, famine and war in Somalia attracted extensive media coverage, whereas a similar situation in the Sudan attracted almost none. The prime reason for this was that Somalia could be covered from Kenya within a day, but to cover the Sudan would require three days (Livingston, 1996, pp. 38–40). As well as cost considerations, if it takes three days or more to travel to the area in question, the news is no longer fresh enough to be newsworthy, and producers and editors are thus reluctant to include it. Most of the world's major conflict zones, however, are in areas with poor infrastructure that inhibits rapid travel. Thus, stories in areas where reporters are permanently stationed receive a far greater amount of extended coverage than those in which reporters are required to move

across large distances and station themselves temporarily.

Other issues associated with accessibility are permission to enter and safety. It is not uncommon for countries at war to impose restrictions on the entry of journalists to restrict the flow of disadvantageous information. This affects the ability of foreign correspondents to cover conflict. Furthermore, entering a conflict zone is, by nature, hazardous, and such considerations also restrict coverage of conflicts.

The "Reverse CNN Factor"

Some academics point to the phenomenon by which the government influences the media, as opposed to the media influencing the government. Hallin (1986) and Bennett (1990) argue that the content of the US media is a reflection of the agenda and the range of debate among elites in the US government—that the media "index" the news according to government viewpoints (see also Mermin, 1999). I would like to refer to this phenomenon as the "reverse CNN factor". With low budgets for newsgathering, news corporations often interview government officials as a cheap alternative to actually travelling to the field. Using government officials as sources also adds perceived reliability of information, and protection against inaccurate reports. As such, a great deal of reporting on "foreign affairs" is conducted from the domestic capitals. The result is an increase in the power of the government in choosing what will or will not become news, and a dominance of the government spin on the news.

With regards to conflict, Western militaries at war increasingly restrict media access to the actual conflict zone, instead providing correspondents with large amounts of their own information and video images at daily press conferences. This is mutually beneficial for cash-strapped news corporations and governments intent on disseminating information that is advantageous to their cause, but the result is very little independent coverage from the battlefield, and a further ceding to the government, by the media, of the power to select the news.

The Resulting Imbalance: a case study of media coverage

Television and Newspaper Coverage of the World in the Year 2000

In order to quantitatively measure the imbalance of media coverage of both with regards to conflict, and to world affairs in general, a case study was conducted of television news and newspaper coverage in the year 2000. Given the ability of the West (Europe, North America and Japan) to play an influential role in foreign conflict management (economically, diplomatically and/or militarily), this study will focus on Western media sources.

The television news programmes selected for the case study were CNN World News (US) and BBC World News (UK). These media were selected for the size of their domestic and international audience (including a large elite audience), and for their considerable influence on the media agendas of other news media. For each day in the year 2000, one 30-minute news programme was recorded and the length (in seconds) of each news item was timed and geographically categorised, according to content, into one of the following areas: Africa (north, east, west, central/south), the Americas (north, central, south), Asia (west, south, south-east, northeast, Oceania), Europe (west, central, east), the Middle East, United Nations and other. Where a single news item included coverage of more than one geographical location, the time of the item was divided proportionately among the categories. Coverage of individual conflicts and peace processes was also compared separately (see below).

One newspaper each was selected from Asia, the Americas and Europe, based primarily on level of influence in their respective countries or regions. The most influential newspapers from Japan (*Yomiuri*), the US (*New York Times*) and France (*Le Monde*) were selected. With a view to incorporating as broad a range of sources as possible, publication in a language other than English was a factor in the selection of the *Yomiuri* and *Le Monde*. For each day in the year 2000, the area (in square centimetres) of each news item on both the front page and in the international section of the newspapers was

measured and geographically categorised, according to its content, into the same areas, and according to the same process as detailed above for television news media. The area of any related photographs was also included in the measurements for newspaper media. Detailed findings of the study can be found in Appendices 1–6.

Overall, the study found that, with the exception of the *New York Times* (which covered Europe the most), the TV news programmes and newspapers gave the greatest amount of coverage to the continent in which they are geographically situated. The *Yomiuri's* focus on Asia and *Le Monde's* on Europe were particularly prominent. In general, areas that received the most coverage were Western Europe, North America and the Middle East. Areas that received the least coverage included conflict-prone western Asia and North and East Africa. *Le Monde's* relatively high coverage of North Africa—when compared with the other media sources—can be attributed to both geographical and historical factors. In all of the media studied, the least-covered continent was Africa, making up between just 1.9 and 9.3 per cent of the total coverage.

The coverage by the television news (particularly in the case of CNN) appeared to be more erratic than that by the newspapers. This can be explained partially by the fact that due to time constraints the television news is able to cover fewer news items than newspapers are, resulting in less geographical consistency. The reliance on moving images, however, leading to a greater tendency for sensationalism, is also a key factor, as was demonstrated in saturation coverage of incidents such as the dispute between the US and Cuba over the Elian Gonzales incident, floods in Mozambique and a *coup d'état* in Fiji.

Coverage of Conflicts and Peace Processes in the Year 2000

Coverage of individual conflicts and peace processes (including UN or foreign involvement) by the same media sources over the same period was also measured (in seconds for television media and in square centimetres for

newspaper media), and the 15 most covered conflicts were ranked by volume of coverage. Violent clashes between national, ethnic and political entities were included in the study, as were related attempts at political settlements. Peace processes in cases in which there had been no recent violence, such as those between Israel and Syria, and North and South Korea, were excluded from the study. Small-scale violence associated with elections and *coup d'états*, such as those in Fiji and Cote d'Ivoire, were also excluded from the study.

