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The impact of news media on foreign policy: the «CNN effect» and the Somali Civil War

The media is important to any discussion related to conflict and peace. It is not just a means of communication, but also a tool, which politicians use to develop, improve, and encourage their own methods and agendas. Since television broadcasts live news 24 hours a day from different conflict zones, understanding media as an independent actor has become a common concern in scholarly and policy circles. The considerable changes in the global media sphere, and proliferation of participants in conflict using the media for their own purpose, demand the creation of a contemporary conceptual and theoretical method of understanding media-conflict interactions. The Global International system was first created in the Second World War, in which events from one state influenced other states despite the distance between them. Contemporary innovations in communication technologies in 1980 and the ideas of Ted Turner helped to create a global network system of news known as the CNN effect. CNN started to broadcast live news from different regions, 24/7 through satellites and cables. For the first time in the history of cable television, CNN was able to report the news of the War in Iraq during 1990–1991 through a live broadcast. Consequently, CNN was established as a global international actor, which could influence other broadcasting networks.

Keywords: foreign policy, the CNN effect, the Somali civil war, US intervention, UN, decision-making process.

Introduction

In later decades, specialists of international affairs have raised the problem that the news media has increased its abilities and opportunities to influence U.S. foreign policy and diplomacy. The CNN effect (CNN curve or CNN factor), and the influence of these contemporary global and real time news media is considered significant, but it may not be profound [1]. Two important factors could explain this effect. The first is the end of the Cold War, when the United States needed a rational way to present its foreign policy. The second key factor is technological development. The progression of communication technology has generated a capacity and opportunity to broadcast live news from everywhere. Although different symposia, articles, research studies, and books have been dedicated to the CNN effect, establishing a clear definition of it has been minimal in most cases. This could be because of the inaccurate 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» [1; 1]. Before analyzing the CNN effect theory in depth, a background overview of the civil war in Somalia will be explained.

Somalia was a very important region for the US and Soviet Union during the Cold War, because country is located close to Middle East oil supplies and sea-lanes. In January 1991, the struggle between rebel troops and government forces reached the capital city Mogadishu and Somalia was destroyed by civil war. Before the intervention in March 1991, the Assistant Secretary of State, Herman Cohen, declared Somalia in a state of disaster, and the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) started to fund relief attempts. Dur-

ing this time, US media attention increased considerably in response to the famine and civil war in Somalia [2]. Operation Provide Relief to Somalia demonstrated the political commitment of the Bush presidential administration to the war-torn region. Although airlift relief attempted to provide aid, the situation in country remained difficult. Consequently, 500 UN troops, four US warships and 2100 submarines were provided [3]. Despite these efforts, when the 1992 presidential election campaign started, the news about Somalia disappeared from the networks. According to Mermin [2], between September 19 and November 8, news about Somalia was given just 250 seconds across major channels. However, Operation Restore Hope was launched on 9 December 1992, and approximately 28,000 US forces were established in Mogadishu [4], in what was described by *Le Monde* «as the most media saturated (mediatisé) landing in military history» [5; 45]. President Bush officially announced on television that US troops would be sent and caused extensive media attention [6].

In February 1993, the Bush administration stated that security in Somalia had been considerably restored, and they began preparing to transfer their relief and peacekeeping mission to the UN (UNOSOM II) in May, despite the protests of followers of Farah Aidid, who complained that UN peacekeepers supported their enemies. After the transition of the mission, UN forces were subject to critical attacks. In June 1993, more than twenty Pakistani soldiers, who were UN peacekeepers, were violently killed, supposedly by supporters of Aidid. Although the UN tried to locate those responsible for these attacks, the number of casualties continued to increase, and President Clinton decided to send approximately 400 army rangers to Somalia to capture Aidid. The television images broadcast how supporters of Aidid dragged the ranger through the streets of Mogadishu. After this, Clinton promised to send reinforcements to Somalia, but declared that he would withdraw army troops from Somalia until 1994 [7]. Before this incident, the public supported the deployment of the US army, but after the casualties, support collapsed and the elite troops were forced to withdraw the army from Somalia.

