

THE PALGRAVE MACMILLAN
SERIES IN
INTERNATIONAL
POLITICAL
COMMUNICATION

Media Pressure on Foreign Policy

The Evolving Theoretical
Framework

DEREK B. MILLER



MEDIA PRESSURE ON FOREIGN POLICY

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN SERIES IN INTERNATIONAL
POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Series editor: Philip Seib, University of Southern California (USA)

From democratization to terrorism, economic development to conflict resolution, global political dynamics are affected by the increasing pervasiveness and influence of communication media. This series examines the participants and their tools, their strategies and their impact. It offers a mix of comparative and tightly focused analyses that bridge the various elements of communication and political science included in the field of international studies. Particular emphasis is placed on topics related to the rapidly changing communication environment that is being shaped by new technologies and new political realities. This is the evolving world of international political communication.

Editorial Board Members:

Hussein Amin, American University in Cairo (Egypt)

Robin Brown, University of Leeds (UK)

Eytan Gilboa, Bar-Ilan University (Israel)

Steven Livingston, George Washington University (USA)

Robin Mansell, London School of Economics and Political Science (UK)

Holli Semetko, Emory University (USA)

Ingrid Volkmer, University of Melbourne (Australia)

Books Appearing in this Series

Media and the Politics of Failure: Great Powers, Communication Strategies, and Military Defeats

By Laura Roselle

The CNN Effect in Action: How the News Media Pushed the West toward War in Kosovo

By Babak Bahador

Media Pressure on Foreign Policy: The Evolving Theoretical Framework

By Derek B. Miller

MEDIA PRESSURE ON FOREIGN POLICY

The Evolving Theoretical Framework

By

Derek B. Miller

palgrave
macmillan



MEDIA PRESSURE ON FOREIGN POLICY

© Derek B. Miller, 2007.

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2007 978-1-4039-7970-4

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

First published in 2007 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN™

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010 and

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England RG21 6XS

Companies and representatives throughout the world.

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN is the global academic imprint of the Palgrave Macmillan division of St. Martin's Press, LLC and of Palgrave Macmillan Ltd. Macmillan® is a registered trademark in the United States, United Kingdom and other countries. Palgrave is a registered trademark in the European Union and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-53827-0

ISBN 978-0-230-60500-8 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9780230605008

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: July 2007

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The Stability and very Being of any Government consists in its Credit and Reputation; in the high Esteem and Veneration it retains in the Breast of its Subjects, and the proportionable Respect paid to it by Foreigners.

Francis Squire, 1740, Uxbridge, England,
in *A Faithful Report of a Genuine Debate
Concerning the Liberty of the Press Addressed
to a Candidate at the Ensuing Election*

This page intentionally left blank

CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
Introduction	1
1. The Contemporary Debate	9
Introduction	9
A Review of Modern Literature	10
2. Beyond the Contemporary Debate	21
The Seditious Libel Test and the Liberal Divide	26
Across the Liberal Divide	32
3. Toward a Theory of Media Pressure	43
Presentation of the Positioning Hypothesis	43
Positioning Theory	44
Inter-Institutional Conversations at the Interpersonal Nexus	52
A Typology of Episode Types	57
The Ubiquity of Security Coalitions in Liberal Democratic Statecraft	64
4. The Iraqi Civil War and the Aftermath, 1991	69
A Historical Overview of Events	74
Reflections on the Events	113
5. Measuring Coverage	117
Types and Measures	117
Understanding Trends in Media Coverage, March–June 1991	134
6. Measuring Pressure, Testing for Influence	151
Creating Data Sets	151
Coding “Objectionables”	153
Independent Measures of Media Pressure	156

Net Figures on Pressure	167
Understanding Trends in Media Pressure, March–June	170
Media Influence	176
7. Summing Up and Pressing On	185
Overview	185
The Positioning Hypothesis in Broader Context: Political Communication and International Relations	198
From Challenges to a Research Agenda	209
<i>Notes</i>	213
<i>Bibliography</i>	231
<i>Index</i>	241