In balanced media coverage—"balanced" here referring to the quantity of coverage, rather than the content—one might expect to see priority of coverage given to conflicts in the world that were the largest in scale, or had caused the greatest loss of life or humanitarian suffering. However, although a slant in coverage, caused by geographical, political, racial, historical or cultural closeness to a particular conflict, is to be expected, no semblance of balance could be found in the coverage of conflicts in any of the sources examined. All media sources devoted a disproportionately large amount of coverage to a single small-scale conflict with a relatively low level of death and humanitarian suffering. Conversely, large-scale international conflicts with massive death tolls, refugee numbers and related levels of humanitarian crisis were largely ignored by all of the media sources.

In all of the media sources studied, the conflict between Israel and Palestine was by far the most heavily covered conflict—in the case of CNN, attracting more than five times the amount of coverage of the second most covered conflict. This was despite the fact that, in the year 2000, this conflict resulted in only about 300 deaths, negligible numbers of displaced persons, and little life-threatening humanitarian suffering. While the resurgence of violence in late 2000 was the object of massive media coverage, peace talks at Camp David in July—and other political developments—were also consistently covered throughout the year.

Coverage of conflicts and peace processes also reflected (to a certain extent) the geographical location of the media source. Four of the ten most covered conflicts in the *Yomiuri* were

located in Asia, with East Timor the second most covered. Conflicts close to home in Europe were heavily covered by the BBC (the Northern Ireland peace process) and *Le Monde* (violence in the Basque region in Spain). Consistently receiving high levels of coverage in all of the media sources—regardless of geographical proximity—were conflicts and peace processes in Europe, such as Chechnya, Kosovo and Northern Ireland, despite the fact that the latter two were relatively minor conflicts.

By contrast, conflict in Africa, which has been, in the post-Cold-War world, responsible for up to 90 per cent of the world's total war dead, suffered an almost complete media blackout. Coverage of the massive war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which caused in excess of one million deaths in the year 2000, was almost insignificant, at best being the eighth most covered conflict. Other major African conflicts, including those in Angola (despite major and decisive offensives there) and the Sudan, were almost completely ignored by the media. Neither of these conflicts was able to enter even the top 15 most covered conflicts in any of the media sources. The conflict in Africa that received the most coverage was that in Sierra Leone, which still failed to reach a level higher than fifth most covered conflict. Minor racial violence in Zimbabwe and the war (and peace process) between Ethiopia and Eritrea were covered more than other African conflicts.

The argument that the media's agenda is determined by the elites in the respective domestic political arenas can partially explain the dominance of the Israel–Palestine conflict in the US and UK, particularly considering the influence of powerful and well-organised pro-Israel (and less influential pro-Palestinian) lobby groups. At the same time, however, the yawning gap between the coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and that of all other conflicts is far too great to be explained simply by this hypothesis.

Ability to cover the conflict at a low cost would appear to offer a more persuasive explanation for the priority level in the media agenda and the large gap in the level of coverage—one that is consistent with the data

obtained in this study. In the case of conflict in the Middle East, reporters are permanently stationed in the immediate vicinity—in a position to cover a sudden outbreak of violence at virtually no additional cost, and without the need to be cued to the conflict by domestic elites. At a much lower level of coverage are conflict areas in which reporters are generally not permanently stationed, but that can be accessed at relatively low cost, namely those in Europe. Finally, at an almost insignificant level of coverage, are the conflicts in areas that are costly and logistically difficult to access and report from.

Several cases in this study clearly contradict the theory that “news agendas typically reflect the agendas of officials” (Livingston and Eachus, 1995, p. 427). The most glaring example is the massive coverage of the conflict in the Middle East in the *Yomiuri* newspaper, which cannot be linked to any significant level of interest in the conflict or agenda priority in the Japanese government. The fact that Japanese reporters are permanently stationed in the conflict zone offers a much more credible explanation. Another contributing factor might be a bandwagon effect—the Japanese media taking cues from other influential media sources in the US or Europe. Such a bandwagon effect may also help to explain the fact that CNN’s coverage of a minor conflict in Zimbabwe exceeded its coverage of the conflict in Colombia, despite the lack of interest in Zimbabwe in the US, and despite the fact that US government elites were in the process of debating a bill to provide massive amounts of military support to Colombia.

Considerable differences in the levels of coverage of conflicts by CNN and the *New York Times* (which work under the influence of the same government elites) suggest that other factors—namely the access (or lack thereof) to video footage of the conflict zone—may play a key role in determining the media agenda. Comparatively low levels of coverage by CNN of the conflicts in Colombia and the DRC compared with the coverage in the *New York Times*, for example, may reflect the difficulties in directly accessing a conflict zone in a jungle environment with a camera crew.

While the issues of accessibility and the safety of foreign correspondents are certainly major factors in the media blackout of conflicts, both in Africa and in other areas such as western Asia (particularly Afghanistan), in some cases race could also be seen as a contributing factor. For example: while the proximity of Zimbabwe to media bases in South Africa seemed to provide partial explanation for such heavy coverage of such a minor conflict in that country, the fact that the conflict was between blacks and whites, as opposed to being a conflict between blacks, was undoubtedly a deciding factor. Race also appeared to be a factor in propelling a small, obscure conflict in the Philippines to being CNN’s second most covered conflict, as coverage focused largely on the plight of Westerners who had been taken hostage by rebels there.

