

# **Beyond the CNN effect**

Towards a constitutive understanding of media  
power in international politics

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*So decisive to experience itself are the results of communications that often men do not really believe what 'they see before their very eyes' until they have been 'informed' about it by the national broadcast.*

C. Wright Mills, 1970

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Responsibility for any errors and omissions in this thesis remains mine alone.

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Henrik Thune

## Preface

Most of what we think we know about international politics is to some degree defined by mass-produced news information. It is a part of a common and everyday practice. What we experience about the world around us, and what we recognize as international problems and threats that demand political action, are to a large extent based on our intake of news information from certain chosen newspapers, web pages, television channels and radio stations (Hafez 2007, Volkmer 1999: 219–27, Robertson 1992: 177–81). In Marshall McLuhan's (1964: 7) classic metaphor, we live, so to speak, as daily consumers of news information, an almost perfect global information life disconnected from geographical place, and with the news media as a kind of expansion of the body's physical sense apparatus – 'an extension of ourselves'. And even if the media are many, and the habits and customs of the news public may be increasingly varied (Castells 1996), global news reality is in fact surprisingly uniform – as evinced below in my time-sequenced empirical study of world-wide coverage of international news (see Chapter VII).<sup>1</sup>

It is not difficult to agree that international news is often global in its coverage, and that many of us are able to get a more or less simultaneous cognitive impression of the world from a chair in front of any TV or PC screen. But what do this mean for how we relate to the reality we experience via the news media? Moreover: do the news media play a role in how the central actors in international relations – nation-states and their foreign policy decision-making elite – behave in their relations to the world, their political interests and priorities, or the perception of reality on which state policies are based?

The past two decades have been marked by a remarkable growth in the number of articles, books, university courses and public and academic debates

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<sup>1</sup> Almost 70% of more than twenty newspapers spread around the world that were surveyed over a four-month period covered the same top three foreign news items. The empirical study was conducted by the author between September 2004 and February 2005. See Chapter VII for a presentation and discussion of this empirical material.

seeking to understand and to answer this type of questions.<sup>2</sup> From the headquarters of NATO and of the UN, to ministries of foreign affairs, newspapers and internet blogs, TV debates, and everyday kitchen-table discussions about international politics, notions like the ‘CNN effect’ (Gilboa 2005a, 2005b, Strobel 1997), ‘CNN curve’ (Neuman 1996), ‘bodybag effect’ (Freedman 2000) ‘mediacracy’ (de Zengotita 2005, Philips 1975), ‘wag-the-dog syndrome’, ‘spin-doctors’ etc. have become popular clichés.<sup>3</sup> The role of the news media in forming and shaping public perceptions of the international realm and state actions or policy priority-setting has also attracted scholarly effort and academic investigation, much of a high academic standard, greatly enhancing our understanding of the role played by the news media in international affairs (Bennett, Lawrence & Livingston 2007, Entman 2004, Robison 2002, Nacos & Shapiro 2000, Mermin 1999, Strobel 1997, Zaller & Chui 1996, Shaw 1996, Livingston & Eachus 1995, Entman 1991, Bennett 1990, Herman & Chomsky 1988, Hallin 1986, Cohen 1963).

To be sure, as a general description it would be fair to claim that the news media are widely regarded as one of the pivotal factors underling the evolution of what prominent scholars of globalization and international politics, such as Manuel Castells (2008, 1996) or John Gerard Ruggie (1993:171), have labelled ‘the global civil society’ and ‘the process of unbundling territoriality’. Already a decade ago the long-time student of communications and international affairs, Steven Livingston (1997: 1), summarized this tendency clearly: ‘The impact of these new global, real-time media is typically regarded as substantial, if not profound.’ Livingston singled out two factors that, in particular, have brought this about. The first was the end, in 1989, of the Cold War as the overarching and all-defining global conflict. The second factor involves the advances in communications technology that have made it possible to broadcast with only a few seconds’ delay from anywhere on Earth – particularly satellite communication devices and fibre-optic cables.

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<sup>2</sup> For a recent overview of this literature, see Gilboa (2005b). For a Norwegian contextualization of the same literature, see Thune, Larsen & Holm (2006), Thune (2002) and Tore Slaatta (1998).

<sup>3</sup> Among these new concepts and labels were the ‘bodybag effect’ (Freedman 2000), ‘media pervasiveness’ (Hoge 1994), the ‘electrocution’ of the battlefield (Baudrillard 2000 [1991]), ‘the triumph of the image’ (Mowlana et al.. 1992)



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Given the great attention that has been paid to the role of the news media in the post-Cold War international political environment, the point of departure of this doctoral thesis is an observation that may seem somewhat counter-intuitive. To put it simply: Compared to the notably increased academic and popular interest in the global role of the news media, over the last decades, the academic discipline that is most dedicated to exploring global and international political relations – the academic discipline of International Relations (IR) – has been surprisingly inactive on the subject. Despite some important recent scholarly achievements (Baum & Potter 2008, Hughes 2007, Ferguson & Mansbach 2007, Bloch-Elkon 2007, Aldric et al. 2006, Gilboa 2005a/2005b, Robinson 2002/1999, Der Derian 2001, Jakobsen (2000, 1996), Shaw 2000, Freedman 2000, Rotberg & Weiss 1996, Shaw 1996) particularly in the field of foreign policy analysis, explicit and direct linkages have rarely been made between international relations theory IR, on the one hand, and the presence of the news media in international affairs.

This lack of interest in the role of the news media within the core of the academic study of IR, to which I shall return later in the introductory chapter, is the point of departure of this doctoral thesis. My concern is that much of the advancement of academic scholarship concerning itself with the interaction between the news media and international politics has occurred outside the core of IR theory, despite its direct relevance to the IR discipline. Hence, there may exist a potential for increased theoretical understanding of various factors structuring and influencing the way states operate on the international realm by bridging the gap between the IR discipline and studies of mass communication that concern themselves with the empirical field of IR, but from outside IR theory. One spokesman for such a bridge-building approach is Eytan Gilboa (2005a). Writing on what he calls ‘the search for a communication theory of IR’ surveying recent literature on global communication, he argues: ‘there is a clear need to adopt a new research agenda for studying the effects of global

communications [...] on various areas of communications and international relations' (2005a: 38).

## **Design**

This doctoral thesis falls within the parameter of what Arend Lijphart (1971) called 'hypothesis-generating case studies', or what Harry Eckstein (1975: 104) referred to as 'heuristic case studies'. Working along the lines suggested by Torbjørn L. Knutsen and Jonathon W. Moses (2007: 132–38), I aim to use several empirical case studies to help 'generate new theory'. They summarize the essential procedure in the following manner: 'The analyst studies a given case to generate a preliminary theoretical construct. Because this construct is based on a single case, it can do little more than hint at a more valid general model. This model, then, is confronted with another case – which, in turn, might suggest ways of amending and improving the construct' (Moses & Knutsen 2007:136).

Moses and Knutsen's description of how to develop and illustrate a general theoretical proposition fits well with the research design and structure of this thesis. As with almost all academic work in the social sciences, and many PhD dissertations within the discipline of International Relations, the endeavour is a generic one. However, contrary to the most common research design, this thesis does not apply and test general, established theoretical hypotheses against one or several unique empirical cases (King, Keohane and Verba 1994: 7–33).<sup>4</sup> Rather, the research design is the reverse. This thesis seeks to provide an answer to the challenge posed by Eytan Gilboa above; it develops and suggests a general understanding of the interaction between the news media and the operations of states in international politics, and then goes on to propose that this understanding view may be applied to empirical inquiries

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<sup>4</sup> One classic example of this type of case study within the literature on foreign policy analysis is Graham Allison's (1971) *Essence of Decision*. For other case studies of the same episode based on alternative generic hypotheses see Weldes (1999) and Alexander George and Richard Smoke (1974). For a recent example of theory-testing related to the news media and foreign policy see Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston (2007).

and to shed light on certain historical processes of evolution in the making of foreign policy in democratic states.