Methodology

The first objective of this essay is to clarify what is meant by the CNN effect, and its impact on foreign intervention in military conflict, which, according to Hawkins [8; 225], is «increasingly coming under academic scrutiny». To analyze the CNN effect as a theory in depth, this paper investigates the case of US intervention in Somalia. The purpose of the research is to understand the scope and character of the influence of television on foreign policy decision making, if it exists. There are two possible outcomes to the investigation. The first one is that «independent journalistic initiatives put Somalia in the news» [3; 386]. The second is that news related to Somalia only became of interest to foreign policy makers because of the contributions made by independent journalists. Firstly, the explanation of the CNN effect will be presented. Secondly, the historical background of the civil war in Somalia will be discussed in response to the CNN effect. Then the next two sections will demonstrate the potential significance and weakness of the CNN effect in the case of US intervention in Somalia. Finally, the role of the CNN effect and its impact on the foreign policy decision making process will be concluded.

This study the qualitative data approach in its discursive analysis, as well as the epistemological approach. The articles for current research were selected using a key word of the main topic through online journal databases EBSCOhost and JSTOR. In addition, Google Scholar was very useful to facilitate search about the impact of news media on the foreign policy decision-making process and to investigate the case of US intervention in Somalia. All the selected articles were reviewed and analysed separately. Furthermore, articles were coded by using a Cornell note taking method. Cornell note taking method has identified the data, key words, statistics, facts and authors' stances in order to simplify analysis. In conclusion, the information from the articles was evaluated and presented in the discussion part.

Discussion

According to Robinson [9], both realists and humanitarians believe that the news media drives foreign policy; except Rotberg and Weiss [9], who assumed that the media does not affect government policy. Carruthers [2; 23] stated in her work *Media at War*, «most agree that television coverage of foreign events has some impact on policy-making. The dispute is over when, why and to what degree». After Vietnam, Somalia is considered a case where the media influenced government policy. According to Gilboa [10; 35], «the US intervention in Somalia has been the second battleground for studies of the CNN effect, and it also has yielded similar controversial results». With regard to the framing of the media reports, most of them supported the decision of intervention and portrayed a positive perspective, such as the «Mission to Soma-

lia» [11], or the extreme actions taken to protect and save the lives of people. For instance, according to Robinson [2], of 45 articles which referred to the policy regarding Somalia, 30 supported the intervention, while just eight of them were very critical. Many reports about the country used emotive language such as «starving Somalis gather in the hope of nourishment», or «Somalia's misery» [2; 56]. While Gowing quoted Marlin Fitzwater, the White House Press Secretary: «the pressure was too great, TV tipped us over the top...I could not stand to eat my dinner watching TV at night» [2; 55]. In this context, the decision of intervention can be considered the results of a strong CNN effect.

Some journalists, such as Strobel [12], have emphasized the multiplicity of factors which caused the intervention, while supporting the strong CNN effect thesis with regard to Somalia. According to Natsios [12], Bush approved of the notion that the news media coverage about starving children in Somalia caused motivation to intervene. Similarly, Mandelbaum also reported that images of the starving children shown by television networks motivated the United States to intervene, and Shattuck observed the «curve effect», which meant that the media propelled the US troops into Somalia and also led them out [10; 35]. Some senior officials have confessed to the impact of the news media coverage on policy making decision. For instance, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said that the CNN effect could be considered the sixteenth state member of the Security Council of the UN [10]. While other scholars and policy makers have given more complex visions of the effect. Colin Powell noticed that a live broadcast could not change foreign policy completely, but it would create the environment in which foreign policy is made [10]. In turn, Anthony Lake, the National Security Advisor for the Clinton administration, confessed that television images could drive the people's opinions, therefore public pressure also has an important role in the decision of whether to intervene or not [10]. Furthermore, other factors such as outcome and feasibility were realized as an important.

