

Television News and U.S. Foreign Policy Constraints of Real-Time Coverage

Eytan Gilboa

This study argues that the main approaches used to investigate the impact of television news on U.S. foreign policy making including the “CNN effect” and “news management” have missed several significant effects. This work employs an approach that views the media impact in terms of constraints real-time television coverage imposes on the policy-making process. These include shortening of the time available for policy making and demanding immediate response to crises and events, excluding experts and diplomats, facilitating diplomatic manipulations, creating high expectations, broadcasting deficient reports, and making instant judgments. The work presents a few actual examples to demonstrate each constraint. The constraints have created challenges and dilemmas for political leaders and government officials, and the article suggests several ways policymakers can use to cope with them.

Keywords: *television news; foreign policy making; global communication; CNN; reporting terrorism; media diplomacy; media and national security; propaganda and disinformation; foreign news coverage; communication strategies*

Scholars have employed traditional and new theoretical approaches to explore the complex dynamic relationship between the media and foreign policy making, each focusing on a particular function or effect.¹ These include the classic “watchdog journalism,” when the media evaluate and criticize policy; the “CNN effect,” when the media drive policy; and the “manufacturing consent” theory and the “news management” function, when the media fully support and serve policy. A fourth approach, the “mutual exploitation” model, suggests that “policymaking cannot be done without the media, nor can the media cover international affairs without government cooperation.” Consequently, the government and the media incorporate each other into their own existence, “sometimes for mutual benefit, sometimes for mutual injury, often both at the same time” (O’Hefferman 1993, 189).

Press/Politics 8(4):97-113

DOI: 10.1177/1081180X03256576

© 2003 by the President and the Fellows of Harvard College

The impact of television news on the formulation and conduct of American foreign and defense policy has been primarily analyzed in recent years within two of these fundamental frameworks: news management and the CNN effect. *News management* refers to government's control of information and manipulation of the mass media as demonstrated in recent wars and military operations such as the 1991 Gulf War, Kosovo, and Afghanistan (Carruthers 2000). The American employment of "embedded journalism" in the 2003 war in Iraq is also a dramatic example of this mode of media-policy relationship.² *News management* means that the media primarily functions as a tool in the hands of policymakers.

Conversely, commentators and scholars employ the CNN effect to describe television coverage, primarily of horrific humanitarian disasters, that forces policymakers to take actions they otherwise would not have, such as military intervention (Robinson 2002). This phenomenon means that the media determines the national interest and usurps policy making from elected and appointed officials. Politicians, officials, journalists, and scholars have argued that the CNN effect caused the U.S. and Western interventions in Northern Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Unfortunately, the focus on news management and the CNN effect, like most binaries, has obscured the widely varied subtleties around and between these poles of analysis, deflecting attention from several effects of domestic and global networks. Close examination of decision making reveals less visible but not less significant effects that exist between these polarities.

This work views the media-foreign policy relationship in terms of constraints.³ Real-time television coverage is able to constrain the policy process primarily because of the high speed of broadcasting and transmission information. Over the course of the twentieth century, technology has reduced the time of information transmission from weeks to minutes. The time American presidents had to officially respond to the construction and destruction of the Berlin Wall clearly demonstrates this constraint. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy had the luxury of waiting eight days before making the first American official statement on the construction of the Wall. In 1989, President George Bush felt impelled to comment after less than eight hours on the destruction of the Wall. In less than thirty years, the time for policy making and policy response has dramatically shrunk.

Senior policymakers acknowledge the effects the twenty-four-hour global news coverage have on policy making. Former secretary of state James Baker identified three effects, two negative and one positive. He mentioned as negative effects the need to respond quickly to events without sufficient time to consider options and the need to cope with television's attempts to determine the national interest; as the positive effect, he mentioned the option of using global television for fast and direct communication with foreign leaders (Kalb 1996: 7).⁴ During the 1991 Gulf War, Baker used CNN to quickly communicate the last U.S. ultimatum to Saddam Hussein (Neuman 1996: 2). This option, however, is a double-

edged sword in that opponents can also use it to advance their goals. As this work will demonstrate, Iraq also used CNN to undermine U.S. policy.

Former secretary of state Madeleine Albright noticed this duality. She said that global television coverage contributes to policy making “because you know what’s going on and there is a real-time sense about things,” but she added that

it makes you have to respond to events much faster than it might be prudent, because facts may come in incorrect, but you don’t have time to put them in context, so you respond just to a little nugget of fact, and when you learn the context later, things change. (Kralev 2001: 105)

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice also views the media as “a problem in policymaking” because “the media wants to know what the president has done for world peace today,” while implementation often takes consistent long-term effort, “and if you are out there, having to report every day what you are doing is not very helpful” (Kralev 2000a: 88).