Whatever the reason, it is clear that the newsroom truism that “One dead fireman in Brooklyn is worth five English bobbies, who are worth 50 Arabs, who are worth 500 Africans” (Moeller, 1999, p. 22) is not an exaggeration: if anything, it is an understatement. In terms of the level of coverage, in the year 2000, one million Congolese were worth far less than the fate of one Cuban boy, and infinitely less than 300 Arabs.

How No Media Coverage Does Not Affect Foreign Policy

It is quite obvious from the above data that there exists a major imbalance in the media’s handling of conflicts in the world today. The media arbitrarily select and focus intently on one or two conflicts, overshadowing all other conflicts, no matter how large in scale they may be. If media coverage does indeed possess the ability to affect policy decisions (especially in these extreme cases that are covered intensely by the media) or, at the very least, affect agenda setting, it follows that lack of media coverage may be linked to a lack of policy. Thus, by ignoring massive conflicts, the media contribute to the absence of government initiatives, or, at the very least, a place on the policy agenda. This section will attempt to examine this possibility in light of the data obtained in this study,

by exploring the relationship between media coverage and policy (both agenda setting and policy initiatives). It will also examine the extended effect of lack of media coverage—that is, the effect on the response of the general public and the academic community.

Agenda Setting

Studies on the agenda-setting function focus on three main components: the media agenda, the public agenda and the policy agenda. Research to date seems to support the hypothesis that the media agenda affects the public agenda (as well as the policy agenda), and that the public agenda in turn affects the policy agenda (Rogers and Dearing, 1994). The effect on the policy agenda will be dealt with in the section on policy initiatives.

The results of this study also support the effect of the media agenda on the public agenda. For example, each year the *Yomiuri* takes a survey on the top international events of the year, with the readers voting for events or issues that stood out in their minds. In 2000, the conflict between Israel and Palestine was the top conflict, ranked at eighth place. Other conflicts listed included Chechnya (nineteenth), and Israel–Lebanon (twentieth). However, not a single event in Africa (conflict or otherwise) appeared in the survey's top 30 events. In fact, in the past five years, no African conflict has been ranked in the top ten of the survey. This matched the order of the top conflicts in the *Yomiuri* (in the year 2000, East Timor and Kosovo were essentially peace processes rather than conflicts). Rogers and Dearing (1994, p. 89) note that "one of the strongest pieces of evidence of the media's agenda-setting influence may consist of the fact that issues and events that are completely ignored by the mass media do not register on the public agendas" (see also McCombs, 1976). The virtual absence of most of the world's major conflicts in the *Yomiuri* (as in all media sources studied), and from the results of the survey, is a case in point.

Policy Initiatives

Using the data from this study, it is somewhat

more difficult to demonstrate the effect of the media on policy priorities—for a number of reasons. One is that in most cases the level of coverage was too low for it to have had a noticeable impact on policy priorities. Another is that, in the case of the Israel–Palestine conflict, while heavy media coverage coincided with vigorous peacemaking attempts and humanitarian assistance by the US and Europe, geopolitical concerns of elites in these countries can also be seen as a compelling motivation in their policy initiatives. It can be said, however, that, at the very least, the media acted as an "accelerant" (Livingston, 1997, p. 2–4) to policy-making in this instance.

It is therefore necessary to find examples of policy initiatives that coincided with intense media coverage, but not with debate between policy elites, pre-established government policy or geopolitical concerns. The clearest examples can be found in the Japanese press. Following intense media coverage of the outbreak of violence in the Middle East in late September 2000, the Japanese government decided, in October, to contribute US\$500,000 worth of emergency medical aid. This was followed by pledges of additional aid packages, altogether totalling US\$21 million. In the year 2000, Japan also made significant contributions to reconstruction efforts in East Timor and Kosovo. While geopolitical interests are certainly a factor in East Timor, the same cannot be said of Kosovo, for which coverage in the Japanese press remained relatively high in 2000.

The media influence on UK policy in Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe is also supported by the results in this study. While the UK has historical ties to these countries, the political and strategic importance of these areas to the UK is minimal. In the case of Sierra Leone, the intervention followed heavy and unprecedented media coverage of the conflict (active since 1991), which included criticism of the UK government's alleged involvement in sanctions busting in Sierra Leone. High-level diplomatic initiatives by the UK against the government in Zimbabwe also followed heavy media coverage of the situation there, despite a much greater amount of suffering in neighbouring conflicts which failed to

prompt notable diplomatic initiatives. Media coverage by CNN of the situation in Zimbabwe was also followed by policy initiatives in the US, starting with the approval by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee of a bill suspending aid to Zimbabwe, despite the previously low level of interest by the US government in that country.

On the other hand, a clear absence of government initiatives and policy agendas related to the majority of the world's major conflicts coincided with a lack of media coverage of the same conflicts. Emergency humanitarian aid was a clear indicator of this. There was a considerable gap in the degree of humanitarian aid to alleviate conflict-related suffering, between countries with and without the benefit of heavy media coverage. In May 2001, the World Food Program announced that it had received only 30 per cent of the funding required to continue its current operations (feed 1.4 million people) in the conflict-ridden Democratic Republic of the Congo. Elsewhere, UN consolidated inter-agency humanitarian assistance appeals in 2001 were not being met, with less than 20 per cent of appeals for Burundi, the Republic of the Congo and Somalia being met as of 31 May. At the same time, media-intensive situations in the Middle East, Kosovo and East Timor were the recipients of large amounts of aid from the Western world. Support for diplomatic endeavours also suffered in under-reported conflicts, with the only high-level attempts at peacemaking for conflicts in Africa being made by the governments of other African countries.

