



Media's impact on national security policy decision making

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Abstract

The force of the newspaper is the greatest force in civilization. Under republican government, newspapers form and express public opinion. They suggest and control legislation. They declare wars. They punish criminals, especially the powerful. They reward with approving publicity the good deeds of citizens everywhere. The Newspapers control the nation because they represent the people. (emphasis added) William Randolph Hearst ^[5].

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Introduction

There are only a few certainties about the news. The first is that there is likely to be more of it available to more of us. Another certainty is that major news media are still going to be driven by the profit motive; consequently, whatever sells they will purvey. Since its inception as a mass phenomenon, what sells is spectacular, titillating, eye catching, or sensational; truth, accuracy or context can become secondary. ^[6]

Considering the impact of the Information Age, Americans may be facing a new phenomenon in the news arena—interactive news tailored to individual interest. This may allow the truly interested "reader/viewer" the opportunity to get beyond headlines and into the "facts" at a depth and breadth hitherto unknown. Of course we must realize that while this opportunity will be generally available, participation is unlikely to be much above current levels of "active" public interest. The cold fact is that reading and thinking about the news takes time and that is what most people are unwilling to give up for something that may not affect them directly. ^[7] Interactive news is also likely to generate more discrete interest levels or focus. Currently, several major newspapers are shifting their overseas coverage to directly accommodate their readership. Marketing areas heavy with Hispanic readers are closing European offices in favor of South and Central American locations. ^[8]

Another aspect of the Information Age that could have an impact on policy is the *possibility* of enhanced public responsiveness to events. As the FAX and E-mail become increasingly available, the power of public opinion may be enhanced. "On Air," real-time polling is already in place on major television networks. These two avenues of public expression may well serve two different groups of citizens. The first group is the computer-literate, foreign policy aware. The second group is synonymous with the television viewing public, not necessarily synonymous with those informed of and active in foreign affairs.

Those people with access to FAX and E-mail are increasing dramatically, but their identity and involvement in public affairs is yet to be defined. It is already possible and acceptable to FAX or E-mail one's opinion to the White House directly, but who are the people who do? What impact a surge of FAX traffic will have is probably going to be governed by the same factors that govern the impact of public opinion now. If an election is imminent, public reactions will likely be voiced more frequently and are likely to be followed more closely; if the domestic situation is threatening, likewise. If a genuine national security interest is threatened, president and public are likely to draw together if the White House leads; if the administration is weak or unpopular, the impact of a flood of public expression may have unforeseen consequences.

The point is that the potential of the public to become informed and to make its voice heard in response to events portrayed in the media is increasing dramatically, but the potential must pass through the filter of public interest, a filter of episodically varying permeability.

For purposes of this study, the supposition is that the media exert influence through two channels, direct and personal, and indirect and collective. The direct and personal aspect is difficult to investigate and minimal effort was devoted to it in this study. The indirect and collective is the realm of public opinion, a battleground of politics unique to democratic societies. This study concentrates upon the latter arena.

The "Yellow Press" and The War With Spain: An Episode

One of the first instances where the power of the press was said to be truly decisive was the Spanish-American War. Even though the electronic media was not a factor in this war, the basic factors of the direct and personal, and indirect and collective impacts of the media are evident. An examination of this episode, like the study of the classic battles of ancient times, simplifies insights. This event was chosen for the similarities in public reaction, media activity, and humanitarian impulses then and in the present. Then as now, media depictions of innocent people undergoing gross suffering at the hands of tyrannical powers always raised a clamor for government to "do something!"

Understanding President McKinley's role requires an appreciation of his leadership philosophy which was, simply, leadership by personal example. However, control of the national agenda or manipulation of public opinion was contrary to his concept of the function of the presidency, and McKinley acted strictly in accord with this concept.^[9]

The President

Current research strongly suggests that McKinley was not actually "driven" to war by the "Yellow Press." A full nine weeks elapsed between the sinking of the battleship USS MAINE in Havana harbor and the move to war, and during that time there was more than sufficient furor, venom and provocative language in the media to test the susceptibility of the national security apparatus (then the person of the president) to media pressure.^[10] In an accompanying incident, the very capable Spanish Ambassador to the United States was driven to resign by the publication in a newspaper of a stolen, private letter to a friend in Havana which was highly critical of McKinley. As Harold U. Faulkner puts it,

The damage... had been done—*not so much in arousing public resentment...* as in removing from the scene the patient, skillful, and tireless de Lome, whose efforts in Washington had neutralized the anti-Spanish propaganda of the jingo press...^[11] (emphasis added)

The press won that skirmish and thereby opened the door of influence a bit wider.

Although McKinley actually moved with due deliberation toward resolution of the crisis on peaceful grounds, it appeared he was being "stampeded into war" by his unwillingness to gain control of public opinion, because he did not see it as his function.^[12] The insistent drumming of the media had an impact upon the public, the public upon the Congress, and thus, by the indirection established in the Constitution of the United States, on the president and national security policy. Angered by media commentary on Cuba and Spain, McKinley simply stopped reading the newspapers, but that did not stop the people from reading them^[13] Up to the very end, McKinley sought to avoid war and only reluctantly placed the ultimate decision in the hands of the Congress, as the Constitution requires. Thereafter he regretted having "had" to do so.^[14] Had he possessed a different conception of the presidency, he had tools to make a fight of the issue.^[15]

Here the impact of the media on the national security process was indirect but traceable along the lines established by the principles of republican government. In the process of going to war, the president lays the matter before the Congress for ultimate decision and the Congress, as the elected representatives of the people, determine whether the people's blood shall be shed or not. Having declined to lead, McKinley could not conceive of another option than to bow to the will of the people expressed through the Congress.