Secretary of State Colin Powell has argued that “live television coverage doesn’t change the policy, but it does create the environment in which the policy is made” (McNulty 1993: 80). This article specifically explores how domestic and global television news has affected the foreign policy making environment. It identifies and analyzes six major constraints of real-time coverage: shortening of the time available for policy making and demanding immediate response to crises and events, excluding experts and diplomats, facilitating diplomatic manipulations, creating high expectations, broadcasting deficient reports, and making instant judgments. The work presents a few examples to demonstrate each constraint. The methodology includes systematic analysis of statements by the participants in the process: leaders, government officials, and journalists found in memoirs, writings, interviews, and proclamations. The concluding section suggests several ways policymakers can use to meet the challenges of real-time television news coverage.

I. Imposing Snap Decisions

Scholars, officials, and journalists have expressed concern about the effect domestic and global television coverage is having on the pace of policy making. Beschloss (1993) argued that the speed of this coverage may force hurried responses based on intuition rather than on careful extensive policy deliberation, and this may lead to dangerous policy mistakes. He asked whether under the pressure of global television President Kennedy would have had the time to carefully consider options to resolve the highly inflammable Cuban missile crisis. Kennedy had thirteen days to make decisions and to negotiate an acceptable agreement with the Soviets to end the crisis. President Bill Clinton’s press

secretary, Dee Dee Myers, also contrasted the time Kennedy had to make decisions in the Cuban crisis with today's practice. She argued,

If that happened now, Bill Clinton would have about 30 minutes, and Wolf Blitzer [CNN Reporter] and everybody else would be standing out on the North Lawn of the White House demanding action, or saying "the president is indecisive." So I worry that the time allowed leaders in crisis to make good decisions is compressed. That's a troubling development. (Patterson 2000: 130–31)

When asked to identify changes in the conduct of foreign policy, former secretary of state Lawrence Eagleburger said, "The public hears of an event now in real time, before the State Department has had time to think about it. Consequently, we find ourselves reacting before we've had time to think" (Pearce 1995: 18). In this case, journalists agreed with both scholars and public officials. For example, Daniel Schorr observed,

Think about the communication age we live in and the way nail-biting officials must make fateful decisions without time to think. And, if you are like me, you will worry a little bit when powerful people make snap decisions, trying to keep up with the information curve.⁵

The networks' pressure for an immediate response, however, is not always automatic. It depends on the circumstances of the challenge or the threat. Despite the dramatic coverage of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September 2001, the media pressure was not powerful enough to require an immediate retaliation, and President George W. Bush took the time necessary to develop an adequate response.⁶ It is also difficult to clearly correlate good decisions with the length of time available for policy making. Great leaders may make the right decision fast and others may make wrong decisions even when they have weeks to deliberate all their options. It is logical to assume, however, that in most cases, the more the time leaders have for collecting information, consultation, and thinking, the greater is their chance to avoid major mistakes.

The observations made by Beschloss, Myers, Eagleburger, and Schorr point to a difficult dilemma political leaders often face. If they respond immediately without taking the time to carefully consider policy options, they may make a mistake. However, if they insist they need more time to think, or have no comment for the time being, they create the impression both at home and abroad of confusion or of losing control over events. President Jimmy Carter's counsel, Lloyd Cutler (1984: 224), explained that if a president does not respond quickly to a crisis, the networks may report that his "advisers are divided, that the president cannot make up his mind, or that while the president hesitates, his political opponents know exactly what to do."

Former State Department spokesman James Rubin also said that if the government does not have an immediate available position, the media tend “to give a lot of attention to stories like ‘Administration surprised by development X,’ or ‘administration at a loss to respond to development Y.’ ” Rubin added that he would like the media to give policymakers more time to respond, “recognizing that a considered response might take a day or two rather than an hour or two” (Kralev 2000b: 110). In general, however, the media do not follow this plea and do apply pressure on policymakers to announce a policy fast. Leaders continue to face the time pressure dilemma and tend to resolve it by providing some response rather than requesting additional time to deliberate on a decision. Yet an immediate response creates problems of its own, in that a statement on television becomes a commitment to a policy that leaders may find difficult to reverse or even change, if after careful consideration they decide that is the tack to take.

2. Excluding Diplomats and Experts

In traditional diplomacy, ambassadors and state representatives dominated several important areas of diplomacy: representing their countries, communicating their government’s positions, negotiating and concluding agreements, gathering information about the countries to which they were posted, and recommending actions to policymakers back home. But the communication and information revolutions have substantially eroded the diplomats’ central position in all four areas (Gilboa 2000; Potter 2002). In many recent crises, global television coverage has replaced ambassadors and experts as the source of critical information and evaluation on what is happening in the world. During the 1991 Russian coup attempt, a senior American official told David Hoffman of the *Washington Post* that “diplomatic communications just can’t keep up with CNN.”⁷ Richard Haass, a former official of the National Security Council and director of policy planning at the State Department, has also complained that “he could see an event or speech live on CNN at 2:00 p.m. but he had to wait three hours or more before the CIA could deliver its own updated news and commentary to the NSC office” (McNulty 1993: 73). In view of these gaps, no wonder that President George Bush’s press secretary, Marlin Fitzwater (McNulty 1993: 73), admitted that in many international crises, “We virtually cut out the State Department and the desk officers. . . . Their reports are still important, but they often don’t get here in time for the basic decisions to be made.” Bush himself admitted during the 1990–91 Gulf crisis, “I learn more from CNN than I do from the CIA” (Friedland 1992: 7–8).