The policy-media interaction model holds that the media have the ability to influence policy when policy uncertainty is combined with "critically framed media coverage that empathizes with suffering people" (Robinson, 2000, p. 614). The above results support this model: where policy was non-existent or unclear, heavy media coverage appeared to be largely responsible for a number of policy initiatives. Elsewhere, policy certainty saw governments withstand media-induced pressure to create or alter policy, as seen in the conflict in Chechnya, which was the subject of heavy and critical coverage.

The Extended Effect

Governments are not the only entities capable of becoming engaged in conflict resolution or alleviation of conflict-related suffering in foreign countries. The general population can participate in the alleviation of suffering through donations as private citizens to aid appeals, or by establishing non-government organisations (NGOs). Such civilian participation is also extremely susceptible to the influence of media coverage (or lack thereof). During high-profile conflicts, numerous private appeals (including hotlines set up by television stations) are created to allow individuals to contribute to humanitarian assistance.

Conversely, viewers will not contribute to assistance efforts in conflicts that they are not aware of. No humanitarian hotlines have been set up to assist conflict-affected people in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo or the Sudan. Even within a conflict, unbalanced coverage will influence civilian participation. Although the media remain focused on the suffering of Albanians in Kosovo, it virtually ignores that of Serbs. The results showed in civilian humanitarian efforts. In an article in the *Japan Times* (4 May 2001), a member of a Japanese NGO, working to assist Serbian refugees from Kosovo, pointed out that assistance for Serbs from Western NGOs was scarce "because the West held the view that the Serbs were evil and the Albanians were good".

The academic community too is able to make a contribution, whether it be through its influence on the government, or through track II meetings. The academic community has shown, however, that it too is not immune from the other side of the CNN factor, by following trends set by media coverage. In 1999 (July/August), *Keesings Record of World Events* devoted less than a quarter of a page to the details of a major peace agreement in Sierra Leone, and about one-third of a page to the peace agreement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In contrast, in the same year (June) it devoted 12 pages of explicit detail to the peace agreement over Kosovo. With the exception of *Survival* (Shearer, 1999), major Western journals have yet to devote a single article to an

analysis of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has involved most of southern Africa. While the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), in its yearbook, frequently devotes chapters of analysis on security and conflict to Russia, Europe and the Middle East, in the last five years, it has devoted but one to the continent of Africa—regarding South Africa's issue of apartheid. The reality is that the world's worst wars and security issues are not being adequately addressed by the academic community.

Conclusions

Sceptics of the independent ability of the media to influence policy decisions focus on the case of the US intervention in Somalia (Livingston and Eachus, 1995; Mermin, 1997). While the points made in these arguments are valid, the explanation provided for the relationship between policymakers and the media is incomplete and too simple to represent such a complex relationship. As already noted, even those who downplay the independent role of the media note that it does indeed play a role in policy decisions (Mermin, 1997, p. 402; Gowing, 1996). Furthermore, the policy-media interaction model demonstrates that where there is policy uncertainty, the media can be a powerful force in leading policymakers to intervene (Robinson, 1999; 2000).

The focus, in academic debate, on such a "push" effect of the media on intervention decisions, however, has meant that an issue with much greater implications remains marginalised. If heavy coverage can lead to intervention decisions, lack of coverage can also be linked with lack of potential intervention decisions. It is important to note that intervention decisions, however, are extreme examples of conflict-related foreign policy decisions. Academic discussion that is limited to intervention decisions will neglect to examine the much broader effect of the media (or rather lack thereof) on foreign policy decisions. Policy

involving mediation (and other diplomatic) efforts between warring parties (at various levels), and the provision of humanitarian aid are among the policy tools at the disposal of governments. While pushing a government to intervene militarily in a conflict may usually be beyond the power of the media, encouraging engagement in other such areas is not.

By focusing its gaze intensely on a single conflict at the expense of all other conflicts, the media are largely responsible for the absence of these conflicts from the public agenda or the policy agenda, and major conflicts (and the massive amount of human suffering that they entail) will be ignored. The impact of the media on policy, in this sense, is much greater than that on individual intervention decisions. Furthermore, as Jakobsen points out, by focusing intensely on select conflicts only during the violence phase, "the media helps to shift focus and funds from more cost-effective, long-term efforts directed at preventing violent conflict and rebuilding war-torn societies to short-term emergency relief" (2000, p. 132). It is this other side of the CNN factor that deserves greater academic attention.

Attempting to find evidence that the other side of the CNN factor has a significant influence on foreign policy is no easy task, given that it essentially involves demonstrating the influence of the lack of something, as opposed to that of the existence of something. As such, given that the other side of the CNN factor is an integral part of the CNN factor, it should be examined closely in conjunction with the CNN factor, with both the influence of coverage and that of the lack of coverage compared over a broad range of policy decisions.

Most of all, attempts to oversimplify the role of the media in foreign policy—by overstating the importance of either independent media policy or the policy agenda of elites—should be avoided. Both clearly have an important influence on each other which should be examined and tested from all angles possible.