This design for theory development is consistent with an inductive approach (George and Bennett 2004: 111–15). That is to say, the theoretical understanding of the role played by the news media put forward here will be developed inductively, by identifying the empirical limitations of existing theories, and then introducing an alternative theoretical model and a conceptual formula intended to help to fill in the empirical gap. Looking back to the early days of modern social science, the method is analogous to the notion of ‘immanent critique’ applied by the Frankfurt school (Held 1980: 184, Horkheimer 1970).<sup>5</sup>

## **Aims**

This is a work situated within the academic discipline of International relations. The general problem that defines the reach of the thesis is this: what political effect do the news media have on how democratic states operate and conduct their affairs in international politics? In accordance with the general research design, I approach this problem stepwise, by dealing with three specific research questions:

1. What are the defining theoretical positions and empirical claims currently informing our knowledge about the role of the news media in international politics?
2. What are the conceptual and analytical limitations of the current academic enterprise? Are there perhaps significant empirical variations that are not accounted for?
3. How can we increase our understanding of the role played by the news media by supplementing IR scholarship with insights derived from theories of

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Immanent critique’ is straightforward method for the advancement of theoretical knowledge. Building on David Held (1980) and Horkheimer (1970), the structure of the argument in this thesis follows the method of immanent critique in the sense that I start with the conceptual principles and standards of the current academic study of the news media in international politics, reveal their conceptual implications and limits, and in light of these limitations seek to identify alternative ways to theorize the role of the news media. ‘Critique proceeds, so to speak, “from within”’ (Held 1980: 184).

communication and studies of the news media outside the theoretical core of the IR discipline?

Starting from these general questions, the aims of the doctoral thesis are the following: The **first** aim is to systematize current theories describing the interaction between the news media and the foreign-policy operations of states on the outskirts of the IR discipline, and thereby seek to enlarge and contribute to the debate on globalization and foreign policy-making within IR. The **second** aim is to assess the conceptual and empirical limitations of current scholarship, and, on the basis of this, to develop an alternative understanding of the role played by the news media in international relations. Along the lines of the theory-developing design defined above, my preferred method for achieving this aim is to contrast the academic knowledge of current scholarship with a more practical form of knowledge. That is to say; to compare the prevailing academic conclusion and findings of the role played by the news media with how the foreign policy decision-makers themselves view the influence of the media, and then seek to advance the academic scholarship by bringing in insights developed within parallel academic fields of inquiry.<sup>6</sup> The **third** aim is to seek to further substantiate and illustrate the general theoretical argument, by reporting the findings of three separate case studies of the role played by the news media in Norwegian foreign policy.

### **Approach**

The focus of this thesis is on the interaction between the institution of the news media and the way democratic states conduct their foreign policy and operate on the international stage. The limitation to ‘democratic states’ is given by the empirical basis of the thesis, which is the Norwegian case. The generic relevance of the thesis for non-democratic states is accordingly not discussed.

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<sup>6</sup> As will become clear in Chapters V and IV, these academic fields are communication studies and political sociology.

I use the term ‘democracy’ in the sense of a ‘polyarchal democracy’ as defined by Robert Dahl (1998:83–91, 1989: 225–32).<sup>7</sup> The two defining democratic governmental institutions built into the theoretical argument of the thesis are a national political system marked by ‘elected officials’ and the ‘access to alternative sources of information’, sensitive to the views and opinions of the public sphere (Dahl 1998: 85–86).

Concerning the definition of ‘the news media’, I distinguish between and refine two different meanings. On the one hand, there is the more traditional definition whereby the news media are understood as a number of independent political actors consisting of a multitude of different news-desks and types of news outlets (newspapers, TV, internet etc.) expressing specific views, interests or ideologies that may or may not play into official decision-making processes and actions (Bennett et al., 2007: 3–9). On the other hand, the news media may be understood as a rather uniform ‘communicative system’ defining homogeneous and constant communicative structures and patterns, independent of the type of news outlet or subjective interests or ideological views etc. of the news-desks (Luhmann 2000: 27).<sup>8</sup> The central argument of the thesis applies this second definition.

In connection with the distinction between these two definitions of the news media I also differentiate between two ways of viewing the role of the media in politics. The distinction I shall introduce is the difference between viewing the news media as an actor existing independently and outside politics, and viewing the news media as a constitutive arena for the expression and action of politics (Chapter I and V).

In terms of academic tradition, the following chapters fall within the broad frame of what George H. von Wright (1971:2–6) labelled the ‘Aristotelian tradition’ of social inquiry. According to that tradition, the primary purpose is not to explain the

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<sup>7</sup> ‘[A] polyarchal democracy is a political system with the six democratic institutions listed above [“elected officials”, “free, fair, and frequent elections”, “freedom of expression”, “access to alternative sources of information”, associational autonomy”, and “inclusive citizenship”]. Polyarchal democracy, then, is different from representative democracy with restricted suffrage, as in the 19th century. It is also different from older democracies and republics that not only had a restricted suffrage but lacked many of the other crucial characteristics of polyarchal democracy.’ (Dahl 1998:90)

<sup>8</sup> Empirically the scope of this thesis is restricted to two types of media outlets: television and newspaper (either print or internet editions).

ability of the news media to cause single actions and events by stipulating causal effects between an independent and a dependent variable. The aim is rather to ‘understand the significance of a social institution’ (ibid: 6) [in this case the news media] by considering how foreign policy and the news media are symbiotic, and may not be accurately understood if simply studied as separate and autonomous entities or variables.<sup>9</sup>

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My scientific aspiration is primarily to generate theory. However, the thesis also reports the finding of several empirical studies. These are used for as *plausibility probes* to develop and substantiate the main generic argument, as well as to shed light on the specific case of Norwegian foreign policy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Borrowing from Alexander Wendt, the theoretical model to be developed in the subsequent chapters may be referred to as ‘constitutive theorizing’ (Barnett and Duvall 2005, Adler 2002: 101, Wendt 1999: 83–87).

<sup>10</sup> For empirical analysis of Norwegian media coverage of foreign news, see Galtung & Ruge 1965, Eide and Ottosen (2002), Ottosen (2001), Ottosen (1994), Ottosen (1993), Ottosen (1991), Ottosen & Figenschou (2007), Slaatta (1999), Slaatta (2001) and Eide (2001).

## **Part One**

### **Introducing the Problem**

## **The Missing Link Between the News Media and IR Theory**

What kind of political effect do the news media have on how democratic states operate and conduct their affairs in international politics? As a first approach to the general problem: Let us commence with something that is concrete and straightforward – a brief glance into a not so unusual morning at the office of the foreign minister in a medium-sized European country.<sup>11</sup>

There are about ten people sitting around the large oak table inside the Norwegian foreign minister's meeting room. At the head of the table sits the minister. He is surrounded by the directors of the various departments of the ministry, and his chief of staff and advisors. It has been an ordinary, quiet morning without any single event or issues dominating or defining the agenda. But all that is about to change. The date is 2 June 2008, and the time is only minutes before a large car-bomb is detonated right outside the Danish embassy in Islamabad, a few meters from the entrance of the Norwegian embassy. According to the foreign minister's chief of staff, who was willing to produce a written statement of this particular day, 2 June 2008 was not unlike many other similar days marked by highly mediated events and episodes, and it proceeded in the following manner.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The data are based on two interviews with the Norwegian Foreign Ministry's chief of staff in June 2008, and a systematic summary of standard proceedings and daily usual morning schedule produced exclusively for the author by the Foreign Minister's chief of staff.

<sup>12</sup> The chief of staff at the Foreign Minister's office, Mr Torgeir Larsen, was contacted by the author and agreed to produce a summary of a 'typical' way news coverage and news events play into the concrete schedule and work of the Foreign Minister. The summary was written down the week after the incident in Pakistan, and has been translated from Norwegian, 11 June 2008. It has been translated by Susan Hoivik, September 2008.



It's a quiet morning. No major or dominant issues. The foreign minister arrives at the office at 8.45. He goes through the main points on the day's agenda with his staff. There is a preparatory cabinet meeting, but without any special cases for the foreign minister. And then there are a few internal preparatory meetings, in advance of the minister's visit to the Middle East and Cyprus the following week. A meeting with the trade union organization, the Parliamentary Commission on Europe and a media appointment. Filming for a Norwegian TV programme and an interview with Japanese TV. And finally at 7 pm a big, live-broadcast debate meeting on racism arranged by the quality daily *Aftenposten*.

The morning meeting in the minister's leader group starts at 09.15, as usual. Today's meeting is an 'orientation meeting' – i.e. without an agenda of specific cases and decisions to be discussed. The heads of the various divisions at the ministry provide briefings on current matters. A dominant theme is the possibility of being summoned to negotiations in the WTO in July. The head of division for European policy and trade leads the discussion.