LIST OF FIGURES

3.1	Positionings in reputational authority	49
3.2	A typology of conversational episodes	60
4.1	Troop deployments for Operation Provide Comfort, 1991	109
5.1	Newspaper coverage in the United States and Britain by story count	120
5.2	Comparative aggregate newspaper coverage	120
5.3	Newspaper coverage in the United States and Britain by paragraph count	121
5.4	Newspaper coverage in the United States and Britain by editorial count	122
5.5	Newspaper coverage in the United States and Britain by opinion pieces	123
5.6	Conversions from seconds to percentages of a minute	124
5.7	Lead stories per month in U.S. TV networks	125
5.8	Count of lead stories per month on U.S. TV networks	125
5.9	Minutes of news coverage per week on U.S. TV networks	126
5.10	Media questions fielded at US press conferences on the topic	128
5.11	Weekly totals of U.S. newspaper coverage, 1 March–2 June 1991	129
5.12	Aggregate totals of U.K. newspaper coverage, 1 March–2 June 1991	130
5.13	Aggregates of U.S. TV news coverage during the case study period	130
5.14	Correlation coefficients among weekly newspaper coverage	131
5.15	Correlations between network coverage	131
5.16	Correlation coefficients across media types and countries	132
5.17	Scale of media interest by paragraphs of weekly newspaper coverage	133

5.18	Scale of media interest by TV coverage per week	134
5.19	Media interest by queries to White House per week	134
6.1	Coding media pressure from U.S. press conference evidence	155
6.2	Percentage of White House Press Briefing questions on-topic versus pressure questions	156
6.3	<i>Washington Post</i> : coverage versus pressure	160
6.4	<i>New York Times</i> : coverage versus pressure	160
6.5	<i>Guardian</i> : coverage versus pressure	161
6.6	<i>Independent</i> : coverage versus pressure	161
6.7	ABC News: coverage versus pressure, 1991	165
6.8	CBS News: coverage versus pressure, 1991	165
6.9	Weekly totals of newspaper coverage versus pressure, 1 March–2 June 1991	167
6.10	The value of disaggregation	168
6.11	Levels of media pressure on the executive as a percentage of coverage	176
6.12	Dropping media pressure before ground troops were deployed	182
6.13	Media influence on the five policymaking phases	184

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people who helped me research and produce this book have my thanks. Keith Krause was my dissertation advisor in Geneva and provided highly valued advice in structuring this project and ensuring its completion. David Sylvan directed me toward the rigorous study of social phenomena. Steven Livingston served as a member of the review committee and made extremely detailed comments on every page and every footnote of an early draft of the manuscript. It was inspiring and intimidating and I owe him a tremendous debt. Rom Harré agreed to correspond with me about positioning theory and suggested I come to Linacre College at Oxford to work with him, probably having realized I needed as much help as I could get. The Europeaeum Consortium provided the scholarship and the Bodleian library provided the inspiration and the material. Phil Seib saw value in this work when it was a mere presentation at an academic conference and helped its maturity into a manuscript and now a book.

My family and friends say that now it's in print they may actually read it. My wife, Camilla Waszink, is a constant source of encouragement when I need it, guidance when I lack it, and eye-rolling when I deserve it. I require a great deal of her attention.

My grandparents, Esther and Lester Shapiro, passed away before this book was completed and would have been proud to see it in print. I can hear their voices even now (you wrote all this?). I dedicate all these weighty words to them.

Introduction

This is a study of political communication in the Liberal democratic state and how media pressure on the executive may affect state conduct in international relations. It examines this vast subject through the narrow theme of media pressure on the decision making of executives vis-à-vis security concerns. In beginning this inquiry into possible media influence, it soon became evident that to understand the significance of one voice, like that of the media, in the cacophony of Liberal democratic discussion it was necessary to ask how any voice, at all, could actually matter. From outside the war room, how can one elicit a response from inside it? To answer this question is to shed light on the decision-making processes of Liberal democratic governments and, even further, how that process might affect the conduct of these societies in the international theater as a whole.

The term “pressure” is often used as an answer to the question of how individuals or groups from outside the decision-making group can affect its performance. But what is pressure, and from that definition, how does it work? To label something pressure implies that there is a criterion that helps us distinguish *this* kind of statement from *that* kind of statement; *this* is pressure, *that* is not. It further implies that this kind of statement could, under the right circumstances, actually force the hand of the executive in a certain kind of situation.