References

- Annan, Kofi (1994) "Peace-Keeping in Situations of Civil War", *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* 26, pp. 623–32.

- Bennett, W. Lance (1990) "Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States", *Journal of Communication* 40(2), pp. 103–25.
- Gowing, Nik (1996) "Real-Time TV Coverage from War: does it make or break government policy", in: James Gow, Richard Paterson and Alison Preston (Eds), *Bosnia by Television*, London: British Film Institute, pp. 81–91.
- Hallin, Daniel (1986) *The "Uncensored War": the media and Vietnam*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jakobsen, Peter Viggo (2000) "Focus on the CNN Effect Misses the Point: the real media impact on conflict management is invisible and indirect", *Journal of Peace Research* 37(2), pp. 131–43.
- Knightly, Phillip (2000) *The First Casualty: the war correspondent as hero and myth-maker from the Crimea to Kosovo*, London: Prion.
- Livingston, Steven (1996) "Suffering in Silence: media coverage of war and famine in the Sudan", in: Robert I. Rotberg and Thomas G. Weiss (Eds), *From Massacres to Genocide: the media, public policy, and humanitarian crises*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: World Peace Foundation.
- Livingston, Steven (1997) "Clarifying the CNN Effect: an examination of media effects according to type of military intervention", Harvard Research Paper R-18, Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
- Livingston, Steven and Eachus, Todd (1995) "Humanitarian Crisis and US Foreign Policy: Somalia and the CNN effect reconsidered", *Political Communication* 12, pp. 413–29.
- McCombs, Maxwell (1976) "Agenda-Setting Research: a bibliographic essay", *Political Communication Review* 1, pp. 1–7.
- Mermin, Jonathan (1997) "Television News and American Intervention in Somalia: the myth of a media-driven foreign policy", *Political Science Quarterly* 112(3), pp. 385–403.
- Mermin, Jonathan (1999) *Debating War and Peace: media coverage of U.S. intervention in the post-Vietnam era*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Minear, Larry, Scott, Colin and Weiss, Thomas G. (1994) *The News Media, Civil War, and Humanitarian Action*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Moeller, Susan D. (1999) *Compassion Fatigue*, New York: Routledge.
- Robinson, Piers (1999) "The CNN Effect: can the news media drive foreign policy?", *Review of International Studies* 25(2), pp. 301–9.
- Robinson, Piers (2000) "The Policy-Media Interaction Model: measuring media power during humanitarian crisis", *Journal of Peace Research* 37(5), pp. 613–33.
- Rogers, Everett M. & Dearing, James W. (1994) "Agenda-Setting Research: where has it been, where is it going?", in: Doris Graber (Ed.), *Media Power in Politics*, Washington, Congressional Quarterly.
- Shaw, Martin (1996) *Civil Society and Media in Global Crises: representing distant violence*, New York: Pinter.
- Shearer, David (1999) "The Conflict in Central Africa: Africa's great war", *Survival* 41(2), pp. 89–106.

Appendix 1. Average daily media coverage (per cent) by region in 2000

Africa

	BBC	CNN	Le Monde	NYTimes	Yomiuri
North	0.2	0.1	3.1	0.1	0.2
East	1.7	1.0	0.5	1.0	0.3
West	1.8	1.3	3.9	2.3	0.6
Central/South	4.7	3.6	1.9	3.6	0.8
(Total)	8.5	6.0	9.3	6.9	1.9

Americas

North	17.1	23.2	10.1	8.4	18.2
Central	2.7	5.0	1.7	5.0	1.2
South	5.0	5.5	4.3	6.4	4.1
(Total)	24.7	33.6	16.1	19.8	23.4

Asia

West	0.8	0.8	0.6	1.4	0.3
South	3.2	3.7	1.1	3.2	1.7
South-East	3.4	7.1	3.6	4.6	9.8
North-East	3.7	7.0	4.3	11.3	25.9
Oceania	2.4	2.8	0.6	0.3	0.6
(Total)	13.5	21.5	10.2	20.7	38.2

Europe

West	120.5	7.4	21.5	10.9	11.1
Central	8.0	5.2	11.3	9.3	5.1
East	5.5	5.5	9.6	9.4	7.8
(Total)	33.9	18.1	42.5	29.6	24.0

Middle East

(Total)	12.3	13.9	15.4	16.6	7.9
----------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	------------

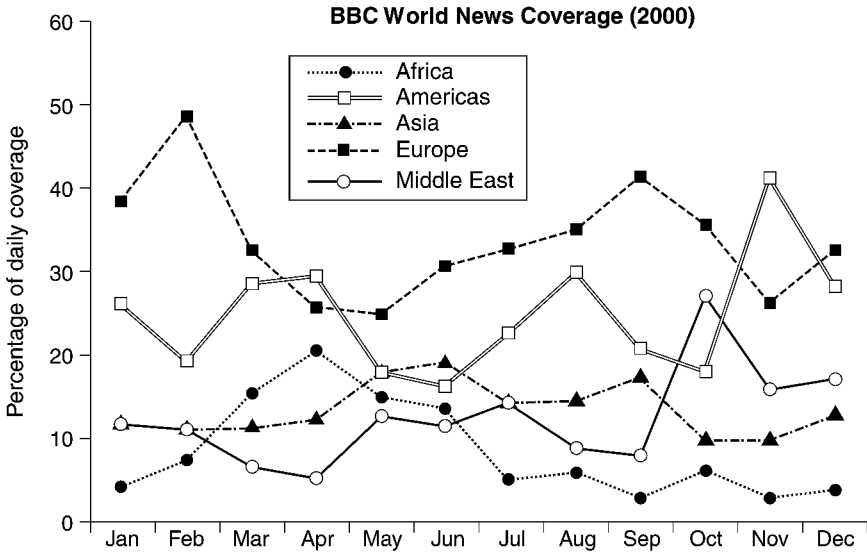
UN

(Total)	1.9	2.2	1.7	2.4	1.2
----------------	------------	------------	------------	------------	------------