Then the meeting is interrupted. The head of the service division – which has responsibility for, among things, preparedness and security matters – is called to the telephone. She returns quickly, and asks for the floor. Bombs – one or several – have been detonated in or near the Danish embassy in Islamabad. There are probably many casualties. The Norwegian embassy is located nearby. Its windows were broken by the explosion, but there are no reports of injuries to staff. The head of the service division returns to her office. There ensues a short discussion of the situation. The need for establishing a crisis team will be assessed, with a focus on offering assistance to the Danes. Considerable media pressure is expected – also on the foreign minister. No decision is taken as to whether, when, where or how the minister is to reply or offer comments. That afternoon's debate meeting on racism will probably be affected – will there be a new round in the Islam/caricature debate? It is necessary to review the background material prepared for the meeting. The foreign minister wants a new briefing after the morning meeting, as soon as more information is available on the events in Islamabad. That means the appointment with Japanese TV will have to be re-scheduled.

Questions from media begin to pour in. The foreign minister is asked for comments. The requests are dealt with by the ministry's Communications Unit. How and when the minister is to present his comments has still not been decided – more information is needed on the situation in Islamabad.

The foreign minister is briefed on the situation. Initial estimates indicate five casualties, unknown whether they are Danish citizens. The Danish foreign ministry is contacted, to arrange a talk between the two foreign ministers, if convenient. The Danish foreign minister, Per Stig Møller, is in Folketinget (the Danish parliament) – but will phone his Norwegian colleague as soon as possible. Media pressure is increasing. Contact with the Office of the Prime Minister is established. Will the PM make a statement? Most practical would be to call a single press conference – to reach as many as possible at one and the same time. But would that be too overwhelming? And is there enough information to hold a press conference? Decision: press conference at 14.30, i.e. after the foreign minister has attended the preparatory cabinet meeting. As yet the PM will not make a statement – keep the matter at the foreign minister level. Preliminary comments from the Communications Unit prior to the press conference: communication is to convey the following: condemnation, sympathy with those affected, contact has been made with Danes, offering them any assistance they might need in Islamabad; and no Norwegian citizens appear to have been injured.

The foreign minister's agenda is pared down as much as possible. He will carry through the meetings with the trade union organization, the government and the Storting [the

Norwegian parliament]. Internal meetings are cancelled and a few other appointments re-scheduled. He goes to the preparatory cabinet meeting at 13.00. In the course of the meeting he leaves the room and is put in touch with the Danish foreign minister, who briefs him on the situation. Norwegian offer of assistance reiterated. Thereafter, telephone conversation with the Norwegian ambassador in Pakistan.

14:30: the minister leaves for the press conference to be held at the Foreign Ministry. Massive attendance – newspapers, radio, TV: The main message formulated after the attack is repeated: 'This a dreadful use of violence outside the Danish Embassy', and [...] 'We stand together with Denmark and strongly condemn the terrorist attacks in Islamabad' (VG 02.06.08).

Media requests continue. 'No' to participation in debate programme – this is not a situation appropriate for debate with a foreign minister. But 'yes' to appearance on the main news broadcasts on Norwegian television

Meeting in the Europe Commission at the Storting, and then onto the debate meeting on racism, where the foreign minister is to be one of the keynote speakers. From there directly into the news broadcasts, at 18.30 and 19.00. The debate meeting continues, with high media coverage. No new round about Islam, freedom of expression, caricatures and cartoons, etc. But the foreign minister does get questions from the press about Islamabad, and he responds. The situation at the Norwegian embassy, is security good enough, any connection with the attack on the Serena Hotel in Kabul some months earlier... etc.

The foreign minister returns home at 9 pm.

The foreign minister responsible for the decisions on Norway's response and reaction to the suicide bombing in Pakistan that day is an individual with almost 20 years' experience as a foreign policy decision-maker and a high-ranking civil servant. And as the former director of a major NGO, having held top positions in the civil service and as policy adviser, and high positions in international organizations, he has played a number of different roles as an actor on the international arena. During my 45-minute-long interview with the minister in 2006 about the role of the media in international politics and his own practice of foreign policy decision-making, he demonstrates an intense awareness of the way in which the news media play into his own work, and the work of his colleagues in other countries.<sup>13</sup> Referring to his political experience from the time before he was appointed Minister, he says:

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<sup>13</sup>See Chapter IV for more interviews. See also Appendix for list of interviewees and description of interviews.

I would say that I am extremely aware of the importance of the media. I consider the media to be central to the work that I do. I have to stay in constant touch with the entire Norwegian population. And that's why I'm so aware of the importance of the media when it comes to my work.

Somewhat later in the interview, reflecting on his own daily interaction with the media, the foreign minister downplays the importance of clear and fixed media tactics. Instead, he points out, 'the news media are an intimate part of what politics is all about: a communication strategy is not simply a way of presenting the political work, but an integral part of politics and a pivotal instrument for defining the premises for how the constituency understands and judges the policies'. Communication through the news media, he argues, is a 'way you shape the premises for how people see things'. During the first part of the interview the Foreign Minister repeatedly refers to the media as almost synonymous with public opinion. He also introduces a particular expression to define his view of the relationship between politics and the media – that 'the activity is the message':

I think we have quite a good strategy. It's very much based on something I also felt was important [in my previous job] and that is: to talk about what we're doing. I'm really focused on that point: the activity is the message [...] You have to think hard about communicating information, sharing insights. In that way you shape the premises for how people see things, and there the media are your tool.

### **1. The 'conventional wisdom' of media power**

I return to this and other interviews with foreign decision-makers in subsequent chapters. For our purpose here, however, it is enough to simply point out that the Norwegian Foreign Minister's view and conviction that the news media play a significant role in his own conduct of foreign policy, is typical. Nor are the proceedings at the Norwegian Foreign Minister's office, described above, particularly unique.

Between February and September 2006 I conducted interviews (later transcribed) with Norway's twelve most influential foreign policy decision-makers in the period from 2000 to 2008 (see Chapter IV).<sup>14</sup> At the outset, all interviewees were explicitly requested to reflect on the direct influence of the news media on the field of foreign policy and their own practice as political decision-makers. This material shows that according to those responsible for the daily operation of states – the policy-makers – the news media do indeed have a strong impact on the practice of foreign policy and international politics. As many as eight of the twelve interviewees defined the general influence of the media within the foreign policy arena as 'strong' or 'very strong'.<sup>15</sup> Only one respondent opined that the media had little influence.<sup>16</sup>

There is little reason to assume that these empirical tendencies and self-descriptions among foreign policy decision-makers indicate a non-conforming Norwegian case. In recent decades and in various contexts, a long series of foreign affairs politicians and commentators have made similar claims, or indeed emotional outbursts, about the role of the media in international politics.<sup>17</sup> One of them, Henry Kissinger (2001: 27) has put this unequivocally: 'The media...', he wrote about the new diplomacy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, '...are transforming foreign policy into a subdivision of public entertainment.' His former boss, Richard Nixon, formulated it no less unmistakably. Writing in his memoirs about what he saw as the newborn irresponsibility of the news

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter IV for description and documentation of these interviews.

<sup>15</sup> The one interviewee who differed served as deputy minister for less than one year and did not have an operative role. He answered as follows: 'I felt that there were few signs that the media influenced our daily work.'

<sup>16</sup> The data are based on interviews with the ministers and the deputy ministers of three consecutive governments, in addition to the official spokespersons and chief communication advisers at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister's Office during the same period.

<sup>17</sup> Some examples: Former US Secretary of State, James Baker III: 'The "CNN effect" has revolutionized the way policy makers have to approach their jobs, particularly in the foreign-policy area' (quoted in Kalb 1996: 7); former US Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright (1993): 'Every day we witness the challenge of collective security on television – some call it the *CNN effect*.' During his time as UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali put it: 'The member states never take action on a problem unless the media take up the case. Public emotion is so intense that United Nations' work is undermined and constructive statesmanship is also impossible.' (Quoted from 'CNN effect is not clear-cut', Fred Cate, 18 October 2002, [www.comminit.com](http://www.comminit.com).) See also the US peace negotiator Richard Holbrooke (1999), as well as *Our Global Neighborhood. Report of the Commission on Global Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995: 95.

media, Nixon gave a voice to all those who have blamed the media for the US defeat in Vietnam:

The Vietnam War was complicated by factors that had never before occurred in America's conduct of war... More than ever before, television showed the terrible human suffering and sacrifice of war. Whatever the intention behind such relentless and literal reporting of the war, the result was a serious demoralization of the home front, raising the question whether America would ever again be able to fight an enemy abroad with unity and strength of purpose at home.<sup>18</sup>

In December 1992, the Grand Old Man of US diplomacy, George Kennan, echoed Nixon's concern that the news media have taken over much of the role formerly played by responsible deliberative organs of government in the making of foreign policy: 'There can be no question that the reason for this acceptance lies primarily with the exposure of the Somalia situation by US media, above all, television. The reaction was an emotional one, triggered by the sight of the suffering of starving people.'<sup>19</sup>

Some years later, former UK Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, made the same general point. In the midst of the Balkan wars of the 1990s he asked rhetorically: 'If policy is not driven by the media, how can one interpret the sudden spiriting away of war-wounded Sarajevans to unavailable hospital beds in Britain?'<sup>20</sup> And even more general and explicitly, Prime Minister Tony Blair presented the following self-revelation only a few weeks before he stepped down in June 2007:

I am going to say something that few people in public life will say, but most know is absolutely true: a vast aspect of our jobs today – outside of the really major decisions, as big as anything else – is coping with the media, its sheer scale, weight and constant hyperactivity.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Hallin (1986: 3.).