The literatures on media influence, public opinion, and international relations were studied for clues about what pressure is. It was found that the term was used regularly, and the manner of its use appeared reasonably consistent—the meanings associated with it all seemed to cluster around a set of actions or qualities that people “naturally” associated with pressure. Though it was seldom defined, its use was in a sense understandable and therefore axiomatic, making its further definition and characterization apparently unnecessary. In short, there appeared to be a generally accepted understanding of when the executive was under pressure, and when pressure was being exerted.

Though attention was focused on media pressure, per se, different literatures reviewed all spoke about pressure as a real phenomenon—so real, and so obvious, in a way, that it didn’t seem to warrant further

examination. There are domestic pressures and international pressures, public pressures and group pressures, alliance pressures and old-fashioned “political pressures.” Leaving aside whether these are all really different actors, was *pressure* something that could be understood and studied on its own terms as a serious force in international relations, as exercised through influence on foreign policy decision making? This book argues that it is, and that comparative political communication and its capacity to create and sustain pressures on the executive should be given a good deal more attention in the study of international affairs. In short, embedded in the term pressure is a theory of statecraft itself, applicable, as it were, far beyond the confines of a study on media–government relations.

In developing a theory of media pressure in political communication in Liberal states, this study has its eye on the more distant horizon of better understanding not only the democratic system, but also what sets it apart. Conclusions of Liberal democratic uniqueness cannot be drawn without equally detailed comparative studies of non-Liberal states and how pressure is practiced and understood there. The detailing of this cultural phenomenon in the two countries studied here goes some distance in making one side of the comparison clear, explicable, and—equally important—falsifiable so that further efforts might be made on better understanding the role of political communication within, and across cultural systems. My hope is that the arguments here are sufficiently compelling to attract other researchers to pick up this question in other societies, or during other times.

* * *

Interest in the dynamic and complicated relationship between media and governmental decision making in foreign policy and national security has experienced renewed interest since the increased involvement of peacekeeping forces in complex emergencies during the early to mid-1990s. The reason for this growing interest is attributable to the coincidental end of the Cold War and the subsequent change in the overarching strategic environment, and changes and developments in communication and transportation technologies. It is sheer coincidence that in the early 1990s, technological achievements made global, real-time voice and video communication a reality at just the moment the Cold War ended. Nevertheless, this coincidence led to creative applications of technology by the media industry making the fall of the Berlin Wall, for example, one of the most watched spectacles in history. Scholars soon caught on to the idea that something serious,

powerful, and fundamental was changing in international affairs. The watchword was “globalization” and the media was part of it.

Editorials soon bemoaned the coming of a “CNN Effect”—named after the international television news network—whereby the media were suspected of setting the agenda of the government in foreign policy. Attentive observers of foreign policy and international relations speculated that if the press historically had a positive impact on democratic governance by educating the sovereign population in Liberal states, then America may have just crossed a sort of technological Rubicon whereby media’s omniscient eye and endless storytelling now threatened to undermine the deliberative decision-making processes of democratically elected officials.

By the mid-1990s, it had become conventional wisdom, and hence axiomatic, to speak of media-inspired foreign policy initiatives. It was not suggested that all policy was driven by the media; few, however, question that it could be. It was equally common to read that the problem of media influence on government was both new and revolutionary. The ability of the media to report live and in “real time” fundamentally changed the rules of the game.

Whereas the real-time news phenomena is indeed a new reality, and technology has unquestionably improved—as measured by affordability, speed, reduced weight, and accuracy in transmission, for example—I hope to explain that a probe into the intellectual history of press and policy lays barren any claim to the discussion of media influence being either new or revolutionary. As we will see, the question of whether and how the media may influence the government has been a living concern for at least 300 years in the West, rising to heights of profound concern, as during the birth of the Liberal state in Europe and the New World from the mid-1700s to the mid-1800s, and dropping to nadirs of indifference as during the early twentieth century until the early 1990s.¹ Rather, the social power of the media and its means of pressuring the government remains exactly the same. What is different is the pace at which the conversation between the media and government takes place. In understanding the perennial and underlying social forces that explain media pressure it becomes easier to make sense of what we are witnessing, to know what is truly different and what remains the same, and, to some extent, what needs to be done about it for the benefit of good governance and social liberties alike.