Sometimes conventional diplomatic messages, regardless of their depth and sophistication, do not have the same effect on policymakers as do televised images from the field. British former secretary of state Douglas Hurd acknowledged that “when it comes to a distant but important conflict, even all the

Foreign Office cables do not have the same impact as a couple of minutes of news video" (Hopkinson 1993: 11). Fitzwater recalled that during the violence in Tiananmen Square, reports and cables were coming in from the American embassy in Beijing, "but they did not have the sting, the demand for a government response that the television pictures had" (Hoge 1994: 140). Similarly, during the 1991 Russian coup attempt, Boris Yeltsin's phone messages to Washington did not sufficiently impress Bush until the actual arrival of television broadcasts from Moscow showing Yeltsin's visible and viable resistance (Donovan and Scherer 1992: 317).

Live coverage of world events, the dramatic appeal of pictures, and the pressure on leaders to quickly adopt policy on the frenetic schedule of television programming challenge the foreign affairs bureaucracy. Officials and experts face the following dilemma: how to compete effectively with real-time information provided on the screen without compromising professional standards of analysis and recommendations. If foreign policy experts, military and intelligence officers, and diplomats make a fast analysis based on incomplete information and severe time pressure, they might make bad policy recommendations. Conversely, if they take the necessary time to carefully verify and integrate information and ideas from a variety of sources, and produce in-depth reliable reports and recommendations, these may be irrelevant if policymakers have to make immediate decisions in response to challenges and pressure emanating from coverage on national and global television.

3. Facilitating Diplomatic Manipulations

Global television has created new opportunities for worldwide propaganda, misinformation, and diplomatic manipulations. For example, leaders make what is described as a significant statement that is broadcast live on local or global television, hoping that what they say will in turn assume a dynamic of its own and undermine and confuse the plans of the rival side. Two examples from American-Iraqi confrontations illustrate this challenge. During the 1991 Gulf War, just before the beginning of the ground assault, Saddam Hussein made a statement designed to create the impression that he was ready to accept the allied conditions to end the war. Television anchors and reporters around the world quickly suggested that the war might be over, and leaders of U.S. allies jammed the White House switchboard to learn what the United States intended to do.

Bush thought Hussein's peace plan was false but was worried that the Iraqi leader might snatch "a victory from the jaws of certain defeat" (Bush and Scowcroft 1998: 474–75). Secretary of State Baker and he felt they had less than thirty minutes to dismiss the Iraqi deal or risk the disintegration of the coalition fighting Hussein. According to McNulty (1993: 71), Bush told the officials he assembled to deal with this challenge, "We've got to get on the air fast to answer

all these people who either don't know what to do or want us to do something we don't want to do." Bush wanted to inform all twenty-six members of the international coalition confronting Iraq of the White House's position. Fitzwater suggested that the quickest and most effective way for transmitting this evaluation was CNN, because "all countries in the world had it and were watching it on a real-time basis" (Wriston 1997: 174). In this particular case, both Hussein's challenge and Bush's response played on global television, but Bush won the game. He correctly identified the challenge and effectively neutralized it.

On Saturday November 14, 1998, Saddam Hussein was much more successful in employing a similar tactic. In response to his defiance of UN resolutions on inspection and dismantling of weapons of mass destruction, Clinton authorized a military attack on Iraq. U.S. bombers were already in the air when CNN's reporter in Baghdad Brent Sadler broadcast live a statement from an Iraqi official who said his government "positively" responded to an urgent letter UN Secretary General Kofi Annan sent to Hussein asking him to let the weapons inspectors come back. The Iraqi official added that the Iraqi government had faxed a commitment to that effect to the UN (Feist 2001: 715–16). An official of the National Security Council watched this CNN live report and immediately called National Security Adviser Samuel Berger, who informed Clinton about the broadcast. While monitoring CNN for details, Clinton consulted with his senior advisers and immediately issued an order to abort the mission. Despite the renewed Iraqi commitment, Hussein continued to ignore the UN inspection resolutions, and the United States continued to demand that he comply with them. In this case, a broadcast on CNN prevented an action that was already under way.