The Media

The traditional function of the media in a free society is to inform. The responsible exercise of democratic citizenship involves a desire to be informed. "Informed" is, of course, the key word.^[16] It has always been a matter of despair that the free people of this country, as individuals, have been so willfully ill-informed. Even the founding fathers had a deep suspicion of the "knowledge" of the masses, while at the same time trusting in their innate genius as an article of republican faith. The Senate exists as a counterweight to the House of Representatives as a concrete demonstration of the dilemma.^[17]

That people can be misled is a continuing possibility.^[18] McKinley experienced a "misled" voting public when defeated in his bid for a seat in the House in 1890.^[19] But believing as strongly as he did in the ultimate sound judgment of the American people, and holding with equal conviction that the role of the president was to affirm and commend, it is easy to conclude that, in this case, the media was given a free hand in the market-place of ideas and, through its eventual influence upon the people, prevailed. If this were so, then, as Hearst claimed, the media had indeed brought about the war.

Yet the press could not have created war sentiment out of nothing; it could not have persuaded the public that war was desirable if the public had not wanted to be persuaded of it. The country was in a receptive mood.^[20]

Current research suggests that media influence on public opinion is still an important phenomenon though difficult to assess.^[21] The strongest factor at work in this episode was the unwillingness of the Executive Office to do anything to guide public opinion.^[22]

The Congress

Although the press screamed for action, it was from the Congress that the most effective appeals came for presidential leadership and not for leadership into war—simply for leadership.^[23] There was substantial anti-war sentiment in many centers of influence including the Congress. Negotiations with the Spanish government were in progress when the MAINE was sunk, but Harold Faulkner notes, "The sinking of the Maine did not ruin these

negotiations, as one might have supposed it would." [24] The negotiations continued despite the 1898 version of television coverage in the form of dramatic drawings, violent cartoons and inflammatory rhetoric. [25] In the end, however, "Congress, . . . would not leave the matter in the President's hands. Congress wanted war, and McKinley was not the man to resist." [26] Was this a triumph of the press?

The principal deciding factor in the swing to war, in the Congress, was an address by Senator Redfield Proctor upon his return from a "fact-finding" trip to Cuba. It is strange that his 30-minute recitation should have done so for:

Proctor advanced no new facts, no new perspective on events in Cuba. He urged no specific course of action. He spoke without passion. Nor do the data of his life reveal any unusual force of personality or impressive weight of accomplishment in themselves capable of riveting the nation's attention. Although he enjoyed the public reputation of a man of character, dignity, and solid reliability, it was one that could be matched by tens of his colleagues. Still, some combination of the man and his words struck a deep emotional resonance in American society and rapidly demolished the last important resistance to war. [27]

It is remarkable how closely this passage aligns with current public opinion studies which find that the strongest influence upon public opinion is that of a respected commentator or "expert." [28] Senator Proctor's address received additional weight by the mistaken impression that the president had sent him on his fact-finding tour. That was a falsehood Proctor studiously denied, but many people thought it to be so nevertheless.

Analysis of the speech itself yields little reason for fastening upon it as the battering ram against the door of restraint. It is warmly factual and couched in language that allows attachment of passion although none was intended. The unexpected reaction to this relatively unemotional presentation is another phenomenon which accords with studies of public opinion "moods." [29]

Current research suggests that the influential shaper of public opinion must have three qualities: (1) personification of certain values, (2) competence, and (3) a strategic position.

Proctor fulfilled all three of these conditions. He was (1) regarded as a man of upright character, was (2) competent by virtue of having just returned from a search for truth at its source, and was (3) a U.S. Senator in a particularly visible position for the moment. [30] Thus, not the medium, nor the message, but the messenger appears to have been the most significant influence.

Other Factors

Particular note must be made of the improved distribution capacity of the press and the change in style at this moment in history. Changes in printing technology made low cost newspapers available to practically everyone, and a combination of "images" in the form of cartoons and dramatic drawings, and a more popular style of writing aimed at mass consumption created a situation similar to the change wrought by the advent of television and particularly by CNN-type coverage. In both cases mass appeal was activated by a simplistic portrayal of events in emotive images. [31]

Dewey's victory in Manila Bay was made known to the Secretary of the Navy by a *World* telegram. [32] Today, many in government, and in the Department of Defense, monitor CNN as the first source of a great deal of fast breaking news. But this kind of instantaneous reporting is just that. It is raw events taking place within the focal plane of a specific camera lens and thus often lacks any significant context. It is there that both problems and opportunities exist.

The Result.

In the movement to war with Spain, the focus of all emotion, except for a short time immediately following the sinking of the USS MAINE, was on the brutal treatment of the Cubans by their Spanish rulers. That, not the MAINE, was the core of Redfield Proctor's speech. Matters of national security, or even of economic losses to resident American industries, which were considerable, were nearly incidental. Had President McKinley been willing to take the lead, there is ample reason to support the proposition that his leadership could have forestalled all the frantic ragings of the press. Those disclaimers notwithstanding, war for humanitarian and expansionist reasons became entangled with popular emotion and the press had a hand in shaping that emotion. It was at this intersection that the decision lay. The president had the opportunity to shape public and congressional opinion, but, left uninfluenced by his leadership, the Congress and public in their turn forced the president's policy to change for war.

Tiananmen Square And China Policy: A Current Episode

What has just been described is an episode of the printed media. Since we are now in a more visual age, the next episode rests on the power of the video image. For seven weeks, Chinese student demonstrators took control of Tiananmen Square and staged a protest in favor of democracy. They set up a copy of the Statue of Liberty and captivated the entire world through their evident devotion to the ideals of liberty in the face of one of the few remaining communist governments. On June 4, 1989, the Chinese government moved to crush the demonstration. We will remember for all time the televised image of a lone Chinese man confronting a column of tanks, bringing them to a halt merely by standing before them. The entire free world thrilled to the sight, but by evening the mood turned sour and the firing began. In full view of television cameras and hidden camcorders, the Chinese government blasted the students from the square, killing hundreds. [33] They then instituted a reign of terror, rounding up all the ring-leaders and putting them on trial. Some were doubtless executed, many remain in

prison. The world was revolted. Surely such blatant acts of inhumanity would be rewarded by serious counteraction by the United States. The president made it clear, however, that he was not going to scuttle the long and hard work that he and others had undertaken to establish an open channel to the Chinese and to foster the growing trade with them, or to compromise the intelligence gathering efforts on the Russians from stations on Chinese soil by any ill-advised sanctions against the Chinese government.