Compared to other interventions such as Rwanda, Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo, the Somalian case was not the subject of public opinion before the Bush administration declared their decision to deploy the US army [6]. The US population reported their unqualified approval for the intervention when the mission appeared a quick, low-cost undertaking, with the purpose of supplying help. In this context, Hawkins [8] conducted a study about agenda setting function, which concentrated on three factors: public, media, and policy agenda. His research supported the hypothesis that the media influences public agenda and policy agenda, and public agenda influences policy agenda [8].

Before the intervention in Somalia, the New York Times [13], in their article 'Separate states aren't the answer in Somalia', stated that Somalia always was and should stay a unitary republic with a strong local government. Later, the publication [14] printed the article 'The tragedy in Somalia can't wait for Clinton', and indicated the responsibility of the international community to stop the crisis by demanding to not forsake the country. In this context, the humanitarian workers, foreign people and Somalis were under threat, and thousands of people were at risk from starvation. Furthermore, the article blamed the anarchic system of Somalia and the sluggishness of the UN. Moreover, in December 1992, the magazine's piece 'Give diplomacy a chance to revamp Somalia' claimed that the main purpose of the United Nations in Somalia was to support Somalis in creating a new society [15]. Another article by the New York Times [11], 'Mission to Somalia; excerpts from a resolution on delivering Somalia aid', declared that the Security Council considered the crisis in Somalia unique and complicated, which constituted a threat to international peace and security, and required an immediate response.

According to ABC's 'US sends aid to Somalia' [16], President Bush believed that only the US could help to deliver the tons of food needed to Somalia, and save thousands of lives, especially those of starving children. When mission Operation Restore Hope began, ABC's piece 'Marines land in Somalia' [17] broadcast a video from Somalia showing the US marines arriving in the country. ABC asked a simple question to the Somalis, other journalists and soldiers, «What happened today?» to memorialize the moment. Most of the marines shared their emotions in a positive way, expressing pride in being American, and happiness to be in Somalia helping them with their relief mission, and the Somalis felt supported.

In his important research, Cohen [18] wrote that television has demonstrated its power to move policy makers. Furthermore, he [18; 10] argued that news media coverage of Somalia «mobilized the conscience of the nation's public institutions, compelling the government into a policy of intervention for humanitarian reasons». Even though the role of the CNN effect was criticized for being exaggerated in the Somalian case, it is noted that even sceptics admitted that television was engaged in policy decisions relating to Somalia. However, Livingston and Eachus [10] claimed that the US intervention in Somalia was an outcome of diplomatic and bureaucratic processes, which will be analyzed as a weak CNN effect further.

According to Livingston [1], many policy-makers, journalists, and other scholars do not believe that the media has a profound influence on foreign policy decision making. Furthermore, that a key factor in the media's effect on foreign policy is not the presence or absence of the camera, but the presence or absence of political leadership in foreign policy. Editor of *Foreign Policy*, James Hoge [1; 2] argued that «television news has a tactical effect from time to time, but not a strategic one; that it operates more when humanitarian issues are». This point is considered important because it suggests that the effects of news media on foreign policy is limited and conditional, and depend on foreign policy types and objectives [1]. Hawkins [8; 225] suggested the «reverse CNN factor», in which media index the news referring to policy makers. Some media corporations with low budgets cannot gather news, therefore they interview officials from government, which is deemed to be a less expensive alternative to travelling to the place of conflict. Furthermore, the opinion of government officials is mostly perceived as reliable. The outcome on what will become news depends on the government officials, which appears mutually beneficial.

According to Natsios [1; 7], who managed the Bush administration's humanitarian relief effort in Somalia, an analysis of US involvement in other states' humanitarian crisis would show 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». In his important research, Livingston [1] declared that humanitarian operations are organized without news media attention. For instance, in 1991, the United States Agency for International Development's office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and Food for Peace Program supplied about 12,000 tons of food to Somalia. Moreover, this humanitarian relief was before the news media revealed the crisis in the country. «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» [1; 8].