Other

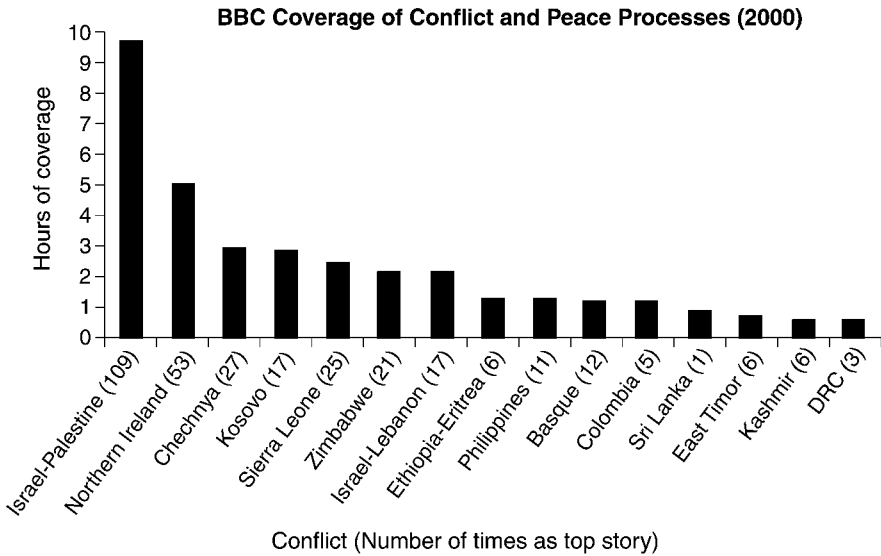
(Total)	5.2	4.6	4.8	4.0	3.5
----------------	------------	------------	------------	------------	------------

Appendix 2.



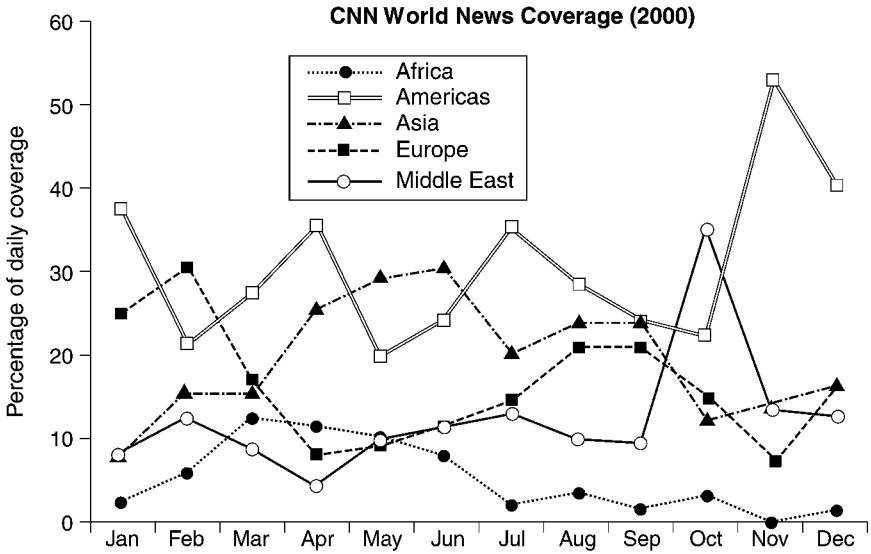
Total BBC average coverage 2000

Africa	America	Asia	Europe	Middle East
8.5%	24.7%	13.5%	33.9%	12.3%



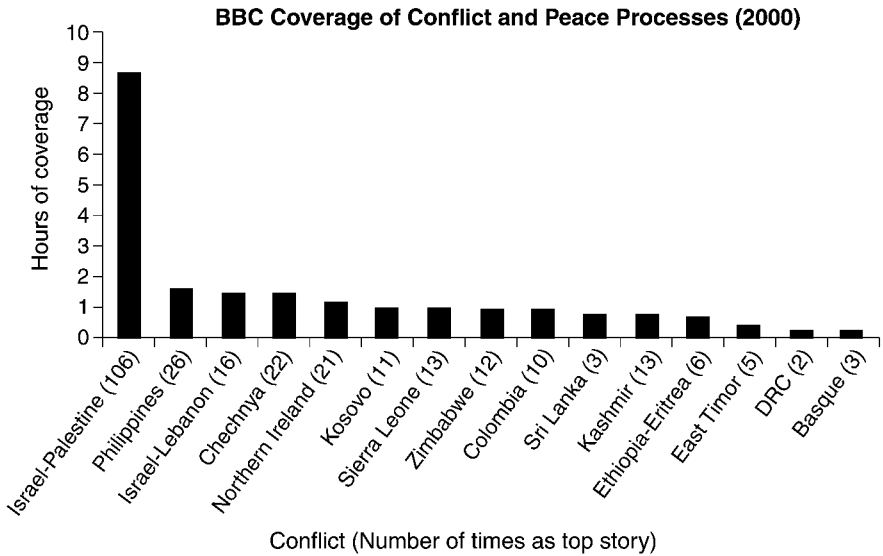
Conflict (Number of times as top story)

Appendix 3.