4. Creating High Expectations

The "video clip pace" of global television coverage may create high expectations for instant results in both warfare and diplomacy. Former State Department spokesperson James Rubin said,

The impatience of the media is one of the phenomena of the 24-hour news cycle. Three times a day, a new story line has to develop. And that creates an institutional impatience, where policies that require time... are not given their full fair view. (Fischer 2000: 39)

War, diplomacy, and other international processes are especially complex and take time to complete. The public expectations of instant results become dangerous in that failure to meet these expectations may result in huge disappointments and subsequent actions that further complicate international interactions. Wolf Blitzer's reports on CNN from the Pentagon immediately after the beginning of the 1991 Gulf War concerned deeply Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of

Staff Colin Powell (1995: 508) because “it seems as if all that remained was to organize the victory parade.” Powell asked the Pentagon’s spokesperson to tell Blitzer that “this is the beginning of a war, not the end of ball game.” Consequently, Blitzer modified the content and tone of his reports on the war. This exchange exemplifies these challenges and a successful response to them by a senior official.

During the initial phase of the 1999 NATO operations in Kosovo, Secretary of Defense William Cohen faced a similar challenge: “The pressure was on from the press to give us a day-by-day account of how successful you were today. And I think that builds a tempo into a campaign to say wait a minute, this is going to take some time” (Kalb 2000: 8). Cohen’s attempts to deal with this challenge were less successful than Powell’s. A similar challenge appeared in the second week of the 2003 American-led war in Iraq. The U.S. forces slowed down the attack, soldiers were killed and taken prisoner, and the Iraqi government mounted an intensive propaganda campaign. The U.S. media became impatient and critical and thought the war was heading to a major disaster. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was able to deal with the media impatience only because the U.S. and the British armed forces regrouped fast and went on to win a decisive and quick military victory over the forces of Saddam Hussein.

Diplomatic media events, spectacular celebrations of breakthroughs in negotiations between enemies, are significant because they prepare skeptical publics for a new era of cooperation and friendship (Dayan and Katz 1992). On the other hand, because they are so dramatic and exciting, they create high expectations for rapid and efficient progress toward peace. But as American-sponsored Israeli-Arab peace processes demonstrate, even after initial breakthroughs and emotional speeches, difficult and long negotiations are needed to conclude agreements. The gap between the promise of media events and the actual results often create dangerous confusion and disappointments (Gilboa 2002b: 204–7).

The global war against terrorism represents a new major expectation challenge to policymakers. Following the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001, President George W. Bush realized that it would take a long period of time to combat the new fundamentalist Islamic terrorism and, therefore, repeatedly cautioned the public not to expect rapid results and instead to be prepared for a battle that might take years, maybe even a generation. The battle includes the use of economic and diplomatic measures that are less visible, slow to produce results, and difficult to evaluate. However, will the media and the public have the patience to wait years for victories in this campaign that may themselves be unclear and largely rhetorical? Global and local networks have already questioned the results of the war against terrorism and frequently pressed leaders to demonstrate success. No wonder that National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice advised the media to recognize that “world affairs is

not a scoreboard where you keep daily score of winning and losing” (Kralev 2000a: 88).

5. Broadcasting Deficient Reports

The commercial pressures on global and national all news networks have affected the work of editors and journalists in ways that challenge policymakers. Reporters are expected not only to report what they see and hear but also to understand and explain events to audiences around the world, albeit in a manner consistent with the time constraints of television. CBS’s Lesley Stahl (1999: 56) admitted that “our time to reflect on the events we covered, to put them into context, and figure out what was important and was not, was disappearing. This was obviously a momentous change, but little thought was given to the consequences.” Because of technological advances, it is possible today to carry in a few suitcases all the equipment needed to broadcast, and it takes only minutes to prepare for live reporting. Yet fast reporting may be incomplete at best and very inaccurate at worst (Seib 2002: 13).

Editors apply pressure on correspondents to file reports as soon they arrive in a relevant location. Often, though, while reporters are able to transmit pictures, they may not know the context and meaning of events, and do not have the time to absorb, reflect, and explain what they see. This is especially difficult for non-resident reporters, who usually are less familiar with the specific background of an event in a foreign place. However, because of budget cuts in foreign bureaus and news production, increasingly such reporters are dispatched to cover foreign affairs (Utley 1997; Hargreaves 2000; Graber 2002: 342–80).

The new highly accessible and affordable communication technologies allow almost anybody to videotape events. CNN receives footage from local stations as a part of exchange deals, so the origins and biases of a tape can be unclear. In addition, the rise of networks such as the Middle Eastern Al-Jazeera has created a new pool of questionable sources and footage. Thus, editors receive an enormous outpouring of information coming from outside their normal and regular channels and sources. Gowing (2000: 217) called this new phenomenon “the supermarket of war videos,” but the problem is not confined to war coverage. Editors are tempted to use these sources because of the competition and constant pressure to adequately feed the twenty-four-hour news cycle. The problem is how to select under pressure relevant materials, and the dilemma is whether to broadcast pictures that editors may not even know when, where, and how were videotaped.