<sup>19</sup> George Kennan in *The New York Times*, 30 September 1993.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted from (Gedye 1993).

<sup>21</sup> The speech was given at the headquarters of Reuters in London, 12 July 2007. See 'Full text: Blair on the media', [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/6744581.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/6744581.stm).

In other words: The Norwegian Foreign Minister and a long list of authoritative voices of prominent foreign policy actors that have expressed themselves on the role of the news media in international politics, answer the question posed at the top of this introduction in the affirmative: The news media *do* indeed stand in some kind of significant formative relationship to foreign policy. The Norwegian foreign policy elite, as well as Kissinger, Nixon, Blair and many other commentators and practitioners of international affairs and foreign politics,<sup>22</sup> all seem to agree on what BBC World anchor, Nik Gowing (1996), once labelled the ‘conventional wisdom’ of the media/foreign policy nexus. That is, the assumption of many in government, ‘that real-time television coverage of the horrors of Bosnia or Somalia or Rwanda not only creates a demand that “something must be done”, but also drives the making of foreign policy’ (ibid: 81).

## **2. The news media as a missing link in IR**

It might be tempting to brush off this type of ‘conventional wisdom’ as merely an expression of unscientific common-sensism. However, as I shall argue in Chapter IV, I believe a case can be made for the converse, namely that academic inquiries into the social or political field, and the field of IR,<sup>23</sup> should take this type of proto-academic knowledge and judgement seriously (Neumann 2002). Now, if this is accepted, and keeping in mind the conviction of many decision-makers that the news media do play a major political role, we are confronted by two striking discrepancies related to the academic discipline of IR:

*1. The lack of interest in the news media among IR scholars:* Despite the upsurge of public interest and awareness, the role of the news media has remained essentially peripheral to the production of knowledge within IR.<sup>24</sup> Although the news media are

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<sup>22</sup> See footnote 17 above.

<sup>23</sup> This taps into recent methodological debate in IR on practice, pragmatism and also what John Hobson and Len Seabrooke (2007) has called ‘everyday politics’ in IR is related to this. See for instance Rytövuori-Apunen (2005) and Günther Hellmann (2002). For ‘practice theory’ see Neumann (2002), Bauer & Brighi (2008).

<sup>24</sup> There are some notable exceptions, referred to in the Preface: Baum & Potter (2008), Hughes (2007), Ferguson & Mansbach (2007), Bloch-Elkon (2007), Aldric et al. (2006), Gilboa (2005a/2005b), Robinson

recognized as an important ingredient within globalization theory and media sociology,<sup>25</sup> there have emerged no shared research agendas or systematic efforts to theorize the reality of the news media as a part of the ontology of international life. If mentioned at all in the IR literature, the news media are often treated anecdotally, or simply as yet another ‘new’ variable or actor alongside other non-state actors in the wider process of globalization.<sup>26</sup> Seminal theoretical contributions, the latest volumes of the highest-ranking European and American IR journals,<sup>27</sup> and state-of-the-art guides to the study of IR, are all symptomatic of the same tendency.<sup>28</sup> This seems puzzling. For despite the neglect there is nevertheless the paradoxical and underlying assumption in part of the IR literature that the existence of omnipresent news media has profound implications. As the British IR scholar and media researcher, Martin Shaw (2000: 27), pointed out almost a decade ago in a thoughtful attempt at bringing the news media into mainstream IR theory, ‘practitioners and academics alike agree that something has changed.’ However, this ‘something’, as Shaw argues, is seldom conceptualized. (One important and interesting exception to this tendency is the *Review of International Studies*’ (2008) “Special Issue: Cultures and Politics of Global Communication”, in which the contributing authors argue for a closer theoretical link between IR and communication theory in a wider sense. However, this interesting attempt of bridge-building does not, so far, include a systematic theoretical treatment of the news media as such.)

2. *Scientific academic scholarship casts serious doubt on how influential the media really are:* Despite the lack of a systematic research programme and attention within mainstream IR, the public fascination with the media/foreign policy relationship has not vanished from the academic scene as such. For the past twenty years, questions about the media have found shelter in a particular academic debate that has established

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(2002/1999), Der Derian (2001), Shaw (2000/1996), Freedman (2000), Rotberg & Weiss (1996), Shaw (1996).

<sup>25</sup> For various approaches to globalization of mass communication see especially Robertson (1992) and Castells (1996).

<sup>26</sup> Examples of this include Rotberg & Weiss (1996), Freedman (2000), and Wheeler (2000: 300), Serfaty (1991).

<sup>27</sup> See for instance textbooks and influential edited volumes such as Carlsnaes et al.. (2002), Goldstein (2002), Mingst (2001), Wendt (1999), Booth & Smith (1995). The journals I make reference to here are *The European Journal of International Relations* and *International Studies Quarterly*.

<sup>28</sup> Some of the exceptions are discussions found in Shaw (2000, 1996), Taylor (1997, 1992), and the ‘virtualization’ of war in Ignatieff (2000) and Der Derian (2001), Robinson (2002).

itself on the outskirts of mainstream IR theory at the intersection of media sociology (Gitlin 1978), political science (Bennett 1990) and foreign policy analysis (Nacos et al. 2000, Serfaty 1991).<sup>29</sup> Although parts of this scholarly informed debate communicate with foreign policy analysis (Baum & Potter 2008, Hughes 2007, Bloch-Elkon 2007, Robinson 2002/1999, Rotberg & Weiss 1996), the role of the news media is, with only a few exceptions (Ferguson & Mansbach 2007, Gilboa 2005a/2005b, Der Derian 2001, Shaw 2000, Freedman 2000), generally peripheral to the production of knowledge within IR, and rarely serves as a common point of reference among IR scholars in their debates, seminars and writings.

Importantly, however, much academic scholarship focusing on the news media in international politics from the outskirts of the IR discipline stands in contrast to the ‘conventional wisdom’ described above. As I shall discuss at length in a subsequent chapter, much of the systematic empirical studies and theoretical models of the media/foreign policy relationship cast doubt on how influential the media really are.<sup>30</sup> This is not to say that the findings of current academic research are uniform: the research comprises quite multifaceted theoretical approaches and yields contradictory empirical findings. All the same, the current academic debate is marked by a certain intellectual point of gravity according to which the ability of the news media to directly affect political behaviour and the decision-makers’ conduct of foreign policy is deemed much weaker than what ‘conventional wisdom’ and popular notions of ‘the CNN effect’, ‘the CNN curve’ or ‘the bodybag effect’ seem to suggest. In an assessment of the collected achievements of the scholarly analysis of the relationship between the news media and the operation of states in international politics, Page (2000: 85) summarized the state of the art:

A pillar of political-communication research – built up over the years by many scholars – is the finding that foreign policy news coverage by the media depends heavily upon

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<sup>29</sup> Central publications in this academic formation include (in chronological order) Bennett, Lawrence & Livingston (2007), Gilboa (2005a/2005b), Entman (2004), Robinson (2002), Nacos et al. (2000), Strobel (1997), Zaller & Chui (1996), Mermin (1999, 1997), Shaw (1996), Livingston & Eachus (1995), Entman (1991), Bennett (1990), Herman & Chomsky (1988), Hallin (1986), Cohen (1963).

<sup>30</sup> See for instance: Robinson (2002), Strobel (1997), Bennett (1990), Hallin (1986), Nacos et al. (2000), Zaller & Chui (1996), Mermin (1999, 1997) and Livingston & Eachus (1995)



official government sources. It follows, in W. Lance Bennett's formulation, that media content should 'index' official debates: the central tendency of media content should reflect the general thrust of officials' opinions. Over time, media content should track changes in official's positions.

### 3. The limits of the current debate

It seems, therefore, that any attempt to bring the role of the news media into the shared academic discipline of IR encounters two puzzles. First, the (conventional) assumption of the news media's centrality contrasts with a general lack of research interest and an explicit research programme within the IR discipline. Second, the decision-makers' self-descriptions of the omnipotent presence of the news media in their own political practice is confronted with (academic) empirical findings that downplay the role of the news media.