Military-to-military contacts were interrupted and sales of certain high-tech computer equipment was delayed, but little else. ^[34] The images that so powerfully moved viewers across America faded from view despite reruns by the television networks. Not only did they fade from view for that administration, but when a new administration took power and was confronted with the legacy of the Chinese atrocities when discussing renewal of most-favored-nation trade status, it too chose to ignore the pictures. Why? What was at work? An issue of national security policy was under discussion and the power of the image and the press proved insufficient to change the policy. Arguably, these two examples suggest that the power of the press, acting alone, be it written words or dramatic images, is not as powerful as might be supposed when it comes to serious matters of national security. Rather, genuine national security issues are left to the president as the nation's leader. The evidence on this requires more study, but a working hypothesis might be that a mature administration can manage even the worst news about national security issues because the people naturally give the lead to the president in such matters.

So what?

The connection between the media and national security policy is both direct and indirect. In the case of a strong administration, news is news and policy is policy and the twain are only remotely connected in a causal way. ^[35] Less certain administrations with low approval ratings, and certainly administrations whose policies are undeveloped or who do not have a solid philosophical basis of operation, are subject to greater degrees of influence by dramatic reporting. ^[36]

The media street is two way. ^[37] While reporting may have an impact on policy, a savvy president will use the media to educate and press his own agenda on the public. This may be done particularly in the arena of foreign affairs where presidential leadership is expected and both people and press are inclined to follow.

Although there is a good deal of study yet to be done to confirm it, evidence suggests that as the general public becomes increasingly aware of media influence, it begins to do its own interpretation. During the Gulf War, despite all its claims of limitation, the media provided what the American people wanted to see, and in the media's whining about not being allowed to show more, it discredited itself in the eyes of its own viewing public. This attitude has led to considerable self-criticism within the media establishment, but its deeper import is that it tends to support Dan Rather's and Tom Brokaw's evaluations that claims of media influence are overblown.

It is a "given" that the viewing public, who make up most of those who represent "public opinion," are, as individuals, largely ignorant of the issues, often ignorant of much of the context and apparently have to be fed information in sound-bites if the message is to get across. That notwithstanding, the public is generally skeptical of the media and, furthermore, as President McKinley believed (a thoroughly Jeffersonian belief) that the people seem somehow to know when major issues are in the balance, what is right and what is not. This phenomenon is borne out by current research which sharply contrasts individual understanding to the collective understanding. Page and Shapiro have demonstrated that the wisdom of the masses—the indirect and collective—is superior to that of the elites—the direct and personal. This is a matter beyond short-term policy formulation; it is an issue fundamental to democracy. ^[38]

Part of the skepticism toward the press is soundly based on repeated exposures of media manipulation of the news. The most egregious recent example was the filming of "defective" trucks—a completely staged event. ^[39] In time, it will become clear that many of the dramatic photographs from the Third World are set-ups put together by Third World stringers. But stringers, those freelance, independent, sometimes part-time reporters, are increasingly commissioned to gather news and photos in remote and dangerous places where, as Peters suggests, high paid/profile journalists are loath to go. Thus, there is an increasing need to make clear who is behind the camera and what is going on outside the camera's view. ^[40] The education of the public in this matter is indirect but widespread enough that even the television show "Hollywood 90210" aired an episode depicting willful distortion of news to increase its impact.

A distortion of the news took place recently, not through manipulation of pictures as much by unwillingness to follow through and report the second half of the story. This happened during coverage of the last Ranger operation in October 1993 in Mogadishu, Somalia; "the media failed to cover the "thousands of Somalis who had demonstrated in support of the United States after [the 3 October fighting with 18 U.S. casualties.]" ^[41] The Somalis suffered grievous losses in that action and the demonstrations suggested a signal to the United States that the Somalis were ready to come back to more peaceful avenues of discourse. This serves to heighten the need for the government to make known the facts which counter the image. An activist administration can gather sufficient information quickly enough, if it is attuned to such things, to launch a coordinated counterattack with some hope of success. While the military or other on-the-scene agency can gather and forward the facts, it is not their place to publish them.

In almost all of these situations, the media can be seen simply as a conduit of information. However, that information will be conditioned by who comes forward to comment on the event, the obvious nature of the event

and whether attempts to call good evil or vice versa are clearly disingenuous, how the government reacts, and what the domestic climate is at the moment.

Daniel C. Hallin concluded his study of the impact of the media on the war in Vietnam with this observation: "The behavior of the media . . . is intimately related to the unity and clarity of the government itself, as well as to the degree of consensus in the society at large."^[42] This observation, derived from a thorough study of the media and policy during that war, was enunciated in 1986. From all the evidence currently available it still appears to be the *key* consideration. There will doubtless be times when new or badly organized administrations find themselves unable to articulate their goals as well as others, but the unity and clarity described above are those which come from what the military call the "Commander's intent." However inarticulate the administration or inept in its handling of the press, the inner focus or lack thereof will come across and the American people will see or hear through it.

The State of Current Research

Some other general observations about the impact of the media, when taken together with the preceding comments, may provide further understanding.