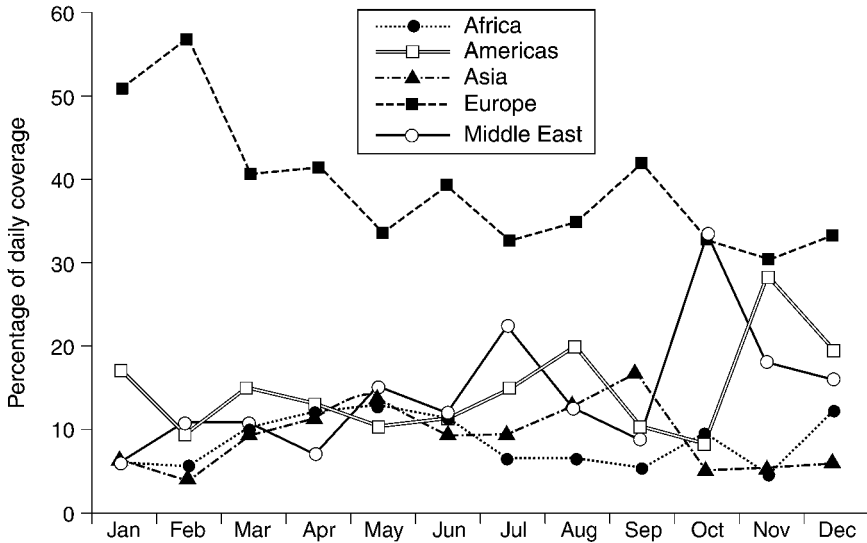
CNN total average coverage (2000)

Africa	America	Asia	Europe	Middle East
6.0%	33.6%	21.5%	18.1%	13.9%



Appendix 4.

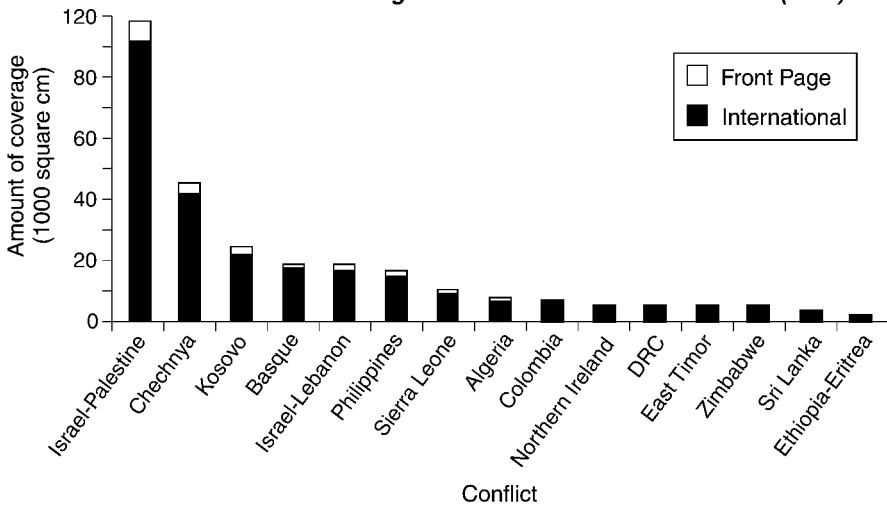
Le Monde International Coverage (2000)



Le Monde total average coverage (2000)

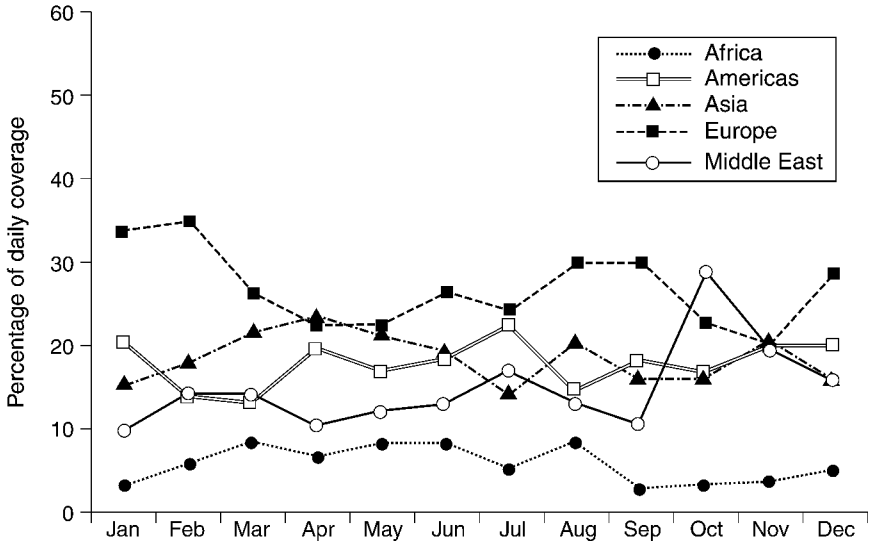
Africa	America	Asia	Europe	Middle East
9.3%	16.1%	10.2%	42.5%	15.4%

Le Monde Coverage of Conflict and Peace Processes (2000)



Appendix 5.