How are these puzzles to be understood? The first one can simply be written off as a matter of intra-disciplinary arbitrariness and priorities. Despite some important contributions, the main research focus has been elsewhere. The second puzzle is more challenging. As I shall make clear later, current academic research on media/foreign policy relations – what we may call the hidden IR discourse on the news media – covers vital theoretical and empirical ground, much of which reports negative findings about the independent influence of the news media on the conduct of states in the international field. The pool of empirical evidence and general insights offered by this research<sup>31</sup> thus makes it tempting to conclude that 'conventional wisdom' of Kissinger, Blair, Kennan

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<sup>31</sup> In addition to Bennett's (1990, 1994), Cohen's (1963) and Hallin's (1986) own work, important references are Strobel's (1997) study of peace operations, Jonathan Mermin's (1996) empirical research on the Panama Invasion and the Gulf War, Livingston & Eachus' (1995) study of 'Operation Restore Hope' in Somalia, Andrew Natsios (1996), Nik Gowing (1996), and Livingston's (1997) general discussion of the CNN effect, Piers Robinson's (1999) 'Policy-media interaction model', Patrick O'Heffernan's (1994) 'Mutual exploitation model', Althaus' et.al (1996) study of the Libya crisis in 1986, Entman & Page's (1994) work on 'power indexing', and also the anthologies *Taken by Storm* (Bennett & Paletz 1994) and *Decisionmaking in a Glasshouse* (Nacos et al. 2000). For more recent studies see Bennett, Lawrence & Livingston (2007), Gliboa (2005a), Entman (2004), Robinson (2002).

and others is misguided, and a popular misconception that even deludes the decision-makers themselves. Kissinger and Blair, one could argue, confuse media attention with influence of the media. But this would not necessarily be a prudent conclusion.

The point of departure of this doctoral thesis involves exactly the opposite premise. I believe there are good reasons for taking seriously the intuition of the foreign policy decision-makers, and the common-sense knowledge about the influence of the media. Established academic programmatic structures always involve certain intellectual limitations. And that is, I shall argue, also the case with academic knowledge of the current seminal reach in the media/foreign policy nexus. What at first seems to be a paradox – the discrepancy between the sober empirical findings of scholarly informed analyses and the conventional wisdom held by decision-makers – is on closer examination spurious, due to the very conceptual formula built into academic scholarship. Or put differently: It may be that the discrepancy between intuitive and scientific knowledge is not so much a question of empirical falsification, in the traditional scientific sense, as it is symptomatic of the conceptual and theoretical presuppositions that inform academic empirical research, and thus calls for a review of the theoretical knowledge underlying this particular scholarship.

This, then, is the central justification and point of departure for this thesis: Starting with current seminal research, the aim is to identify the empirical limitations of existing theories, and then introduce an alternative theoretical model and a conceptual formula that may account for the ‘conventional wisdom’ of media power in international politics. The first step is to review the state of the art and then, against the backdrop of more evidence in support of the ‘conventional wisdom’, seek to identify the conceptual shortcomings of the current academic debate. I shall argue that the analytical depth and breadth of current research is defined and limited by at least two conceptual limitations and choices that are built into the predominant research programme. Both are related to the concept of power and influence. Together they may explain why empirical findings and conclusions go contrary to and end up seriously questioning the widespread view of many commentators and politicians that the news media are indeed a powerful institution – on the international stage, and for their own conduct of foreign policy. These conceptual limitations are:

*1. A causal and individual view of power:* The first conceptual shortcoming is related to what political *power* and influence of the news media really mean (Barnett & Duvall 2005, Giddens 1984: 283, Lukes 1974).<sup>32</sup> I argue that the dominant strand of the media/foreign policy research, reviewed in Chapter II, has hitherto been largely preoccupied with a causal and individual conception of media power. Most empirical research has operated – explicitly and implicitly – according to a view of political power consistent with what Steven Lukes (1974: 11–15) has called a ‘one-dimensional’ view of power, considering the possible influence of the news media as a relation in which the news media, as an independent institutional entity and variable, assume the ability to enforce political behaviour directly, causing actions that would not have occurred otherwise.

However, the fact that current research casts serious doubts on the existence of a direct and causal form of media influence in international politics does not logically imply that one can refute the widespread popular view of strong media influence on foreign policy. The empirical findings of current research have limited generalizability beyond their own conceptual horizon, and cannot clarify the existence of other forms of media power that may very well justify the popular notion of mass mediation of international events as a powerful political practice (see Bourdieu 1991: 52–53). To put it differently: In order to understand and analyse the power of the media for the conduct of foreign policy, we must begin by distinguishing between (at least) two different concepts of what political power means: On the one hand, ‘power over concepts’ that ‘points to actors’ exercise of control over others’; and, on the other hand, what Barnett & Duvall (2005: 46) have summarized as ‘[c]oncepts of power tied to social relations of constitution [that] consider how social relations define who the actors are and what capacities and practices they are socially empowered to undertake. These concepts are, then, focused on the social production of actors’ “power to”’.

That brings us to a second conceptual shortcoming.

*2. A causal understanding of media effects:* The second limitation of much academic research on the role of the news media in international politics is related to an

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<sup>32</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of different concepts of power see Barnett & Duvall (2005), Lukes (1986), and in particular Lukes’ (1974) study *Power: A Radical View*.

old debate in the social sciences. This is the distinction between what Wendt (1999: ch. 2), within the discipline of IR, has described as ‘causal’ versus ‘constitutive’ modes of theorizing relations between social entities (see also Barnett & Duvall 2005: 46). Much of the academic work on media/foreign policy relations, and the analytical models, has been cast in terms of causal variable analysis. The principal difference between causal and constitutive theory of the media/foreign policy relations is this: While a causal theory would describe a change in the state of foreign policy as a result of the news media as an *independent* agency enforcing a change of political behaviour, a constitutive understanding of the relations would seek to describe how foreign policy decision-making and the media presuppose each other, with no temporal disjunction. Or as Wendt explains:

In providing answers to causal questions, in saying that ‘X causes Y’, we assume three things: 1) that X and Y exist independent of each other, 2) that X precedes Y in time, and 3) that but for X, Y would not have occurred [...] In order to explain transitions it is necessary that the factors to which we appeal be independent of and temporally prior to the transitions themselves; hence the terminology of ‘independent’ and ‘dependent’ variables that is often used in causal theorizing. Constitutive theories have a different objective, which is to account for the properties of things by reference to the structures in virtue of which they exist...the ‘independent variable/dependent variable’ language that characterizes causal inquiries makes no sense, or at least must be interpreted very differently, in constitutive inquiries. (Wendt 1998: 105–6)

The central point which Wendt seeks to express here about the difference between a causal and a constitutive explanatory model has to do with the nature of relationship between entities. Causal explanation requires that the entities (or variable) involved exist in a relationship of independence. A constitutive generic ambition on the other hand, consists of an attempt to understand and describe a relation where the entities involved are symbiotic. And this is the same generic ambition that defines the core and focus of this thesis: While there are important causal effects between media coverage and foreign policy (many of which are being explored within the current academic media/foreign

policy debate), the types of effects and influence most needed to be studied scientifically are constitutive relations between news media and the conduct of foreign policy.

Take for instance, the interview with the Norwegian foreign minister at the beginning of this chapter. The minister clearly indicated that the news media play a pivotal and integral part in his daily conduct of foreign policy. But he does not, and did not in the transcript of the interview to which we shall return later, describe the media as influential in the sense of having ‘power over’ foreign policy by dictating the political agenda, or through critical coverage forcing decision-makers and states to behave against their own interests. Nor is the relationship between the news media and foreign policy a causal interaction between independent actors. Rather, the relationship is constitutive. The media seem to be conceived of as an arena for politics. Politics has to be realized through the media, and is to some extent defined, adjusted or formed according to the basic framework, limitations and systematic tendencies of mass communication defined by the particular communicative characteristics of the news media. Perhaps the media do not directly enforce their will upon politics – yet the media may still be powerful through the ability to enforce their own communicative structures and visions of the world as a condition for political action and behaviour. Hence, the influence is best described, not as a causal relationship between independent entities, but as a relationship where the conduct of foreign policy is embedded in the news media reality, and is thereby somewhat symbiotic.

#### **4. A constitutive model of media power in international politics**

This, then, is the first analytical step: To review the current state of academic research and knowledge, seeking to identify a certain intellectual point of gravity that inform the research (Chapters II and III). The second, and more substantial, step (in Chapter IV, V and VI) is to take seriously the ‘conventional wisdom’ of the news media’s role in international politics and to formulate, against the backdrop of the conceptual limits and favouritisms of most current research, a theoretical understanding that may help to better

harmonize the striking incongruity between the ‘conventional wisdom’ and the scholarly understanding of the relationship between the media and foreign policy.