Although a few writers (mostly journalists) kept the question of press–government relations from slipping into complete oblivion during the early part of the century, disciplinary constraints and traditions in academe forced the study of this relationship into the uncomfortable

company of public opinion research, which, it will be argued, was not the most advantageous forum for this inquiry.²

These earliest twentieth-century scholars were concerned with exogenous influences on policymaking and the functioning of the democratic state. Seeing that it was the media, or press, that informed the population, it took little effort to shift the focus away from the public per se and to the supposed-progenitor of the public's opinion. In 1922, Walter Lippmann published his seminal book *Public Opinion*, which was concerned with these very matters. Though not termed as such until 1972, agenda-setting has since become a burgeoning research agenda on media influence on the public. It also benefited from a ready wealth of material to draw upon, and therefore found a comfortable intellectual home in the prior work on public opinion. One question that has fallen from the agenda, however, is whether this tradition has helped or obscured progress in the specific matter of *media influence on government*. As will be explained, public opinion researchers have still not explained in a convincing manner the *means* by which the public's opinion might actuate or affect policymaking. Without knowing how the public's opinion can influence governmental policy-making, it is difficult to know where to look to find out whether it has happened. Correlation studies of public opinion and decision making or media coverage and decision making are of little benefit unless we can make some claim about who is following whom, and why we believe that might be the case. Good theories (or even explicit ones) still remain wanting.

By taking a suspecting glance at the public opinion literature, and supposing that, perhaps, media influence is not generated by public opinion per se but rather by some as-yet-to-be-identified mechanism, we provide ourselves an opportunity to approach the question of media influence from a fresh perspective and to create a new formulation of the problem.

When retreating to this ground, we can ask two consecutive, structuring questions:

1. By what means might the media influence national security decision making?
2. Can we find evidence that the media have influenced national security decision making in the manner suspected?

Chapter I is an investigation into the contemporary literature. We start by examining the work of writers who are unified by a specific interest in media-government relations in the context of international

affairs. The review shows how certain ideas about media influence have evolved, reached impasses, devised new solutions, and arrived today at an epistemological problem about what we mean by “pressure” and how influence is “caused.”

These problems are very similar to those found in public opinion research, which is also interested in influence, only this time from the public rather than the media. As the public opinion literature is more developed—owing to a longer tradition and a wider base of scholars—we can see how they’ve reached the same types of problems and why a new type of argument is needed to get beyond this barrier. If we can take lessons from that field, perhaps we can avoid following their diversions and jump right to—and possibly over—the same problems they now face.

Chapter 2, “Beyond the Contemporary Debate,” expands the universe of relevant voices to solve some of the theoretical mysteries uncovered in chapter 1. After noting that much work on media–government relations is now trapped by a reliance on both public opinion research and agenda-setting theory, and also that the dominant epistemological approaches complicate rather than simplify concerns over measurement and “causality,” we take a radical departure and move not to another contemporary field in an untapped discipline, but farther back in time. In doing so, a world opens up to the best arguments ever produced about media influence on foreign policy decision making. This antiquarian approach revisits the towering ideas of freedom of speech and its social functions that formed the bedrock of modern political life in the West. This brief, but focused exploration leads back to the early 1700s and the mid-1800s, when Europe and the New World underwent a series of Liberal revolutions.

We see how arguments are spun on the question of free speech, liberty of the press, and freedom of expression with the full knowledge of the writers that riding on their arguments was the manner in which democracy would be forged in European statecraft. We find embedded in their arguments—ignored or long forgotten—a wealth of bold and explicit theorizing about media–government relations and the power of the press to affect the conduct of statecraft.³ By explaining how pressure works, these arguments seem to pick up just where the modern literature stops. Recovering some of these ideas (there is much more work to do here, and this chapter is only a start) lets us recover some of our intellectual heritage and use it in a new way, hopefully with some exciting implications.

Chapter 3, “Toward a Theory of Media Pressure,” forms the heart of the meta-theoretical work in this book. It fashions an explicit

hypothesis about the means by which the media might be able to affect the decision making of foreign policy decision makers in Liberal states.

The chapter aims to explicate the mechanics of this hypothesis by showing how communication, in the form of rhetoric and political positioning by coalition partners, can create political imperatives for policy-makers. The grounding for the coding techniques is provided here, and the details of the coding process are provided in chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 4, “The Iraqi Civil War and the Aftermath, 1991,” provides a history of the Iraqi Civil War in 1991 and the decision of the United States and British to remain “uninvolved” in the fighting until early April, when both countries launched one of the largest and most logistically complex humanitarian relief operations in history. Due to the dearth of attention placed on this important event for the entire Middle East, efforts have been made to reconstruct the events from primary source material, journalistic accounts, and the few sections of books dedicated to remembering these events.