- There is little doubt that the media influence public opinion; the arguments revolve around how much and in what way.^[43] Additional research is required into *how much* information, presented in *what format*, under *what conditions* is likely to move the public *to act* in some measurable fashion or direction. Mere opinion shifts are not necessarily an indicator of the will to act; something else must take place. Determining what that something else is presents another research topic. Where the past differs from the present is that the mechanisms to act are now more broadly available.
- Several studies demonstrate that respected commentators and experts have the greatest ability to sway public opinion.^[44] Additional research is necessary to examine this phenomenon in reaction to the current proliferation of commentators/network talk shows. An investigation of their effect should include issues of host personality, guest reputation, and on-air performance by the interviewees.
- Popular presidents can sway public opinion, but their ability to do so decays over time—as a general rule.^[45] President Clinton is the first president to attempt to harness the power of television and the Rooseveltian weekly "Fireside Chat" technique to gain support for his programs. His success in merging the technique and the technology in support of his agenda deserves further investigation.
- Presidents can exert stronger influence on public opinion in matters of foreign affairs.^[46] The present administration offers another important case study since, like the Roosevelt administration of the 1930s, its focus on domestic concern is internal and economic. The international scene of the 1930s was no less unsettled than it is today, but now the United States is the only possible global leader. How public opinion and national security policy will respond to presidential management in the next decade is worth extensive investigation.
- Presidents with low popularity polls are ineffective in influencing public opinion. If they are so-called "zone three" presidents (less than 50 percent approval ratings), their attempts at intervention usually bring about negative effects.^[47] Here the present administration offers another case study since its popularity has hovered close to that dividing line.
- "Good luck" issues—issues which give even unpopular presidents a chance to regain some positive influence over public opinion—include foreign use of force against the United States. These generate a "rally 'round the president" mood.^[48] Further investigation should be undertaken seeking comparative analysis of this phenomenon between "isolationist" and "internationalist" periods.
- Presidents have the opportunity to shape the public debate much of the time through their ability to "inform" the press and people personally and through their extensive staff and appointee networks.^[49] The relatively secret nature of national security issues generally keeps them from public debate unless something goes wrong and allows the administration to use "national security" as an excuse or reason not to be forthcoming. This is a highly complex issue involving a broad assortment of pressures and interests, and must be conditioned in part by the credibility of the NSC spokespersons and staff. Here the negative legacy of Irangate may have an effect.
- As a general rule, in Third World matters, the fact that a Third World issue makes the news at all indicates that the White House has sent a signal that the issue is temporarily important.^[50] There is plenty of solid research in this area, but it bears watching as the primacy of the big three television networks declines and alternative news sources with regional focus proliferate in response to consumer interest. "The Family Channel," which carries programs sponsored by Christian evangelical organizations, had been carrying the starving Somalia story for several years, because Somalia was a mission field, before the big three picked up on it.

Two articles in *Army Times* also indicate the need for further research. In a May 1993 article, Ralph Peters listed six reasons why the media should not wield the influence that he believes it does. He complained about the manner by which some events are selected for media coverage at the expense of others:

(1) sympathetic subjects—they [the subjects of the event] are like us or are inherently photogenic; (2) the endemic cowardice of reporters which encourages them to avoid the rural and brutish where they could be killed or suffer discomfort. (This assertion ignores the growing casualty count of reporters killed in line of duty.); (3) reporters

need a supporting communications infrastructure; (4) the media have developed their own group-think which restricts their interpretational range; (5) most reporters utterly lack any grasp of history which would allow them to interpret events in context; and (6) there are no longer any meaningful controls on the media, either internal or external—profit drives. There appears to be enough truth to Peters' claims that further investigation would be helpful, but the more important reason to determine the validity of these observations is that the structure and conduct of news-gathering is changing so that where Peters may be right today, tomorrow he may be wrong. What is germane about this article is that it raises a critical question about *what* will be covered.

What is required here is deeper investigation of media- policy linkages in the national security arena, not so much to determine the "if," but "how" or "why." Several commentators suggest that television is gradually producing a change in public awareness of foreign policy issues. Is that awareness real, episodic, or connected to some current domestic theme?

To date, none of the principal players, from President Bush, Generals H. Norman Schwarzkopf and Colin Powell, former Secretary of Defense Cheney or former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft have testified exactly how that decision came about. If those photographs had that much power, military commanders had best take notice and be prepared, for nothing in war is pretty.

Whether it is as Simpson states or not, the remainder of his comment, "and certainly not to take the war to Baghdad," reflects an ignorance of the basic fact that the latter decision, at least, had been made well before the gruesome event. George Will opined that "if there had been television cameras at Gettysburg, there would be two countries" today. The potential of the image for impacting operational and/or strategic decisions is a cause for deep concern. The Highway of Death image-decision connection provides one example of the effectiveness of the direct-personal media channel.

Answering The Basic Questions

A number of questions must be addressed. First among them is to what extent is national security decision making unique and by its nature more or less responsive to media impact? National security decision making is different partly by virtue of the structure of government, partly by virtue of public expectations. The Constitution established a system by which foreign affairs (which is the realm of most national security issues) were to be conducted principally by the president, but were to be consummated only "with the advice and consent of the Senate." Traditionally the president has led in such matters and, of special importance, the American people expect him to do so. Thus, the tendency has been to allow the president to lead (if he will) in a manner which satisfies the basic desires of the people, a criterion sometimes difficult to determine. Especially in matters of serious foreign policy issues which involve vital national interests, the "rally 'round the president" factor usually can be exploited. However, matters of genuine vital national security interest are more often and more readily handled in secret than others, provided all parties are conscious of operational security (OPSEC) and dedicated to the private conduct of those affairs. Thus, national security issues are different from ordinary issues and may lend themselves to a certain degree of insulation from media impact. Generally they are handled through the mechanism of the National Security Council (NSC) which was established by the 1947 National Security Act for just that purpose. Further, the public seems generally willing to concede the lead to the administration when such issues become public. If the Gulf War is any indicator, the public is not willing or anxious to see the media in the lead.

Another issue is that of "raw news." Perhaps the greatest problem with "raw news" is the visual images that accompany it. Just how important is the phenomenon of raw news that CNN presents in the near real time? Who presents the images is also important. Many of the most graphic images are shot by "foreign stringers," people whose connection to the media is part-time, opportunistic, and possibly biased. They shoot photographs or videos as the occasion presents itself and then market their wares to the highest bidder. (Some are on contract to major media organizations, but they are paid for piece work.) This goes to the heart of influencing the public. To influence public opinion, the commentator must be a respected, credible figure. A well-established anchor wields more weight with the viewing public than do some presidents. But anchors do not present "raw news" and thus benefit from the delay between an event and the evening report, during which time the president or an administration spokesperson may have taken the lead. In foreign policy, and by implication national security, the public expects the president to lead and will usually "stand by" for some reaction from the White House. The media will be "at the door" as quickly as possible seeking some administration reaction and in their hunger for newsworthy comments or indicators of policy decisions exert some pressure upon the administration to speak.