Marvin Kalb said that the use of foreign video “is one of the more serious problems now facing television news” (Sharkey 1993: 17). He explained that the networks hand out camcorders to political activists around the world and viewers do not know whether video from abroad comprises “honest pictures” or

“pictures taken for political purposes.” NBC’s Tom Wolzien confirmed Kalb’s concern. He said he was worried about overseas video because “by the time the tape gets on the air, nobody has the foggiest idea who made it or whether the pictures were staged” (Sanit 1992: 17). But Rosenstiel (1994: 30) argued that the consequences of this practice are actually far more severe: “The networks’ loss of control over their pictures did more than make life tough: it lessened journalistic standards.” In view of these deficiencies and limitations, many overseas reports may be incomplete, distorted, and even misleading. In extreme cases, leaders who use them as a significant information source may adopt wrong policies. Both policymakers and consumers must take these deficiencies into account.

6. Making Instant Judgments

Many editors think that since numerous networks and newspapers all chase the same facts, the only way to distinguish one report from all the others, other than breaking the news story, is to produce a definitive thought about an event or a process. White House correspondent Kenneth Walsh (1996: 288–89) called this new practice the battle for “insight scoops” and provided several examples to illustrate his observation. Early in his presidency, Clinton ordered an attack on Baghdad, and CNN began to discuss the effects of this action on his presidency even before all the facts of the attack became known. Similarly, in September 1994, Jimmy Carter, Sam Nunn, and Colin Powell announced in a press conference that they had mediated an accord ending the military rule in Haiti and restoring the civilian government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Minutes after the announcement, a reporter called Clinton’s communication director Mark Gearan and told him he was planning to write a story on whether the agreement represented effective diplomatic efforts or a flawed political settlement doomed to failure. Gearan said that this was a “ludicrously premature motion” motivated by “commercial pressure on reporters” to immediately analyze the news. This is a dangerous trend, Gearan told Walsh: “If policymakers make decisions based on how they immediately [will] be judged, in many instances they are making bad decisions.”

The tone of television coverage, not only its contents, may challenge policymakers. Fitzwater (1995: 264) observed that presidents must be very careful in making policy statements when television “sets the tone or mood of response for America. A president has two options: lead that response and set the tone . . . or reflect that tone in some symbolic way.” If a president fails to recognize the television tone of events, he is likely to be judged “as out of touch or out of his head.” Fitzwater ignored a third option: changing or overriding the tone. The Bush reserved approach to the dismantling of the Berlin Wall provides a good example of this constraint. The destruction of the wall was one of the most important events of the twentieth century, and television reporters expected

Bush to immediately declare and celebrate a spectacular American and Western victory in the cold war. Bush thought, however, that he should make only a low key statement to avoid an embarrassment to Gorbachev and other Eastern European leaders that could result in a policy reversal. Consequently, his approach looked uninspired and somewhat apathetic. Fitzwater, however, thought that Bush failed to recognize the tone of the reports on the dismantling of wall.

Representing television journalists in a pool organized to broadcast the president's message, CBS's Lesley Stahl (1999: 355–56) thought, "Bush with what looked like a frown, sat there so limply, he actually listed in his chair. And his voice, instead of expressing the excitement of the moment, whined." Her reports and those of her colleagues reflected these observations. When told that he did not sound elated, Bush replied, "I am not an emotional kind of guy" (Beschloss and Talbott 1993: 135), but on several occasions he also said, "I'm not going to dance on the wall." A decade later, Stahl explained in her book that "Bush's assuring the Soviets was the right approach," but she added, "Surely there was a way to satisfy the soul without threatening Gorbachev. Reagan would have found it." This case exemplifies careful diplomacy and poor communication strategy as Bush and Fitzwater did not even attempt to override the tone set by television for the event.

Discussion

Leaders and officials have always used the press, particularly the "elite newspapers," to obtain information and insights on other countries and world affairs. However, television news is a much more immediate, dramatic, and powerful source. The effect of the faster pace of diplomatic exchanges on the decision-making process is particularly acute in crises. Valuable information, observations, and suggestions from overseas diplomatic and intelligence sources may no longer arrive in time to have the desired influence on decisions, and when information does arrive in time, it competes with dramatic televised images and ongoing reportage of crises and foreign policy issues. Policymakers must also consider the tone of coverage and deal with attempts of foreign leaders to undermine their policies and plans through messages delivered on global television, primarily via the "breaking news" format that further intensifies the pressure for an immediate response.

Before the global communication revolution, a leader could have sent one message through local media to his people and another through foreign media to other peoples. Today, this distinction has disappeared, and a policy statement reaches, at the same time, both local and foreign audiences, including enemies and allies. Often, this audience multiplicity requires a balancing act that in turn may take considerable time to articulate. In addition, the result may have to be somewhat general and vague. The media, however, apply pressure on senior

officials to give them clearer responses, and if journalists do not receive what they want, they become critical of official policy. In the past, when confronted with unfavorable coverage by local networks, leaders invoked patriotism and employed forceful persuasion to ensure support for their policy. Today, however, they have also to cope with new networks such as Al-Jazeera, whose reports tend to reflect a bias toward the opponent.