Mermin [3] argued that there is no doubt that news about Somalia was broadcast on television before the Bush administration decided to intervene. However, he also asserts that Somalia first appeared in the news after major changes were made to US foreign policy between August and November 1992 in the US. Furthermore, Mermin [3] claimed that Somalia received more news media coverage between August 14 and September (approximately 55 minutes, about 18 minutes a week) from three major television networks: ABC, NBC and CBC. The media reported on the relief preparations made by the US to Somalia, and the majority of news reports included the video from Somalia. In addition, notwithstanding the US military operation in Somalia and the video of starving children, Somalia was not at the first place of the news in CBC, NBC, ABC between January and November 25 during 1992. Also, Mermin [10] did not support Cohen [18] and considered the effect of television as a myth and argued that the US intervention in Somalia is not proof that television coverage can move the government; instead, it is a clear example of how the government can control the news media. If the television pushed the US into Somalia, it was because of government officials — senators, and a house committee within the Bush administration — who made significant attempts to report the situation in Somalia as a desperate crisis [3].

Similarly, Riley [10] acknowledged that in cases such as Somalia, political leaders set the agenda of news media, not otherwise. If scholars who support the strong effect of CNN on humanitarian interventions cannot offer prove, then their assertions become less convincing. In that case, the important role of policy certainly will be acknowledged. Quoting Kofi Annan [9; 305], Gowing stated: «if authority have a clear policy, television will have a little impact on foreign policy». However, Srtobel [12; 219] claimed that the effect of the media is connected to the «unity of the existing policy». Thus, when policy is not developed or clearly defined, the media could have an effect on policy decision; otherwise, the media influence on foreign policy decreases when strategic interests are increased, and the capacity of influence is be controlled.

According to Livingston [8], the war in Somalia attracted more media attention than the situation in Sudan. He argued that this was because in order to cover Somalia, journalists had to travel one day through Kenya, whereas coverage of the Sudan demanded three days' travel. Indeed, media corporations were competitive because of cost considerations. For instance, if broadcasting a news story required more than three days' travel, it would not be immediate or up to date. Therefore, producers and editors did not include it. Moreover, most of the conflict areas were far from infrastructure. On the other hand, the areas which did not require long travelling distance were given much more attention by the media.

Another issue is about permission to access information. It is a common situation in conflict areas that journalists are restricted and limited to take reliable information. This diminishes the ability of foreign journalists to effectively describe the conflict. Furthermore, conflict areas are always hazardous, which leads to a lack of news coverage. It is important to mention Wolfsfeld's [19; 81–95] theory of the «Political Contest Model», in which he claimed that the political process has an influence on the media rather than the media

on political process. In response to understanding the intervention in Somalia as a case of strong CNN effect, the outcomes reveal little support of this concept. Before 25 November 1992, journalists did not pay considerable attention to the deployment of US forces. For instance, the average number of articles issued by the *Washington Post* and *the New York Times* was 0.76 and front-page coverage was dedicated to Somalia in only two cases [20].

While CBS dedicated just 3 minutes 30 seconds to the situation over 21 days. It is difficult to imagine that such scant attention from journalists could drive the public and the government. Less than one article and approximately 9 seconds of air time per day could not prove that the media compelled politicians to intervene [8]. The assumption of Mermin [1997:385–403] that the media caused politicians to deploy forces in Somalia, is not supported by these findings. According to their argument, some government officials attracted media attention to Somalia in order to compel government policy makers to intervene. Furthermore, they proposed that if media coverage has an influence on government foreign policy, a lack of media coverage could also be a factor in lack of policy [8]. However, in Somalia's case, the level of media coverage was not high enough to require the attention of government officials. Contrary to common understanding and research, it is unlikely that the media was a key factor in Operation Restore Hope [20].

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is possible that real-time television played some part in the decision of the US government to intervene in Somalia. However, the evidence in this paper has demonstrated that news and stories about Somalia appeared after the changes made to US foreign policy in the August and autumn of 1992. This undoubtedly stimulated journalists to cover Somalia, but the decision to do so was set in Washington. Thus, while Somalia is often considered an example of the media's influence on government policy and its power to change government decisions, this paper presents that the government has the power to set the news agenda, and television is a key part of foreign policy. Nevertheless, the role of the media in foreign policy should not be oversimplified, either by overstating the policy agenda of the government or the media. Both have an influence, which should be examined and analyzed from different perspectives. Journalists could set the news agenda in deciding what kind of information to report or ignore, but it is vital to consider which frameworks they follow during that process. In this context, most studies have revealed that journalists move towards politicians and authority officials for guidance over the content of the news. This point refers to the other side of the CNN effect, which requires more academic attention.