This pressure may force a premature reaction and some policymakers have complained that they have no time to think things through. The existence of reasonably well-developed policy or a clear philosophy make reaction to surprise events more manageable.

All this, of course, involves the impact of visual images.

How powerful are the visual images in the news media? Only a tentative answer can be given to this question. It is certain that there is shock value in some photographs. The video footage of Somalis dragging the body of a dead American through the streets of Mogadishu had two effects. Public opinion polls reflected a demand to commit forces in strength and "teach them a lesson they won't forget." Instead, within four days and under intense congressional pressure, the administration issued statements committing itself to a withdrawal by a certain date and convinced the United Nations to withdraw its "Most Wanted" posters of Mr. Aideed. The impact of the photos appears to have been decisive in the direction exactly opposite that of public opinion. As the more

recent, horrifying photographs from Rwanda have flashed on the television screen, the administration has sought to energize others to the task of restoring order. Rwanda has no national security value to the United States so the pictures, as awful as they are, elicit only humanitarian demands to quell the slaughter. On the other hand, genuine national security issues are not normally the subject of dramatic photographs and those which are dramatic in the national security arena are often highly classified.

One issue which should be of particular concern, and which may require government legislation, is the evidence of media manipulation of images. Students of the media know that this is not a new phenomenon, but the evidence of sophisticated technical manipulation of images is growing and there is a possibility that the normally skeptical American public will come, in time, to view the picture "worth a thousand words" today, as containing 750 lies or potential lies tomorrow. Conversely, the MTV generation may come to believe the image anyway. It is easy to handle images whereas reading or thinking rationally takes work.

Even as alternative periodicals abound in academe, alternative news sources are increasing. It is possible that the 500-channel, interactive media center, which seems on the verge of replacing the family television, may well give interested viewers access to alternative interpretations of news, but unless there is an accompanying increase in the number of reporters in the field, all 500 channels will likely carry the same pictures.

Notwithstanding all the above, the public will continue to react to dramatic images more strongly than to mere words of outrage. If the Somali incident is any indicator, the reactions, though immediate and visceral, may well be only of short duration. Ultimately, Americans wanted their soldiers out of Somalia and the administration read that desire correctly and moved contrary to the public opinion survey without significant outcry being raised.

Then, how important is the mood of the country in responding to news events? Obviously, it is very important. The American people will follow their president in national security issues so long as the threat is palpable and his actions conform to the general limits of the national interest as they understand them. Internal discord makes it difficult to focus on external issues, but external threatening issues may serve as a rallying point for national unity. Bosnia, as an example, has little or no apparent national security value to the American public. Neither did Somalia, but while it appeared easy to take action in Somalia on the heels of PROVIDE COMFORT (the relief of the Kurds), there seems to be a general understanding that Bosnia could become very disruptive of American economic recovery and, horrifying photographs and news notwithstanding, the public does not want to be led into the Balkans. In his classic work *The First Summit: Roosevelt & Churchill at Placentia Bay, 1941*, Theodore A. Wilson recounts a period in 1940 when President Roosevelt felt that the mood of the country had turned sour to the point where even his remarkable persuasive powers had become ineffective. So strongly did he feel this that he avoided any attempt to change it.

It is significant that Franklin D. Roosevelt was a popular president. Lyndon B. Johnson, on the other hand, was not; especially when compared to his predecessor. What, then, is the role of presidential popularity? The American people expect a very high standard of performance from their president, particularly in matters of national security, especially when it involves the spilling of American blood. Whereas the tendency exists to allow the president to lead in foreign matters, a "zone three" president will essentially be unable to lead or influence public opinion on any significant issue unless he is handed a "good luck" issue—something as unequivocal as Pearl Harbor.

Self-assured presidents seem far better able to handle the media, but are best able to do so when they have a stated framework, a previously articulated philosophical orientation upon which to lean. Ronald Reagan had such a base and was able to operate from it with relative impunity from media probing.

In the last few years, TV news has carried some stories for extended periods. At some point, any news story grows stale. There is a fatigue factor which affects public responsiveness to otherwise dramatic news, but when that fatigue factor begins to affect any given story will vary. The networks are profit driven to keep the public attention, and a dip in ratings will result in an automatic shift of news to more dramatic events regardless of the apparent importance of the first event. Further, with the advent of CNN, high drama can be continuously covered, but as CNN coverage of the Gulf War demonstrated, there needs to be at least a broad enough backdrop against which the networks can portray a host of peripheral issues in those otherwise interminable periods of waiting for the next event to begin. Conversely, CNN's coverage of the Gulf War suggests that when a real national security issue is involved, public fatigue is not a factor. This may have been a unique event since it was the first of its kind, but it is possibly significant that as an event it held public interest for almost six months. In any case, it is a phenomenon that requires further study.

Is there a predictable public opinion response time? So long as the chain of influence runs conventionally from event to news media to citizen to elected official to the Congress to the president, time will be manageable to some degree. But with the advent of public access to the White House via FAX and E-mail, it is possible that reaction time will be compressed. Given the growing sophistication of Political Action Committees (PACs), it is highly likely they will employ the most immediate response avenues and will attempt to mobilize their supporters to do likewise. (The author was solicited by telephone once and twice by mail, once with E-mail addresses and instructions, within one 10-day period while writing this study.) The popularity of the "jam the White House switchboard" maneuver is growing and, as the media continue to report on its effectiveness, it is likely to increase as a political signalling tactic at the very least.

Whether this "pressure tactic" will translate into action remains to be seen—especially in matters of foreign affairs for which there are only a few PACs or interested and influential groups. Cubans braving the Florida Straits get

the attention of the media while Hmong refugees trying to swim the Mekong to find safety in Thailand go totally unnoticed.

How important is the context of an event? It appears that context is one thing generally absent from most televised media reports. Further, as fewer reporters are stationed on foreign assignments for any length of time, the ability of the media to provide relevant context will diminish. On the other hand, access to varied data bases may eventually reverse this situation.