This study demonstrates that television coverage affects the nuts and bolts of policy making and has created challenges and dilemmas for political leaders and officials. There are not any easy solutions to all these dilemmas, but the first task is to acknowledge that they exist and may have significant effects. Leaders face the following challenges and dilemmas: (1) how to avoid an immediate policy response to an unfolding event without being exposed as a weak leader who is confused and does not know how to handle a situation; (2) when responding, how to refrain from making a commitment to policy that one might later reverse or change; (3) how to include different appeals to domestic and foreign audiences in a single message; (4) how to cooperate with television enthusiastic coverage of major diplomatic events without creating too high expectations for overly rapid results; and finally, (5) how to maintain policy that is at odds with prevailing television tone without alienating reporters and audiences. The professional foreign affairs bureaucracy face these dilemmas: (1) how to write and provide solid and well-founded information, evaluation, and recommendation for policy and still submit reports in time to be considered by leaders; and (2) how to effectively compete with video images that may be at odds with preferred policy.

Policymakers do not face the same challenges in every international event or crisis. The media pressure varies according to parameters such as the national interest, the threat's magnitude, and domestic considerations. The media pressure on policy making is more problematic and potentially more damaging when the right thing to do is not obvious, when aids have different views and may change them, when the president does not know what to do and needs time for deliberations and consultations, and when the president wishes to effectively present a policy. The national interest is always a key factor. Policymakers were concerned with the pressure global television networks applied on them to militarily intervene in humanitarian crises during the 1990s, because they did not think such actions served the national interest. On the other hand, the media pressure in events such as the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington and the war in Afghanistan was minimal, because the United States itself was ferociously attacked; the media, like government agencies and the academia, failed to investigate Osama bin-Laden, al-Qaeda, and the threats of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism; and the government and the public, directly and indirectly, applied pressure on the media to be patriotic.

Conclusions

Policy making in defense and foreign affairs is highly complex and difficult. This study shows that the expansion of the twenty-four-hour domestic and global news coverage has made it even more complex. Television news increasingly becomes a source of rapid real-time information for policymakers, accelerates the pace of diplomatic communication, and creates the expectation of rapid results. The quickness of television coverage applies pressure on policymakers and foreign policy experts to respond even faster to world events while broadening the audience for both their significant and insignificant messages, which can prove a powerful but precarious tool that requires very careful execution. These new effects can dramatically affect the outcomes of events.

Clinton's adviser Dick Morris (1999: 116) observed that

policy and process are developed by the interplay of public officials, the media, and the voters. Each has its role; each has its limitations. But none of the players recognize their limits and all are constantly trying to transcend them.

Policymakers cannot eliminate the constraints and challenges of television news; they can only limit and control them. Viewing the media as a permanent enemy and criticizing and discrediting the networks are not effective and may even backfire. The clashes of Madeline Albright and James Rubin with reporters did not help the causes of Clinton's foreign policy (Lippman 2000: 128–29; Fischer 2000). Similarly, the Pentagon's idea to create special offices for disinformation to help the global battle against terrorism was not likely to help the government in dealing with the networks and fortunately was cancelled. But policymakers can employ the following measures to successfully cope with the constraints and challenges of television news coverage:

1. Contingency planning for every major step in diplomacy and warfare must include a detailed communication chapter that integrates policymakers' anticipation of negative media effects and adequate responses. Highly qualified and experienced communications professionals and foreign affairs experts should jointly prepare and periodically update this chapter for many likely and less likely crises and events.
2. Communications experts should be extensively involved not only in the planning phase but also in actual high-level policy making. James Rubin's participation in policy making during the Kosovo crisis and Ari Fleischer's presence in White House policy making in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the United States helped to limit the negative effects of global news coverage.⁸ Participation of communications experts in policy making should become a standard operating procedure.
3. Much greater emphasis must be placed on the handling of news networks in the training of leaders, diplomats, and officials. Leaders must be prepared to handle

the rapid pace of global communication and to avoid serious policy mistakes deriving from television's demands for fast and effective responses, particularly in crises. Sophisticated simulation exercises may be used to train and prepare leaders. For example, before making important policy statements and pursuing significant actions, communications experts can present leaders with questions the media are likely to press and help them prepare persuasive answers.