Throughout this thesis I seek to formulate a view of the role played by the news media in international politics that involves three general claims about the relationship between news coverage of international politics and the operations of democratic countries in their conduct of foreign policy:

My *first*, and most general, claim is that the media should be understood as a dominant and global ‘communicative system’, and that the media’s representation of the international realm is systematically structured and defined by a rather uniform communicative logic and pattern. The key distinction, I shall suggest (and to be discussed at length in Chapter V), lies in the difference between viewing the news media as an independent variable and *actor* that may or may not affect politics, and viewing the news media as the *field* or arena with the ability to define the basic rules and logic for the expression and action of politics. One of the IR scholars to suggest a distinction similar to the one I seek to refine and develop here is Martin Shaw (2000). Criticizing current academic scholarship for failing to understand the media, and thereby also failing to grasp the new shape of world politics, Shaw (2000: 29–30) argues: ‘The media in general can be seen as social spaces within which individual and institutional actors of all kinds produce the self-representations of other social actors and produce their own individual and institutional representations [...] Media are thus *both* constitutive spaces of society *and* distinctive kinds of actors.’

The inclusion of the news media in the study of international relations should begin with a distinction between these two different concepts of the news media, only one of which has been systematically incorporated into the academic world thus far. What is needed is a theory of the relationship between news media and state actions in the international realm, where the news media are understood as one communicative arena or field inscribed with a certain and uniform communicative structure or logic (Luhmann 2000: 27), in which state actions are played out, perceived and embedded, and thereby shaped and defined by the structural properties of the media arena.

On the basis of this distinction, the *second* claim I shall seek to develop and substantiate is that the historical innovation of information technology and the expanded

role of the news media in covering international events have led to a ‘differentiation’ of international political reality (Mills 1970, Luhmann 2000). By ‘differentiation’ I mean that we are experiencing a continual and increasing reorientation of the focal point of foreign policy decision-makers and elected politicians towards the international realm as it unfolds and appears in the arena of the news media, and a parallel political marginalization of events and issues that do not enter this arena and do not fit with the dominant format of the mass media system. Those aspects of international reality that do not readily harmonize with a dominant and uniform communicative logic of the news media arena will tend to lose political relevance, and get ousted by those events, occurrences and aspects of international affairs that better fit the basic communicative logic and format of the media.

My *third* and perhaps more fundamental claim is that the dominant and uniform communicative format and structure of the news media are increasingly reflected and reproduced in the actual foreign policy operation of states; that the conduct of foreign policy takes on some important part of the logic of the media arena. To a limited but significant degree, the actions, priorities, policy instrumentalization, threat perceptions etc. of democratic states become embedded in, and are synchronized with, the core characteristics of the communicative system through which international politics is represented. Specifying the general argument, one could say that the way in which foreign policy decision-makers and actors approach the international over time, tend to change and harmonize according the quality of a dominant global system of communicating the international. In this way, the news media are conceived of not as an independent variable in a linear relationship to foreign policy, but as a specific and consistent condition in which all political behaviours and expressions are embedded, and as an integral and constitutive part of foreign policy.

This thesis suggests a view of media power in international politics inspired by an evolutionary and historical understanding of political relations (Bourdieu 1993: 78, Thayer 2000). By viewing the news media within democratic societies as a constitutive arena for political behaviour, the news media are to some extent conceived of analogous to an environmental condition. And since this condition is inscribed by a certain universal communicative logic and structures, the conduct of foreign policy will – in part, and over

time – adjust to and satisfy these conditions. The influence of the media on the conduct of foreign policy cannot simply be studied as a causal effect, measured case by case. The influence of the media may also involve *‘the power of adaptation’* (Bourdieu 1993: 78), defined as a type of influence and historical change where the foreign policy operations of democratic states constantly perform an adaptation to a universal communicative logic of the news media. To understand the role of the media in international politics, therefore, is to identify and understand systematic patterns in how the news media transmit and communicate international political reality, independent of the media’s political or national predisposition and biases.

Empirically, I propose, as a general argument, that the current dominant communicative logic of the news media implies a particular visual and dramaturgic tendency both expressed in the foreign policy outlook among decision-makers and the operation of states in foreign policy. More broadly: If the dominant format of the medium is visibility and drama- and event-orientation, then those threats, problems and parts of international reality that cannot readily adapt to such a format are likely to be devaluated and gradually marginalized.<sup>33</sup> Further, if the typical pulse or structure of the news focus tends to follow a logic of news singularities (where the media tend to let one international or issue dominate the foreign affairs news agenda), then political attention, interest and use of resources are likely to follow a pattern marked by exaggerated concentration on a single subject or issue at a time – a monomaniacal tendency of the conduct of foreign policy. The media’s power of adaptation may also explain systematic changes in the instrumentalization of foreign policy over time, for instance what has been identified as an increase of types of responses and actions that are related to easily communicable, dramatic and visual features of events or issue areas – i.e. increased use of military strikes, irrational and media-friendly allocation of short-term emergency, and rapid humanitarian relief operations, rather than long-term poverty alleviation, structural adjustments or cost-effective emergency-prevention work. (See Jakobsen 2000.)

In this sense, and inspired among others by the work of the German system theorist Niklas Luhmann (2000) and the American sociologist C. Wright Mills (1970),

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<sup>33</sup> For an interesting discussion of the impact of ‘the iconic turn’ ([www.iconicturn.de](http://www.iconicturn.de)) on the public intellectual see Jürgen Habermas’ (2006) essay ‘Die Intellektuellen und Der Iconic Turn’, [/www.iconicturn.de/iconicturn/home/](http://www.iconicturn.de/iconicturn/home/).



discussed below in Chapter V, the general argument in this thesis opens up for a rather wide-ranging view of the role played by the news media on the international scene. The argument asserts that at least part of the operations of states in international politics – states where reliance on public opinion is high and where power is dependent on support and re-election – may be systematically formed by the way information is processed through the news media, and cannot be fully understood in isolation from the historically dominant and largely universalized logic of communicating international events and developments. The argument simply assumes that much of what we consider to be facts about the international realm are produced through masse-mediation of news items, and that these news items become institutional facts that are collectively represented and reproduced through public debates and democratic processes, finally becoming the reality wherein the utterances and actions of politics are played out and judged by the popular constituency (Searle 1995, 1999).



Part II of the thesis develops the basic structure of the general theoretical argument. Part III offers two empirical probes to refine and ascertain the plausibility the argument based on several original case studies. The final concluding part (Part IV) summarizes and highlights the central themes by formulating empirical hypotheses for future research, and discusses the relevance of brining the news media and media research into the academic field of IR.

The main argument presented in this thesis includes important structural and impersonal components, based on a form of epistemological externalism that sees the news media as a system operating in line with a structural communicative logic that may be reproduced in the actual conduct of states and foreign policy decision-makers.<sup>34</sup> The central theoretical distinctions underpinning the argument are presented and discussed in Chapters V and VI. Similarly, the methodology used to conduct the empirical

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<sup>34</sup> That is to say, the methodological approach is not limited to what is often referred to as methodological individualism or epistemological internalism – the view that social phenomena can arise and be understood simply ‘as the result of the action and interaction of individuals’ (Elster 1989: 13).

investigations in Part III of the thesis is presented in connection with the discussion of the empirical data in Chapters VII and VIII, while Appendices I, II, III and IV provide a list of interviewees, lists of sources and data, and background studies for the theoretical discussion.

## **Part Two**

### **Theory: Making Sense of the Media World**

## **Introduction to Part Two**

This part consists of four chapters. The first one (Chapter II) reviews relevant parts of the recent academic research and debate of the news media in international politics. Chapter III identifies the main empirical findings of this academic research program and discusses some of the conceptual limitations of the program. In the following chapter (Chapter IV) I contrast part of this academic research with how the foreign policy decision-makers themselves view the influence of the media. Through this comparison I demonstrate that there exists a striking gap between some of the important findings of the academic scholarship, on the one hand, and the actual experience and self-understanding of the foreign policy decision-makers themselves, on the other. Chapters V and VI indicate a theoretical perspective on media power in international politics that may help to bridge this gap, and that is directly inspired by how the practitioners of foreign policy themselves seem to view the role of the media in international politics.