Chapter 5, “Measuring Coverage,” gets down to the nitty-gritty of measuring coverage during the crises for all sources in both countries. In examining the case study period between 1 March and 2 June 1991, every story containing the word “Iraq” in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Guardian*, and the *Independent* was read and every paragraph was coded. A similar process on a minute-by-minute basis was also conducted for ABC News, NBC News, and CBS News. In total, 16,607 paragraphs, 991 stories, 134 opinion pieces, and 55 editorials or lead stories were manually counted, as were 720.62 minutes of total television coverage. The latter measures were aided by the records of the Vanderbilt Archives; however, special methods were developed to solve some of the differences in the needs of this study from the data sets as they were available. This was done by a thorough review of the transcripts of ABC and CBS. Unfortunately, the BBC has yet to establish a public depository for the transcripts of their news broadcasts making such a similar measure untenable.

Chapter 6, “Measuring Pressure, Testing for Influence,” analyzes media pressure as disaggregated from media coverage based on the theories of the Positioning Hypothesis. To find proof of “uptake,” or direct conversational evidence of the U.S. executive taking media statements as pressure, every question posed by American journalists to the White House from 1 March through 2 June 1991—totaling 2,719 questions—was examined three times: the first time to count the total number of questions asked (2,719), the second to determine relevance to the main

policy story (636), and the third to separate “pressure questions” from “non-pressure questions” (218 were pressure).

As Britain does not have an analogous institution to the White House Press Conference, the entire House of Commons HANSARD record was also examined for pressure from the Opposition (in this case Labour) during the same time period as the American study. By the end of May, the total number of words spoken on the matter (accepting a margin of error of about two percent) would be roughly 51,000.

To distinguish the independent measure of pressure from coverage, all 16,607 paragraphs were reexamined individually to check against the criteria established, and evidence gleaned from the press conferences in the United States. In Britain a rather different method was used, as is explained.

The number of stories, the number of stories on the front page, the number of paragraphs, editorials, and opinion pieces were all individually coded. As a result, chapter 7 is the first effort yet undertaken to independently measure media pressure as distinct from media coverage, and further benefits from a cross-national comparison, as well as a cross-media comparison (newspapers versus television). The results are then checked against the diplomatic records, and in the case of Britain, the records of the House of Commons.

A series of conclusions are presented about actual media influence in the United States and Britain respectively during the case study period. It draws empirical, methodological, and case study conclusions that should prove helpful to researchers aiming to better understand the relationship between media coverage and executive decision making as well as those people concerned with learning about the decision making in the case studies themselves.

Chapter 7, “Summing Up and Pressing On,” recounts the primary arguments and conclusions from the study as a whole and then builds a case for how these conclusions fit into the larger literature on both media–government relations and international relations theory respectively. A special effort is made to bridge the study of political communication with the orthodox study of international relations. The section suggests ways forward for better understanding media impact on decision making in Liberal states, and for comparative studies of media–government relations in the non-Liberal world.

The Contemporary Debate

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to review some of the literature that has informed the current (i.e., the last half-century) debate over media effects on foreign policy decision making in Liberal societies. In describing and assessing the state of the art we can consolidate the arguments that have produced the most notable results and organize them so that consistencies and contradictions can be revealed. This lays the framework for developing an explicit hypothesis about media pressure in chapter 3, which is then tested in the next chapters.

The central theme of this chapter is that the prevailing theoretical framework suffers from two epistemological problems that can be rectified by the same solution. The first is about the mechanism of influence between the media and the government. In the great majority of cases, scholars treat media–government relations as a study of cause-and-effect without ever explaining how exactly the media can affect the government beyond metaphors such as “pressure.”

In the absence of an explicit theory we are left with a more detailed—if unresolved—discussion about “directionality” in the media–government dynamic. For some, the media pressures the government, for others, it is the government’s manipulation of the media that is central, and to still others, there is some form of “bi-directional” or “mutually influential” process at play.