Despite the huge growth of information/news services, most Americans remain locally focused and see international events through the lens of their own particular situation. Consequently, while Americans see Bosnia as morally awful, they also understand that physical involvement there would interfere with the reorientation of the American economy and would result in the growth of the defense sector which has just been so painfully dismantled. As an example of the problem of split focus, the American Jewish community has been the voice to highlight the issue of genocide against the Bosnian Muslims. Genocide is genocide they rightly argue, but the arguments have not resulted in sustained public outcry, probably because there are other more pressing issues confronting the Jewish community at the moment.

Ironically, it appears that former President Jimmy Carter may have used the context of international uncertainty over what to do with North Korea, coupled to an international television address to preempt administration plans to put serious pressure on the North Koreans. Whether or not his negotiations with President Kim Il-Sung would have borne fruit without the public disclosure that accompanied it will never be known. What is certain is that the context of growing international tension and an ambivalent American public disposition to go to war with North Korea again made Mr. Carter's announcement significant enough to alter administration deliberations.

How susceptible is the media to foreign manipulation? How is that manipulation received? International opinions/attitudes are frequently displayed in the American media sometimes simply because they are newsworthy, sometimes because foreign nations are seeking overtly to influence American policymakers through the the American public. Sometimes these attempts to influence are done crudely in which case most Americans dismiss the attempt, sometimes, as Egyptian President Sadat demonstrated, with craftiness which yields some results.

Finally, some policy elites matter more than others. How responsive/susceptible are these elites to the media? While there may be a good deal of prejudice involved in any answer to this question, the research appears sparse. In a speech at a media conference held at a small college in Pennsylvania, Daniel Schorr made it clear that current media management is more attuned to its profit motivation than to reaching any particular body *per se*. One may interpret from this that the mere hope of pandering successfully to an influential body that does not otherwise generate high volume sales is not likely to occur. However, among the two million who "count" in such matters, there is a good deal of elitist flavor. Yet, Page and Shapiro state that "characterizations of public opinion as ignorant fall very wide of the mark." "Collective opinion has responded rapidly and in sensible ways [given the information provided] to international [and other] events. . . ." A policy elite exists, but the judgement of the American public must be attended to.

The second part of the answer must also come from Page and Shapiro who state, "lack of available information does often give elites leeway to act in unpopular ways." And that "the *availability* of key facts . . . may be low, for reasons of chance or design."

Conclusions

These appear to be the truths associated with the interplay between the media and the government.

The Relationship is Complex and Situational.

Media impact in itself may not be sufficient to alter government policy. But it is not clear how the public, increasingly becoming aware that it may make its voice heard directly in reaction to a media event, through E-mail access to the White House, will affect the Executive Branch. On the other hand, it is possible that as certain news organizations conduct their own on-air polls for immediate interpretation, the White House will begin its own polling operation.

The popularity of the administration is a fundamental factor in how well it relates to the press. A strong administration can turn the media to its service in matters of national security because the people tend to want the president to lead in that area.

A president with low public opinion ratings can only gain public and media support through dramatic action in response to dramatic events. Otherwise, zone three presidents are generally unable to positively influence public attitudes. Mature administrations are generally better able to deal with dramatic events and may be better able to gain control of the focus of reporting so that the administration rather than the media sets the agenda.

Respected commentators and "experts" have the capacity to move public opinion dramatically, generally somewhat beyond what even a popular president can do. However, as a general rule, the media takes its lead in foreign policy from the Oval Office. An active administration can seize direction of the media reporting by "providing many opportunities" to the press. This amounts to a saturation operation.

Images play a role.

Strong video images can engage the attention of the American people if there is a humanitarian theme or a clear and present threat to U.S. national security; however, the images are only part of the complex of interactions and may have only transient effect.

It is not yet common knowledge that some news is "doctored" or that what is happening before the camera may be only what is taking place in one small area. As stringers are employed more and more in the Third World, it is increasingly likely that activity may be staged or filmed selectively. When the biased nature of video coverage becomes common knowledge, televised dramatic events may well lose impact.

The Media is the Messenger

The media claim, with some supporting evidence, that they are simply the medium for the message and the people react however they will. Others, including policymakers, sometimes claim that they feel hamstrung by the media. "Media pressure" is a call to action for which some immediate response is required, thus reducing the time for thoughtful consideration. The evidence that time for reflection generates better decisions is ambivalent. Political Action Committees can now activate the public to "SHOUT" electromagnetically! The motivation may come from mailed appeals to call congressmen or senators or the White House; to telephonic appeals; or televised appeals. To date, few such appeals have appeared in the print media. A televised appeal may have only transient impact. A letter allows time for reflection and consideration while in an active mode whereas television usually finds the viewer in a passive mode. In all these cases the media is the messenger and appeals for action are clearly identified with their proper source.

Ultimately, the media's impact upon national security decision making is a complex, situational equation consisting of a host of variables from the prestige, personality and credibility of the news commentators, president, other prominent government figures and the "enemy" if there is one; to the depth of focus of the public on domestic issues.

National Security is Different.

What does all this mean for national security? The answer, like much of what has been presented here, is that it depends. The elements that come together to determine whether the media has an impact upon national security decision making include the ability of the media to gain access to the important information, the manner in which they choose to present it to the people, and how that presentation resonates with the public mood. Operating in harmony with or in opposition to the media portrayal of an issue is the level of administration control which is, in its turn, strengthened or compromised by the factor of presidential popularity. In a true national security episode, both press and people are likely to hold back to see whether the administration will lead. If it leads in a direction compatible with the general mood of the people, both will likely be supportive. If either the president fails to lead, or attempts to lead in a direction contrary to the popular mood, there is likely to be trouble for the administration. But in matters of national security, the government has the advantage of secrecy and a horde of salesmen should it choose to attempt to sell an issue. Always operating within and alongside this rather ambiguous process is the element of personal conviction. Those with direct access to the president or to his principal advisers have the opportunity for disproportionate influence. This applies as well to advisory organs like the NSC. But they, like individuals, operate in roles that vary from administration to administration. There is, then, no certain answer to the question. A different calculus is required for each episode and the variables are no more static than the mind of man.