## Chapter II

### **The Academic View of Media Power**

The first step of our inquiry is diagnostic. We need to identify and describe the central theoretical positions and scholarly findings currently informing the knowledge about the role played by the news media in international politics, and against that backdrop seek to define some of the conceptual and analytical limitations of this current academic enterprise. As noted in the introduction, even though the novelty of direct transmission of real-time pictures and news-bits from hotspots around the world has had a mesmerizing appeal for foreign affairs commentators ever since the end of the Cold War, the role of the news media has remained somewhat peripheral to the production of knowledge within the academic discipline of IR. But that is certainly not the whole story.

Despite the lack of systematic treatment of the news media within mainstream IR, there exists nonetheless a wide and systematic body of scholarly literature concerned with the relationship between the news media and new practices of mass-communicating news, on the one hand, and the international behaviour and operations of states, on the other. In content and focus, much of this literature is closely linked to the part of foreign policy analysis defined by Walter Carlsnaes (1999: 334–36) as explanatory ‘agency-based perspective’ approaches to foreign policy decision-making, where the focus is on the news media as a central explanatory factor of foreign policy analysis. Some of the contributing scholarship come from academics rooted within the discipline of IR (Baum & Potter 2008, Ferguson & Mansbach 2007, Gilboa 2005a/2005b, Shaw 1996/2000, Robinson 2002/1999, Der Derian 2001, Freedman 2000, Rotberg & Weiss 1996), but the main part of the academic debate on the role of the news media in international politics exists as a discourse largely independent of IR theory.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For a list of the most important contributions see note 29 and 31 above. See also David Hesmondhalgh’s (1993) literature survey.

Taken together, this academic configuration that grew out of specific experiences and events during the years just before and after the end of the Cold War forms what can be said to be, in Imre Lakatos' (1974) terminology, the 'hard core' of a research programme about the relationship between the news media and the foreign-policy operations of states. In the following I will refer to the conceptual space covered by this debate simply as the 'media/foreign policy debate'.

The endeavour of this chapter is diagnostic: to identify and systematize central contributions in the ongoing media/foreign policy debate accessible for the relevant intradisciplinary scholarship, within IR. I ask:

- (1) What is the 'CNN effect' hypothesis, and do we really need it?
- (2) What is the current state of academic knowledge and theoretical views of the function of the news media in international politics?

### **1. Leaving the 'CNN effect' hypothesis behind**

No linguistic marker or name-tag is more closely associated with the influence of the news media in international politics than the 'CNN effect'. Yet, the precise meaning of this popular concept is far from clear. In an investigation of the past few decades' attempts at establishing a communication theory of international relations, the Israeli communication theorist Eytan Gilboa (2005b, 2005a: 29) has summarized the conceptual precision as follows:

Systematic research of any significant political communication phenomenon first requires a workable definition. Research of the CNN effect, however, has employed a variety of confusing definitions. Several formulations address only the policy forcing effect on humanitarian intervention decisions, while others suggest a whole new approach to foreign policy making and world politics.

Gilboa's claim is based on a systematic survey of how the concept of the 'CNN effect' has been applied and used among analysts and scholars as well as by policy-makers and journalists (Gilboa 2005b). His findings reflect the conceptual bewilderment as well as conflicting views as to the actual impact of the news media on the making of foreign policy and media power in international politics. The confusion is not only conceptual: it is also entangled with and complicated by disagreement on the extent to which the news media do in fact have formative effects on the conduct of foreign policy:

Policy makers, journalists, and scholars have mostly disagreed on the CNN effect. Disagreements surfaced both within each of these groups and among them. Representatives of all three groups argued that the CNN effect has completely transformed foreign policy making and forced interventions in places such as Northern Iraq [April, 1991], Somalia [December, 1992], and Kosovo [March, 1999]. Others have suggested the opposite, that the CNN effect has not dramatically changed media/government relations, it does not exist, or has been highly exaggerated and may occur only in rare situations of extremely dramatic and persistent coverage, lack of leadership, and chaotic policy making. (Gilboa 2005b: 335–36)

In other words, and again according to Gilboa, there seems to be a dual analytical confusion within the media/foreign policy debate. On the one hand the definition of a central concept in the debate (the CNN effect) does not offer clear guidance as the kind of political effect or type of influence the concept refers to. And on the other hand, there is the more overarching disagreement – whether the conduct of foreign policy and the news media are significantly related to each other, and to what extent the 'CNN effect' represents a particularly recent development, or is simply a new and fashionable linguistic marker for a long-standing relationship between the media and the state. In this sense, current academic enquiries into the relationship between the news media and the making of foreign policy are hampered both by empirical deviation ('does the effect exist?') and by methodological ambiguity ('what is the effect that might exist?'). A look at operationalizations of the CNN effect in recent academic literature seems to confirm Gilboa's view (Robinson 2002: 2, Freedman 2000, Nacos et al.. 2000: 2, Livingston &

Eachus 1995: 416, Feist 2001: 713),<sup>36</sup> even though there have been attempts to clarify the concept.<sup>37</sup>

The confusion surrounding the ‘CNN effect’ hypothesis is not surprising. The ‘CNN effect’ was after all a journalistic term invented to describe the concrete social and economic consequences of real-time broadcast from the First Gulf War in 1991, when a whole Western news audience became deeply engaged in following CNN’s live coverage

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<sup>36</sup> In *Decisionmaking in a Glass House*, a collection of articles that represents the state of the art in comparative studies of the roles of public opinion and mass media in international policy-making, the ‘CNN effect’ is introduced as ‘the ability of the first truly global television network to inform the public instantly and continuously of news from anywhere in the world and thereby force national decision-makers to deal quickly with the problems and issues reported – often without sufficient time to deliberate’ (Nacos et al., 2000: 2). In a similarly important study, Piers Robinson (2002) puts it differently. His focus is not on the speed and timing of political decision-making process, the role of public opinion or solely on televised news coverage, but on the real-world policy effect of a combination of news outlets. ‘The CNN effect’, he writes, ‘is not synonymous with CNN. Consequently this study focuses upon the impact of both TV news and print media on decision-making. And: [...] the focus of this study is in the alleged influence of the media upon decisions to intervene during humanitarian crises with the use, or threat of use, of force’ (Robinson 2002: 2). Two other seminal articles echo Robinson’s definition. Livingston & Eachus (1995: 416) define the CNN effect in the following manner in their analysis of the role played by the news media during the US invasion and withdrawal from Somalia in 1992/1993: ‘Shifts in policy come in response to media content, and policy makers, in some measures, have lost control of policy making to the news media.’ Feist (2001: 713) takes this even further, extending the impact of the news media to its assumed ability of not only replacing, but even overruling recognized national interests: ‘The CNN effect is a theory that compelling television images such as images of a humanitarian crisis, causes U.S. policymakers to intervene in a situation when such an intervention might otherwise not be in the U.S. national interest.’ Freedman (2000), however, sees it quite differently. In his view, the CNN effect is not the actual production of policy effects, but should be understood as the collective (and often irrational) psychological effect of strong visual images.

<sup>37</sup> In the most systematic attempt at clarifying the term, Steven Livingston (1997) argues that there are at least three different ways in which it has been used in the literature. *Firstly*, the ‘CNN effect’ has been used to describe a situation where news media coverage of atrocities, humanitarian crises and violent conflicts re-order foreign policy priorities. This is the CNN effect as a *policy agenda-setting agent*, with an asserted correlation between heavy media coverage and subsequent actions taken by Western states (Livingston 1997:6). The US-led intervention in Somalia in December 1992 (‘Operation Restore Hope’) as well as ‘Operation Provide Comfort’ in Northern Iraq in April 1991 have been analysed as empirical evidence of such a media/foreign policy effect (see Livingston & Eachus 1995, Shaw 1996). *Secondly*, the term has been used in a way that implies that the media may serve as *impediments* to the achievement of policy objectives, either by the ability of emotionally-charged TV coverage to change public opinion, or the ability of on-site TV coverage to complicate the pursuit of policy goals by exposing secret operations (Livingston 1997: 2). The TV images of the body of a dead US Ranger soldier, dragged down a dirty street in Mogadishu as crowds cheered and jeered, only weeks before President Clinton decided to get the US troops out of Somalia, is one possible example of this version of the CNN effect (see Stroble 1997). *Finally*, Livingston (1997: 6) argues that we may also speak of the CNN effect as a mechanism that shortens decision-making response time and accelerates the policy process, thus changing the practices and tempo of decision-making processes. Or as a former White House counsel, Lloyd N. Cutler (1984: 114), once described it in an article based on personal experience as a policy adviser at the White House: ‘If an ominous foreign event is featured on TV news, the president and his advisers feel bound to make a response in time for the next evening news broadcast. If he does not... the evening news may report that the president’s advisers are divided, that the president cannot make up his mind...’



from Baghdad and the military bases in Saudi Arabia (Gilboa 2005b: 327).<sup>38</sup> Later the same term has reappeared in comments and analyses of other events and developments on the international scene, often used as a popular idiom to describe a general and widespread feeling of a more media-sensitive political environment within international affairs. The same goes for much of the general interest in the relationship between the news media and international affairs. Also that was in large part triggered by concrete and dramatic events such as the Tiananmen incidents in 1989, the Gulf War and the US invasion of Somalia in December 1992, and not primarily initiated as a systematic academic research programme. The variety of confusing definitions and focuses reflects the whole battery of ways in which the media have been involved in global relations over the past twenty years.