I argue that in identifying an appropriate theory of pressure we can render the second question irrelevant. We can do this by treating media–government relations as an on-going conversation made up of empirically demonstrable and morally significant episodes that have direct consequences on policymakers’ abilities to form and maintain coalitions of support for their ideas and actions. In this model, “causality” in a mechanical sense is sidestepped entirely and is replaced

with deliberate actions by the government. Directionality is moot because we're interested instead in turn-taking in a conversation.

A REVIEW OF MODERN LITERATURE

The most direct studies on the question of media effects on foreign policy are very recent, specifically the 1990s. In 1995, Steven Livingston and Todd Eachus questioned what has come to be known as the “CNN Effect,” which they describe as the theory of the loss of policy control by elite decision makers to the news media. Though technology was not an explicit factor of their study, its significance was strongly implied.

In citing earlier work on the CNN Effect, Livingston and Eachus list nine predecessors who had written on the topic. On inspection, none of these references predate the 1990/91 Gulf War in part because CNN itself—and by extension all real-time news coverage—did not exist either. This underscored the technological focus of the research.¹

Their work was an in-depth case study of one of the progenitors of the CNN Effect debate, namely the Somalia operation by the United States, and for this reason it is a good starting point for the present review. In 1992, the United States intervened in Somalia with military personnel in Operation Restore Hope to help feed starving people after the government collapsed and anarchy befell the state. In September, 1993, coincidentally just a day before the October deaths of the U.S. forces killed in fire-fights with Somali rebels led by General Aidid, the venerable George Kennan published an editorial in the *New York Times* called, “Somalia, through a Glass Darkly.”² In it, he argued that American foreign policy was being led by the media, and, more specifically, television. Andrew Natsios (who is highly suspicious of this argument) argued that this so-called CNN Effect “suggests that policy-makers only respond when there are scenes of mass starvation on the evening news. It also suggests that policy-makers obtain most of their information about ongoing disasters from media reports.”³

Kennan’s article was soon followed by a wealth of editorials, journalistic books, and edited volumes arguing for or against the existence of the so-called CNN Effect, especially with regard to humanitarian relief operations, or what the military then called “OOTW” or operations other than war.⁴

Livingston and Eachus wanted to know whether pressure from television and print media really had led to the initial decisions concerning U.S. intervention in Somalia. They concluded that the answer was an

emphatic “no.” “News coverage trends do not support the claim that news attention to Somalia led to the Bush Administration’s decision to intervene.”⁵ They conclude instead that “the decision to intervene was the result of diplomatic and bureaucratic operations, with news coverage coming in response to those decisions.” Their method was two-fold. They conducted a content analysis of news accounts of Somalia in a variety of media between late 1991 and December 1992. Second, they interviewed officials and journalists connected with the events.

Livingston and Eachus helped to dispel the particular myth that the initial decision to intervene in Somalia was caused by the media, as Kennan had suggested—a conclusion echoed by Piers Robinson in his 2002 book on the CNN Effect. What they demonstrate is that media coverage of Somalia complied with W.L. Bennett’s theory of “news indexing,” which states that news reports tend to follow or peg their stories to official actions and statements by policy elites.⁶

The indexing hypothesis, as it has come to be called, is at present the backbone theory of the small standing literature on media effects on government. It has received little empirical testing, and thus far no meta-theoretical challenges. W.L. Bennett was the first to name the phenomenon and provide a useful and refutably explicit hypothesis. However, the observation was made earlier. One example comes from Daniel Hallin who wrote in 1986 about Vietnam War coverage that, “day-to-day coverage was closely tied to official information and dominant assumptions about the war, and critical coverage didn’t become widespread until consensus broke down among political elites and the wider society.”⁷ It was Bennett, however, who took such case-specific observations and proposed a general theory, which is why research on the subject is generally associated with his efforts.⁸

Jonathan Mermin presents a different argument from Livingston and Eachus about Somalia. He writes,

[t]he argument that television contributed to U.S. intervention [in Somalia] is supported by the chronology of events and news stories presented in this study; there is no reason to doubt that the appearance of Somalia on American television just before major changes in U.S. policy in August and November of 1992 influenced the decision of the Bush administration to act. What is not clear, however, is why Somalia appeared on television in the first place, a question of central importance in understanding the scope and character of television’s influence on foreign policy formation.⁹

The Livingston and Eachus study, as just discussed, provides a succinct and clear argument (two years earlier) that does give a reason to doubt

this assumption of media influence. Nevertheless, his central conclusion is that “the lesson of Somalia is not just about the influence of television on Washington, but is equally about the influence of Washington on television.”¹⁰ This presumably proves that the media do not “drive” foreign policy, but contributes to its decision-making process. We are still left to wonder how.