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БАҚ-тың сыртқы саясатқа әсері: Сомалидегі азаматтық соғыс және «CNN ықпалы»

Қақтығыстар мен бейбітшілікке қатысты кез келген мәселені талқылауда бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарының (БАҚ) маңызы зор. БАҚ тек байланыс құралы ғана емес, сонымен қатар саясаткерлер үшін өздерінің әдістері мен бағдарламаларын құрастырып жетілдіру мақсатында пайдаланатын құрал. Теледидар түрлі қақтығыстар аймағынан тәулік бойы жаңалықтар тарата бастағалы бері, бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарын дербес актор ретінде түсініп тану ғылыми және саяси ортада қиындықтар тудырып отыр. Жаһандық медиасаладағы маңызды өзгерістер және БАҚ-ты өз мақсаттары үшін пайдаланатын қақтығыстарға қатысушылардың санының артуының себебінен, медиа қақтығыстардың өзара әрекетін түсіну мақсатында заманауи тұжырымдамалық және теориялық әдістің құрастырылуы талап етіліп отыр. Жаһандық халықаралық жүйе ең алғаш рет екінші дүниежүзілік соғыс кезінде пайда болды, яғни қашықтыққа қарамастан, бір мемлекеттегі оқиғалар басқа мемлекеттердің ішкі және сыртқы саясатына ықпал ете алатын үдеріске тұспа тұс келді. 1980 жж. коммуникациялық технологиялардағы заманауи инновациялар және Тед Тернердің идеялары «CNN эффектісі» деп аталатын ғаламдық желілік жаңалықтар жүйесін құруға көмектесті. CNN тәулік бойы спутниктер мен кабельдер арқылы әртүрлі аймақтардан тікелей эфир жүргізе бастады. Кабельді теледидар тарихында CNN тұңғыш рет 1990–1991 жж. Ирак соғысына қатысты жаңалықтарды тікелей эфир арқылы көрсете бастады. Демек, CNN басқа хабар тарату желілеріне әсер ете алатын жаһандық халықаралық актор ретінде құрылды деп тұжырымдауға болады.

Кілт сөздер: сыртқы саясат, CNN ықпалы, Сомалидегі азаматтық соғыс, АҚШ интервенциясы, БҰҰ, шешім қабылдау үдерісі.

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Влияние СМИ на внешнюю политику: гражданская война в Сомали и «эффект CNN»

Средства массовой информации важны для любой дискуссии, связанной с конфликтом и миром. Это не просто средство общения, но и инструмент, который политики используют для разработки, совершенствования и поощрения своих собственных методов и программ. С тех пор, как телевидение транслирует новости в прямом эфире 24 часа в сутки из разных зон конфликта, понимание СМИ как независимого субъекта стало общей проблемой в научных и политических кругах. Значительные изменения в глобальной медиасфере и рост числа участников конфликта, использующих средства массовой информации в своих целях, требуют создания современного концептуального и теоретического метода понимания медийно-конфликтных взаимодействий. Глобальная международная система была впервые создана во время Второй мировой войны, когда события из одного государства влияли на другие государства, несмотря на расстояние между ними. Современные инновации в коммуникационных технологиях 1980 г. и идеи Теда Тернера помогли создать глобальную сетевую систему новостей, известную как «эффект CNN». CNN начал транслировать прямые новости из разных регионов, 24/7 через спутники и кабели. Впервые в истории кабельного телевидения CNN смогла сообщить новости в прямом эфире о войне в Ираке в 1990–1991 гг. Следовательно, CNN был создан как глобальный международный актор, который может влиять на другие вещательные сети.

Ключевые слова: внешняя политика, «эффект CNN», гражданская война в Сомали, интервенция США, ООН, процесс принятия решений.