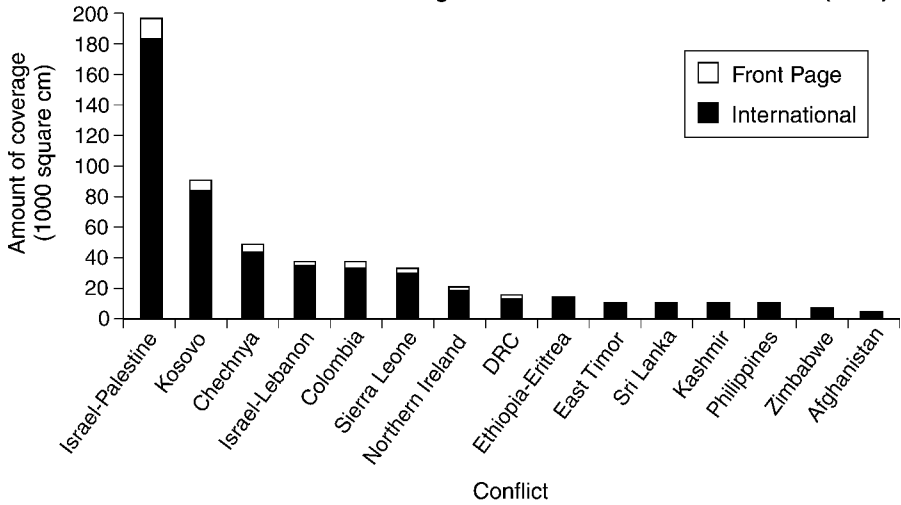
New York Times International Coverage (2000)



New York Times total average coverage (2000)

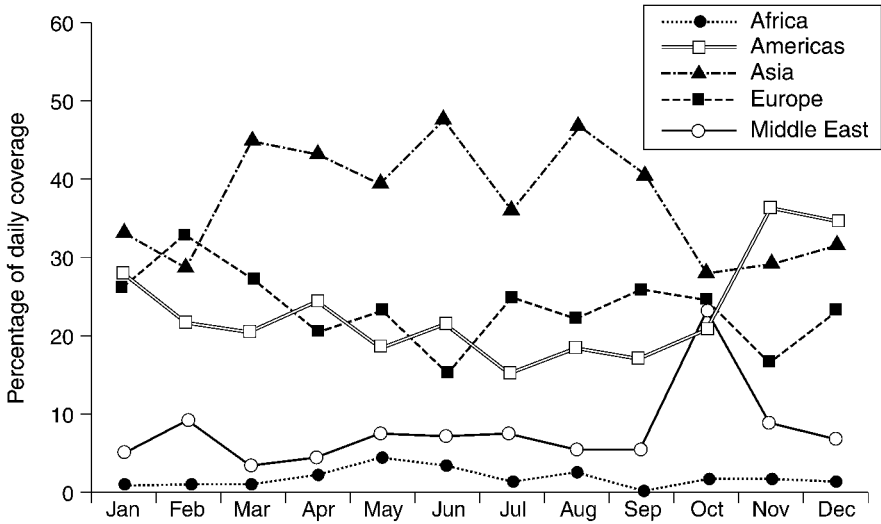
Africa	America	Asia	Europe	Middle East
6.9%	19.8%	20.7%	29.6%	16.6%

New York Times Coverage of Conflict and Peace Processes (2000)



Appendix 6.

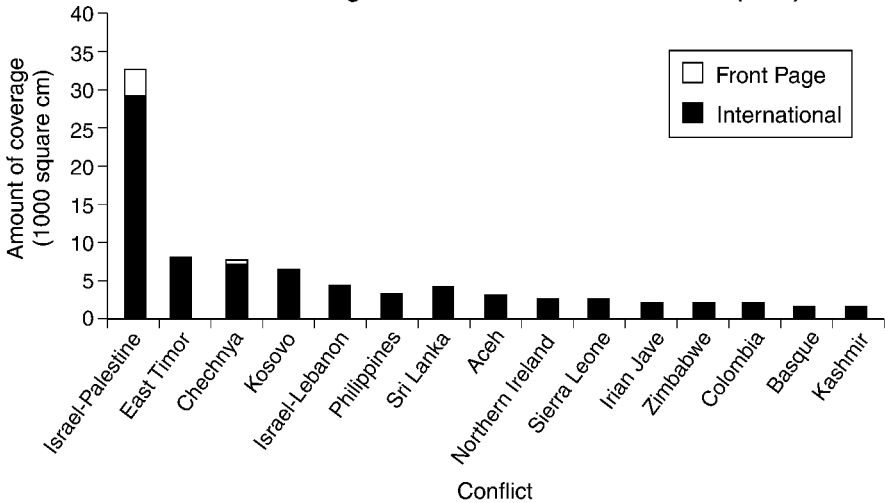
Yomiuri International Coverage (2000)



Yomiuri total average coverage (2000)

Africa	America	Asia	Europe	Middle East
1.9%	23.4%	38.2%	24.0%	7.9%

Yomiuri Coverage of Conflict and Peace Processes (2000)



Copyright of Journalism Studies is the property of Routledge, Ltd. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.