Another study, published a year later, was written by John Zaller and Dennis Chui and was called “Government’s Little Helper: US Press Coverage of Foreign Policy Crises, 1945–1991”; it strongly supported the Bennett theory of indexing, which is supported by the Livingston and Eachus and Mermin pieces as well. Being slightly more specific than Livingston and Eachus about indexing, Zaller and Chui described Bennett’s 1990 argument as holding that “reporters ‘index’ the slant of their coverage to reflect the range of opinion that exists within the government.”¹¹ Zaller critiques Bennett (1990) by observing that “one concern is that [the study] failed to develop a measure of congressional opinion that was independent of what the [*New York Times*] claimed it was.”¹² This independent measurement would have been important because it would have made explicit the distance between official opinions and how they were reported. As Zaller writes, “journalists might, for example, have used officials as sources but either done so selectively or distorted their views so as to produce the results that journalists rather than sources wanted.”¹³ Zaller and Chui sought to correct this failing by retesting Bennett’s hypothesis. Their results supported the indexing hypothesis very strongly, and their method was quite interesting.

Zaller and Chui focused on “variations in the hawkishness or dovishness of coverage of foreign affairs crises.” They hypothesized that the degree of press hawkishness would depend on the degree of hawkishness in the government. The definition of hawkish and dovish was relative to the crisis. For an unbiased list of foreign policy crises from 1945 to 1991 (or at least one that was non-partisan to their investigation), they turned to John Spanier’s *American Foreign Policy since World War II* (1992) and produced a subsequent list of thirty-nine crises, four of which were omitted: three because Congress was not in session, which would affect their results, and the one other because they deemed it similar enough to another to combine it with a second.¹⁴

They found a strong correlation. So the question is: what did they actually measure? Importantly, Zaller and Chui were forthright in observing that their correlation study of government and media, though quite rigorous, does not determine necessarily who is leading

whom in the public discourse. Their interpretation that the media were indexing their stories and editorials to government opinion comes from “outside the data—from prior studies that stress, on the basis of qualitative observation, the dependence of reports on sources.”¹⁵ They conclude that this aspect of their argument is not conclusive, but does contribute to the indexing hypothesis and therefore to a greater understanding of government–media relations.

Zaller and Chui were not testing the CNN Effect, *per se*. Except for the last five years or so of their study, there was no CNN, and before the mid-1950s, there was no television worth considering in such a study.¹⁶ The world was then composed of newspapers and radio, and unfortunately—though perhaps understandably—radio was not reviewed.¹⁷ Technology, therefore, was not a variable that Zaller and Chui considered. In a stricter sense, their theory was an examination of whether media discourse and governmental discourse—during times of foreign policy crises—were similar or dissimilar and to what extent. They concluded that they were notably similar, which is a helpful finding because it sets us up to ask why.

If the indexing hypothesis seems to hold up, then what must be distinguished, and which generally appears overlooked, is whether indexing *precludes the possibility of influence*. This question takes us beyond studies that seek to find out “who is leading whom” and forces us to ask how the relationship actually works, and whether indexing makes any difference to that dynamic.

Piers Robinson wrote a review article intending to “[assess] what is meant by the term ‘CNN Effect’ in relation to western intervention in humanitarian crises.”¹⁸ He begins by reviewing what Herman and Chomsky call a “propaganda model” whereby, through coercive and often furtive means, the government sets the media agenda and demonstrates that it is incompatible with the CNN Effect model. After noting this incompatibility based on each theory positing a different direction of causality, Robinson wants to introduce a “media-policy interaction model.”¹⁹ Robinson argues convincingly that the research on the CNN Effect “fails to clarify whether or not the news media have (or have not) triggered recent ‘humanitarian’ interventions.”²⁰

Robinson’s use of the term “triggered” is important. Like Livingston and Eachus, Robinson is primarily concerned with the initial decision to undertake an action. All three authors dismiss this as a possibility, quite rightly, in the case studies conducted in the former instance, and in the supporting literature in the latter (which is not to say it is theoretically impossible). But what about media pressure

throughout the life of a policy, like in Vietnam? Isn't this a core question to understanding media-government relations? Why only questions about "triggers"?