Endnotes

1. Russell W Newman. "Mass Audiences," *Media Studies Journal*, Fall, 157; also see Gladys Ganley, "Political Uses of Personal Electronic Media," 175, and Michael C. Janeway, "Power and Weakness of the Press," 1991, 3.
2. Benjamin I Page. "Democratic Responsiveness? Untangling the Links Between Public Opinion and Policy," *Political Studies Quarterly*, 1994, 25-28.
3. James. *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, 1:6.
4. Daniel C Hallin. *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, 213; also Ted Koppel, "The Perils of Info-Democracy," *New York Times*, 1994, A25.
5. William Randolph Hearst as quoted in Gerald F. Linderman, *The Mirror For War: American Society and the Spanish-American War*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974, 165-166, from a signed editorial in the *Journal* on, 1898.
6. Ken Auletta. *Three Blind Mice: How the Networks Lost Their Way*, New York: Random House. Author details the shift in direction of the networks toward the pure profit motivation of ordinary big business. The Hearst and Pulitzer competition was likewise market-share driven, but, says Auletta, the current trend is a disturbing turn away from any attempt toward reporting truth, 1991.
7. Russell W Neuman. "Mass Audiences," *Media Studies Journal*. Neuman suggests that the public attention span responds in a variety of ways which require further investigation, 1991, 157.
8. Alicia C Shephard. "An American in Paris (and Moscow and Berlin and Tokyo...)," *American Journalism Review*, 1994, 25-26.
9. Gerald F Linderman. *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish-American War*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974, 25-27. For a slightly contrary view, see Harold U. Faulkner, *Politics, Reform and Expansion: 1890-1900, The New American Nation Series*, New York: Harper Torch Books, 1959, 27, 223, 31.

10. Robert Beisner. *From the Old Diplomacy to the New: 1865-1900*, second edition, The American History Series, Arthur S. Link gen. ed., Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc, 1986, 128-129.
11. Faulkner. *Politics, Reform and Expansion, 1890-1900*, 227.
12. Linderman, *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish-American War*, 28, cites Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History, A Reinterpretation*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1963, 250, "...his philosophy was that a President obeys, does not resist, public opinion"; also Linderman, 27, "He believed the people knew more than any man. He never tried to lead but studied so constantly public opinion that he became almost infallible in its interpretation." Quoting Chancy M. Deep in "Memorial Address on President McKinley at the Lincoln Anniversary Banquet of the Republican Club of New York, 1902." (footnote 57)
13. Linderman. *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish-American War*, 28.
14. *Ibid*, 30-31.
15. *Ibid*, 35.
16. It has never been for lack of information nor of access to it—which must temper our enthusiasm for the perhaps exaggerated promise of the Information Age, except that viewing television requires little initiative and insofar as diversity in programming develops, diversity of information may likewise grow.
17. Jordan and Page, "Shaping Foreign Policy Options," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. Page and Jordan's research demonstrates that in fact the collective public usually gets the issues right. How is unclear and demands further research, 1992:36(2):227.
18. Benjamin I Page, Robert Y Shapiro. *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in American Policy Preferences*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, 394-396.
19. Linderman. *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish- American War*, 30-32.
20. Faulkner. *Politics, Reform and Expansion, 1890-1900*, 228.
21. James A Stimson. *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles and Swings*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1990.
22. Gabriel Weinam. "The Influentials: Back to the Concept of Opinion Leaders," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Summer, 1991, 276. One must take into account Robert Beisner's thesis that McKinley was always in charge of himself and had simply accepted the fact that only war was going to bring about the peace he desired above everything else. Beisner, *From the Old Diplomacy to the New, 1865-1900*, 129.
23. Linderman. *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish- American War*, 32.
24. Faulkner. *Politics, Reform and Expansion, 1890-1900*, 231.
25. Linderman, *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish-American War*. Linderman cites a shift toward emotionalism, lavish illustration, mass appeal vs class, a substitute literacy with potential danger somewhat akin to what many observers are reporting about the MTV generation in America today. Despite the shallowness of this type of appeal, there is evidence which needs further development that more Americans are becoming more aware of foreign affairs. Qualitative judgements have not been forthcoming, 156-157.
26. Faulkner. *Politics, Reform and Expansion, 1890-1900*, 232.
27. Linderman. *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish- American War*, 38.
28. Jordan, Page. "Shaping Foreign Policy Options," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 228.
29. Page, Shapiro. *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in American Policy Preferences*, begins a discussion of mood theory as it is known in the realm of public opinion studies. Page and Shapiro, among others, strongly suggest that public moods are much less fickle than previously portrayed, 172.
30. Linderman. *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish- American War*, 52-59.
31. *Ibid*. Among the unique aspects of the time was the fact that the government was not yet in the habit of collecting and disseminating information in any systematic way. Most Americans were focused on local issues. When interest in Cuba began, the newspapers provided all the information that did not come out of geography or history books. The media were, in fact, the only ones with the information, with "the facts." Lacking any counter-facts, media facts were whatever the newspapers chose them to be and they chose them with a purpose in mind—war! Had President McKinley chosen to attack the media facts, the odds are that he would have had a very unsubstantial basis from which to do so. His "truth" would have been purveyed through the conservative media and it would have been well-received by much of the business establishment. This is another aspect of the phenomenon of influence by experts. Perhaps there is a deeper trend at work which acknowledges that there is too much to know for most people to be expert in any but a few areas, and only the opinion of "experts" may be relied upon, 156-157.
32. Linderman. *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish- American War*, 163. also for an evaluation of the relative speeds of reporting today, see Robert J. Donovan and Ray Scherer, *Unslient Revolution: Television News and Public Life, 1948-1991*, Woodrow Wilson Center Series, New York: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1992, 317.
33. Mark Mohr. quoted in *Turmoil at Tiananmen: A Study of U.S. Press Coverage of the Beijing Spring of 1989*, Foreword by Marvin Kalb, Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge: Harvard University, 1992, 191; also George Ladner Jr. and R. Jeffrey Smith, "Intelligence Ties Endure Despite U.S.-China Strain," *The Washington Post*, 1994, A1, A25.