4. Communications professionals can also build a positive image for their leaders that may include pictures of high-ranking officials and experts entering and leaving presidential offices or residencies. These pictures create the impression that the leader is cautiously and seriously considering policy options, thus helping to deflect media pressure for instant official responses. It is now well known that how a leader looks on the screen could be more important than what he says. Yet leaders are not always aware of this condition. Statements that they make on serious issues while vacationing and holding a golf club may create the wrong image abroad and should be avoided.
5. The global twenty-four-hour broadcasts create information vacuums that policymakers must quickly fill, because otherwise journalists, commentators, and opponents may speculate and judge policies even before they are announced. A typical media vacuum appears when it becomes known that a leader is expected to make a major policy speech on the next day and no effort is made to reveal the policy rationale and some of the speech's key points during the space created between the initial announcement and the actual delivery of the statement.
6. In the past, presidents invited influential editors and senior reporters for personal background conversations on complex foreign policy issues. In many cases, these talks were sufficient to thwart criticism. While today this practice is much less effective, it can still be used to limit potential adverse effects of television news coverage. Henry Kissinger and Colin Powell used this tactic very effectively, and policymakers can learn from their experiences.

Thus, in addition to traditional and conventional strategic and diplomatic considerations, sophisticated policy making in defense and foreign affairs today requires sensitive understanding of the global media constraints, better planning, efficient communication strategies, and training of leaders and officials. One of the most important principles of successful leadership and governance is the talent and ability to adjust to changing circumstances. Leaders and institutions are now more aware of the challenges of domestic and global television coverage, but they still need to address them more effectively along the lines suggested in this study.

Acknowledgments

This work is based on research the author conducted while serving as a fellow at the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He thanks Alex S. Jones and Dr. Pippa Norris for the invitation to conduct research at the Center as well as the following outstanding personalities from academia, the government, and the

press for making valuable comments on an earlier draft of this article: Thomas E. Patterson, Bradlee Professor of Government and the Press at the Shorenstein Center; Ambassador Jonathan Moore, former deputy assistant secretary of state and special assistant to the secretary of defense; and Richard N. Kaplan, former president of CNN-US. The author also thanks Parker Everett for his research assistance.

Notes

1. For general analyses of media and policy making, see Spitzer (1993), Bennett (1994), Nacos et al. (2000), Graber (2002: 159–94), and Paletz (2002: 338–62).
2. For an initial assessment of “embedded journalism,” see Howard Kurtz, “For Media after Iraq, A Case of Shell Shock,” *Washington Post*, April 28, 2003:A-1.
3. This approach is explained and developed within a comprehensive framework for analysis of major interactions between global communication and foreign policy (Gilboa 2002a).
4. In his memoir, Baker (1995: 103) also dealt with the revolutionary effects of global television on policy making.
5. Daniel Schorr, “CNN Effect: Edge-of-Seat Diplomacy,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 27, 1998:11.
6. For preliminary assessments of the effects the terrorist attacks have had on American and global journalism, see Zelizer and Allan (2002) and Hachten and Scotton (2002).
7. David Hoffman, “Global Communications Network Was Pivotal in Defeat of Junta,” *Washington Post*, August 23, 1991:A-27.
8. Howard Kurtz, “Straight Man,” *Washington Post Magazine*, May 19, 2002:15–29.

References

- Baker, James A., III. 1995. *The Politics of Diplomacy*. New York: Putnam.
- Bennett, W. Lance. 1994. “The Media and the Foreign Policy Process.” In *The New Politics of American Foreign Policy*, ed. David A. Deese. New York: St. Martin’s.
- Beschloss, Michael R. 1993. *Presidents, Television, and Foreign Crises*. Washington, D.C.: Annenberg Washington Program.
- Beschloss, Michael R., and Strobe Talbott. 1993. *At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Bush, George, and Brent Scowcroft. 1998. *A World Transformed*. New York: Knopf.
- Carruthers, Susan L. 2000. *The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century*. New York: St. Martin’s.
- Cutler, Lloyd N. 1984. “Foreign Policy on Deadline.” *The Atlantic Community Quarterly* 22(3):223–32.
- Dayan, Daniel, and Elihu Katz. 1992. *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Donovan, Robert J., and Ray Scherer, 1992. *Unsilent Revolution, Television News and American Public Life, 1948-1991*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Feist, Samuel. 2001. “Facing Down the Global Village: The Media Impact.” In *The Global Century*, eds. Richard Kugler and Ellen Frost. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press.
- Fischer, Dean. 2000. “State of Tension.” *American Journalism Review* 22(April):36–41.
- Fitzwater, Marlin. 1995. *Call the Briefing*. New York: Times Books.