Robinson successfully demonstrates that the literature is presently contradictory about directions of influence. But a further categorization would have been helpful, one that is as yet unaddressed: the benefit of dividing and explaining the differences between theories of political communication and theories of political economy. Zaller and Chui are primarily interested in the question of communication, that is, how, if at all, the media's words, sounds, and images might affect the outputs of the foreign policy decision-making process. Herman and Chomsky are concerned instead with the playing field on which the acts of communication are taking place. For them, structural constraints such as centralized power and ownership of media firms determines what can be addressed and what cannot. Because of this, they are dismissive of what the media does. It is already "tainted" somehow, and hence unworthy of real attention.

We need to differentiate a political communication study from a political economy study and explain their relationship. Herman and Chomsky are taking a political economy approach, that is, they are identifying and analyzing those forces that determine the structural constraints in which communication takes place, and are alleged to influence communication. These structures, of course, change through time and in each locality. Earlier in American history, for example, the press was owned and operated by the political parties. Today, they are generally owned by multinational conglomerates operating in a free-market system and political parties manage little more than their own websites in terms of publishing. Likewise, the political economy of Britain, with its combination of state and privately owned media outlets operating within a Liberal state with legal protection of free speech is different from, say, the Soviet Union under Stalin, with state-owned and -controlled media outlets and the common penalty of jail or death for the dissemination of subversive ideas or messages. All communication takes place within a structure that may be called the "political economy" and it can and should be studied.

A study in political communication itself, however, is one that seeks to identify and analyze how communication functions within a given society. It is—or should be—taken for granted that some political economy of communication exists within the community studied. But the assumption remains that *what is communicated can be studied on its own merits*, given that what is communicated can only exist as a function of the structure that supports it. It would be incorrect to

argue, for example, that because there are structural constraints on communication, it is impossible to elicit an effect from that which is communicated. What must be asked instead is whether communication by or through the media is still capable of influencing policy outcomes *given* a set of structuring factors in economy, law, or political coercion, for example. Part of the trouble in unpacking the present literature on media–government relations is that the distinction between communication and economy is not being made. We’re chasing different rabbits but have yet to recognize it. Eventually, when we get a better handle on each subject area we’ll need to work together to better understand the social system, but at the moment our maturation is being stymied by arguments comparing apples to oranges.

This brings us to the final point about Robinson’s analysis namely the issue of media pressure itself. In reviewing the work of Nik Gowing, Warren Strobel, and others, Robinson quite rightly illustrates that they tend to have difficulty in “measuring exactly the precise impact which the media have on policy, specifically whether or not the media can cause humanitarian intervention; and the significance each attaches to policy certainty (or uncertainty) in determining media influence” that there is “little evidence of a push [i.e., cause intervention] effect . . . nor is there evidence of a pull [i.e., cause withdraw] effect.”²¹ Robinson writes that many arguments elsewhere are essentially loose speculation about “‘complex systems,’ ‘fluid interplay’ and a ‘rich and diverse relationship’ between media coverage and policy outcomes—all of which sounds reasonable enough but does little to clarify things or prove a direct casual relationship between media coverage and policy outcomes.”²²

Unfortunately, when Robinson discusses the need to differentiate between immediate and underlying causes of media effects on policymaking—referring to the case of the Kurds in 1991—he writes, “Media pressure would then be understandable as the immediate factor in causing intervention” but he does not tell us what pressure actually is, how it might work, or how we might recognize it. The need to answer these questions lies in the proposed “media-policy interaction model” as a solution. The 2002 book, in which he carefully tests his theories, still does not address this problem. He writes, “this study focuses on analyzing the amount and form (via framing analysis) of media coverage with the focus upon how a particular humanitarian crisis is represented and the tone of coverage towards official policy.”²³ This is indeed done with great detail and care. But it remains uncertain why the framing of the media coverage *matters at all* seeing as we remain without a theory to explain how framing affects policymakers, and second, *how we can know empirically whether media coverage mattered to the policymakers?*