34. Robert J Donovan, Ray Scherer. *Unsilent Revolution: Television News and Public Life, 1948-1991*, Woodrow Wilson Center Series, New York: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1992, 310.
35. Russell W Newman. "Mass Audiences," *Media Studies Journal*, 1991, 157; also Michael C Janeway, "Power and Weakness of the Press," *Media Studies Journal*, 1991, 3.
36. Ted Koppel. "The Perils of Info-Democracy," *New York Times*, 1994, A25.
37. Patrick O'Heffernan. *Mass Media and American Foreign Policy: Insider Perspectives on Global Journalism and the Foreign Policy Process*, Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp. O'Heffernan establishes the position that one must view the media-government interaction as a two-way street. While it is certainly well established that the media do exert influence, it is equally clear that they are used by a wide variety of agents for an equally wide range of purposes. In O'Heffernan's Chapter 8, "Insider's Model," there are three principal actors: Chiefs, Staffers and Implementers. These are all domestic figures and as suggested earlier, they all have varying degrees of influence. Further, outside actors—the foreign press, foreign chiefs, staffers and implementers also play a role, 1991.
38. Page and Shapiro. *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in American Policy Preferences*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. This entire book, the summation of research covering a 50-year period, pounds home the point that the framers of our democratic institutions, though themselves skeptical of the "wisdom of the masses," nevertheless held to the theory of participative government. And, when not intentionally misled by government or influential factions, the wisdom of the people has usually proven superior to the elites, 1994.
39. Dale Davenport. "Credibility Crashed With NBC's Fakery," *Harrisburg Patriot-News*. In this episode, a major network filmed a crash test of a certain line of trucks, but they "enhanced" the effects of the crash to be certain that they obtained a dramatic picture—they added firing mechanisms to insure the crash resulted in a fire explosion. Although the trucks may have been defective, the video footage presented on the news was as phoney as if it had been created in Hollywood, 1993, B11.
40. Jacqueline Sharkey. "When Pictures Drive Foreign Policy," *American Journalism Review*, 17; also see Bert Quint, "Absentee Journalism," *Forbes Media Critic: The Best and Worst of America's Journalism*, Summer, 1994, 92-94.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Daniel C Hallin. *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, 213. Ted Koppel shares this conclusion stating "If an Administration fails to set a clear agenda of its own, it will become the prisoner of somebody else's." And further, "For an administration, the absence of a clearly enunciated policy is the political equivalent of a vacuum." Ted Koppel, "The Perils of Info-Democracy," *New York Times*, 1994, A25.
43. Patrick O'Heffernan. *Mass Media and American Foreign Policy: Insider Perspectives on Global Journalism and the Foreign Policy Process*, Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation. Two major case studies consume half of O'Heffernan's book. In the first the author studied Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's skillful use of the American media to influence the American government, an act which the author claims contributed ultimately to the Camp David Accords. His second case study examines Israel's careless disregard of the media during the early stages of the intifada which contained dramatic images, an underdog struggle, and had considerable duration. Here he makes the case that the raw media images inflamed world opinion which resulted in a condemning vote in the U.N. Media images may not have been the sole cause of the shift in U.S. policy towards Israel, as there was ample disquiet on that issue to begin with, but the video footage of Israeli soldiers' brutality toward Palestinian children crystalized that disquiet. The United States could have obstructed the vote, but instead chose to abstain—a clear slap in Israel's face. Media images of Israeli brutality were clearly instrumental in turning U.S. policy away from its customary full support of Israel. Israeli reactions to media coverage finally resulted in a news blackout, recommended by Henry Kissinger. Included in these case studies, is a third case study on the TWA hijacking, in which the role of the media varied considerably. There was little doubt, however, that the terrorists were attempting to use the media to further their own particular ends. To an uncomfortable extent they were successful, 1991, 103-109, 159-174, 175-213.
44. Donald L Jordan, Benjamin I Page. "Shaping Foreign Policy Opinions: The Role of TV News," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 1992:36(2):227-240. Also W. Russell Neuman, "The Threshold of Public Attention," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1990:54(2):159-172; and Donald L. Jordan, "Newspaper Effects on Policy Preferences," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1993, 191.
45. Paul Brace, Barbara Hinckley. "The Structure of Presidential Approval: Constraints Within and Across Presidencies," *The Journal of Politics*, 1991:53(4):996, 998; also Charles W. Ostromand and Dennis M. Simon, "Managing Popular Support: The Presidential Dilemma," *Policy Studies Journal*, 1984:12(4):680-687.
46. Lee Seligman. "Disarming the Opposition: The President, the Public, and the INF Treaty," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1990:54(1):46.
47. Jordan, Page. "Shaping Foreign Policy Opinions: The Role of TV News," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 231; also Charles W. Ostromand and Dennis M. Simon, "Managing Popular Support: The Presidential Dilemma," *Policy Studies Journal*, 680-687.

48. Brace, Hinckley. "The Structure of Presidential Approval: Constraints Within and Across Presidencies," *The Journal of Politics*, 999.
49. Jordan, Page. "Shaping Foreign Policy Opinions: The Role of TV News," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 231.
50. Ken Silverstein. "Follow the Leader: When Covering the Third World, Major U.S. Newspapers Take Their Cue From the White House," *American Journalism Review*, 1993, 30-36; also Mark Hertgaard, "On Bended Knee: The Press and the Reagan Presidency," *American Journalism Review*, 1993, 31. Whereas both of these references carry the same theme, an excellent work of more general nature is Nicholas O Barry, *Foreign Policy and the Press: An Analysis of the New York Times Coverage of U.S. Foreign Policy*, Contributions to the Study of Mass Media and Communications No. 20, Bernard K. Johnpoll Series ed., Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990. This author particularly distinguishes between the developmental phase of a foreign policy issue and the later reporting on that same issue.