- Friedland, Louis A. 1992. *Covering the World: International Television News Services*. New York: Twentieth Century Fund Press.
- Gilboa, Eytan. 2000. "Mass Communication and Diplomacy: A Theoretical Framework." *Communication Theory* 10(3):275–309.
- Gilboa, Eytan. 2002a. "Global Communication and Foreign Policy." *Journal of Communication* 52(4):731–48.
- Gilboa, Eytan. 2002b. "Media Diplomacy in the Arab-Israeli Conflict." In *Media and Conflict: Framing Issues, Making Policy, Shaping Opinions*, ed. Eytan Gilboa. Ardsley, NY: Transnational Publishers.
- Gowing, Nik. 2000. "Media Coverage: Help or Hindrance in Conflict Prevention." In *The Media and International Security*, ed. Stephen Badsey. London: Frank Cass.
- Grabber, Doris A. 2002. *Mass Media and American Politics*. 6th edition. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly.
- Hachten, William A., and James F. Scotton. 2002. *The World News Prism: Global Media in an Era of Terrorism*. 6th edition. Ames: Iowa State University Press.
- Hargreaves, Ian. 2000. "Is There a Future for Foreign News?" *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 20(1):55–61.
- Hoge, James H., Jr. 1994. "Media Pervasiveness." *Foreign Affairs* 73(4):136–44.
- Hopkinson, Nicholas. 1993. *The Media and International Affairs after the Cold War*. Wilton Park Paper 74. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Kalb, Marvin. 1996. "Report First, Check Later, an Interview with Former Secretary of State James A. Baker III." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 1(2):3–9.
- Kalb, Marvin. 2000. "Be Skeptical, but in a Crisis Give Us the Benefit of the Doubt, an Interview with Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 5(2):6–16.
- Krlev, Nicholas. 2000a. "The Media—A Problem in Policy Making: An Interview with Condoleezza Rice, Foreign Policy Adviser to George W. Bush." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 5(3):87–89.
- Krlev, Nicholas. 2000b. "The Truth and Nothing but the Truth—But Sometimes Not the Whole Truth: An Interview with James Rubin, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs and Chief State Department Spokesman." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 5(2):109–10.
- Krlev, Nicholas. 2001. "Around-the-Clock News Cycle: A Double-Edged Sword, an Interview with Secretary of State Madeline K. Albright." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 6(1):105–8.
- Lippman, Thomas W. 2000. *Madeleine Albright and the New American Diplomacy*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- McNulty, Timothy J. 1993. "Television's Impact on Executive Decisionmaking and Diplomacy." *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 17(1):67–83.
- Morris, Dick. 1999. *The New Prince: Machiavelli Updated for the Twenty First Century*. Los Angeles: Renaissance Books.
- Nacos, Brigitte L., Robert Y. Shapiro, and Pierangelo Isernia, eds. 2000. *Decisionmaking in a Glass House: Mass Media, Public Opinion, and American and European Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Neuman, Johanna. 1996. *Lights, Camera, War: Is Media Technology Driving International Politics?* New York: St. Martin's.
- O'Heffernan, Patrik. 1993. "Mass Media and U.S. Foreign Policy: A Mutual Exploitation Model of Media Influence in U.S. Foreign Policy." In *Media and Public Policy*, ed. Robert J. Spitzer. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Paletz, David L. 2002. *The Media in American Politics*. 2nd edition. New York: Longman.

- Patterson, Bradley H., Jr. 2000. *The White House Staff: Inside the West Wing and Beyond*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.
- Pearce, David D. 1995. *Wary Partners: Diplomats and the Media*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly.
- Potter, Evan H., ed. 2002. *Cyber-Diplomacy: Managing Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century*. Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Powell, Collin L. 1995. *My American Journey*. New York: Random House.
- Robinson, Piers. 2002. *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention*. London: Routledge.
- Rosenstiel, Tom. 1994. "The Myth of CNN." *New Republic* (Aug. 22, 29):27–33.
- Sanit, Tal. 1992. "The New Unreality: When TV Reporters Don't Report." *Columbia Journalism Review* (May/June):17–18.
- Seib, Philip. 2002. *The Global Journalist: News and Conscience in a World of Conflict*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Sharkey, Jacqueline. 1993. "When Pictures Drive Foreign Policy." *American Journalism Review* 15(December):14–19.
- Spitzer, Robert J., ed. 1993. *Media and Public Policy*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Stahl, Lesley. 1999. *Reporting Live*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Utley, Garrick. 1997. "The Shrinking of Foreign News: From Broadcast to Narrowcast." *Foreign Affairs* 76(2):2–10.
- Walsh, Kenneth T. 1996. *Feeding the Beast: The White House versus the Press*. New York: Random House.
- Wriston, Walter B. 1997. "Bits, Bytes, and Diplomacy." *Foreign Affairs* 76(5):172–82.
- Zelizer, Barbie, and Stuart Allan, eds. 2002. *Journalism after September 11*. London: Routledge.

Biographical Note

Eytan Gilboa is a professor of politics and communication at Bar-Ilan University in Israel. He has written numerous works on international communication and American foreign policy. His most recent works include an edited volume, *Media and Conflict: Framing Issues, Making Policy, Shaping Opinions* (Ardsey, NY: Transnational Publishers, 2002).

Address: Department of Political Studies, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, 52900, Israel; phone: +972-2-561-7039; fax: +972-3-535-3307; e-mail: egilboa@mail.biu.ac.il.