What should this imply for the future use of the CNN effect as a workable analytical concept and point of departure for the media/foreign policy debate? Gilboa's (2005b: 337) answer is that there is a clear need to develop entirely new research models and methodologies, and a research agenda that covers subjects so far not included in the shared academic research, thereby moving beyond the dominance of the CNN effect and the conceptual confusion concerning the concept.<sup>39</sup> I believe that Gilboa's (2005a, 2005b) general observation should be taken to what seems to be its logical conclusion: namely, that the academic study of the role played by the news media for the conduct of foreign policy and interstate relations will gain in clarity, in addition to avoiding superfluous debates, if we simply steer clear of the 'CNN effect' as a concept and as an analytical tool.

Apart from the conceptual uncertainty and confusion identified by Gilboa, my additional reasons for this are threefold. *Firstly*, the CNN effect is inevitably associated with one type of news network and form of news communication (CNN itself), and a few

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<sup>38</sup> The first time the 'CNN effect' was mentioned was in an interview with lodging industry analyst, John Rohs, in *The New York Times*, 28 January 1991: 'Restaurants, hotels, and gaming establishments seem to be suffering from the *CNN effect*' (Gilboa 2005b: 327).

<sup>39</sup> To this end, Gilboa (2005a: 38–39) has tentatively proposed eight topics and issues that can be taken as a point of departure for a more diverse research agenda. Gilboa (2005a:38–39) lists the following eight topics: 1) effects of geopolitical changes, 2) effects of technological changes, 3) effects on all conflicts phases, not only on violence, 4) direct effects on policy-making, 5) effects on areas other than defence and foreign affairs, 6) effects of a Western bias, 7) meaning of global reach, and 8) effects on the work of editors and journalists.

specific historical episodes (the Gulf War in 1991, and some post-Gulf War military operations). This makes it too contextual and historically too specific to be generically useful as a general concept for exploring media/state relations in international politics. *Secondly*, the CNN effect indicates a particular one-way, mechanical, and direct relationship between news communication and politics. However, ever since the first simple model of the media/state relation was developed by Cohen in the 1960s, much of the research has been occupied with describing and theorizing relations between news media and politics that are mutually dependent and also symbiotic (Cohen 1963, O’Heffernan 1994, Robinson 1999). Thereby, and methodologically speaking, the concept excludes constitutive relations between the news media and foreign policy behaviours, and types of power and influence other than those defined by Steven Lukes as ‘one-dimensional’ views of power (1974: 13). And *thirdly*, the CNN effect may already be so contaminated by its various uses and confusing definitions, among academics as well as in the public debate, that there is no room to establish a common ground or, as Livingston (1997: 1) sought, ‘to clarify exactly what is meant by the CNN effect’.

What then should be the common description and ground of the media/foreign policy research agenda? I believe the discussion above offers an answer and a possible point of departure. What we have at hand in the academic media/foreign policy debate is not *one* CNN effect hypothesis, but a set of theories of the media/state relationship presenting competing hypotheses. And, I would argue, that is exactly what is needed for future research on the role of the news media within the discipline of IR – the question is not how to clarify the CNN effect, but how to identify the various theories and general hypotheses that already exist and that have been lumped together under one confusing catch-phrase. To the extent that such a research programme requires a general label, the most obvious choice would be to re-invoke Bennett’s (1990) pre-CNN effect terminology and speak of ‘theories of media/state relations’ or perhaps the less restrictive ‘communication theories of international relations’ (Gilboa 2005a).

## 2. Four theoretical views of the function of the news media in international politics

As a first step towards such clarification, I shall assess seminal and distinct contributions to the academic study of the media and foreign policy,<sup>40</sup> and divide these contributions into four different types of communication theories of international relations. I make no claim that these four theoretical approaches are representative of the whole academic debate as such – only that they offer distinctly different theories of media power, and that they may indicate a useful point of departure for a typology of current knowledge about media/state relations in international politics. The four of theories are set out below distinguishing between different types of explanations.

		<b>Explanandum</b>	
		Individual behaviour	Systemic
<b>Explanans</b>	Structure	<b>2. Systemic Theories</b> <i>('the international system defines the media's ability to affect foreign policy')</i>	<b>4. Globalization Theories</b> <i>('global media infrastructure forms transborder civil society that affect the foreign policy agenda')</i>
	Agent	<b>3. Socioeconomic Theories</b> <i>('economy and class dominance define media's ability to affect foreign policy')</i>	
	Agent	<b>1. Journalistic Theories</b> <i>('journalistic practises and individualized professional norms define degree of critical media coverage')</i>	

<sup>40</sup> The main contributions discussed are as follows: Daniel C. Hallin's *The Uncensored War* (1986), Piers Robinson's (2002) study of the connections between media coverage of humanitarian crises and Western military interventions in his *The CNN Effect: The myth of news, foreign policy and intervention*, Edward Herman & Noam Chomsky's (2002 [1988]) classic work on the political economy of US media *Manufacturing Consent*, Robert M. Entman's (2004) *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, and Martin Shaw's *Civil Society and Media in Global Crisis* from 1996.

## ***2.1. Journalistic theories of the media in IR***

The first type of theories of the function of the news media in international politics involves what I shall call *journalistic theories of the media in IR*. They have a common core in seeking to explain or understand the foreign policy behaviour of states by studying the professional behaviour of leading press organizations and individual journalists. That is to say, the basis of the explanation of the function of the media, or the *explanans* – what explains whether the media do or do not affect policy – has to do with established and institutionalized norms, professional standards, and individual journalistic practices that define the daily news coverage of foreign policy and foreign policy issue-areas.

In an overview of recent decades of academic research, Benjamin I. Page (2000: 85) describes the main achievements as follows: ‘A pillar of political-communication research – built up over the years by many scholars – is the finding that foreign policy news coverage by the media depends heavily upon official government sources.’ What Page has in mind here is the ‘indexing hypothesis’ (Nacos et al. 2000: 47, 62, 81; Robinson 2002: 12; Mermin 1996: 181) This hypothesis is rooted in the early works of Barnard Cohen (1963) and Daniel C. Hallin (1986), among others, and was most eloquently articulated by W. Lance Bennett (1990) in his study of coverage of US policy towards Nicaragua in the 1980s. Briefly put, the indexing hypothesis holds that the ‘mass media news professionals [...] tend to “index” the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic’ (Bennett 1990: 106). Critical coverage will normally appear only if there is opposition to a given policy within the government, or if the policy is marked by a high degree of uncertainty or lack of clear strategy. If, on the other hand, there is bipartisan support for government policy, critical viewpoints will be marginalized or ignored in the news coverage.

According to Bennett (1990: 104) the main reason is the existence of certain journalistic norms about proper press behaviour that define some basic guidelines for press/government relations embedded in US political culture: ‘Culturally speaking, it is generally reasonable for journalists to grant government officials a privileged voice in the

news, unless the range of official debate on a given topic excludes or “marginalizes” stable majority opinion in society, and unless official actions raise doubts about political priority.’ As a result, media coverage will tend to conform to the interests and viewpoints of political elites, given a certain degree of foreign policy consensus.<sup>41</sup>

Daniel C. Hallin’s study of the news media coverage of the Vietnam War, in his *Uncensored War* (1986), is illustrative. Hallin’s general empirical finding is that in a situation where the official consensus prevails, the media tend to uphold the dominant political perspective and pass on the views of authorities assumed to represent the nation as a whole.<sup>42</sup> For example: Only after the Tet offensive in 1968 did the war in Vietnam enter ‘the sphere of legitimate controversy’, when ‘...images from television were frequently invoked in political debate over the war. But for most part television was a follower rather than a leader: it was not until the collapse of consensus was well under way that television’s coverage began to turn around: and when it did turn, it only turned so far’ (Hallin 1986:163).

Both Bennett and Hallin cast doubts on how influential the media really are. The news media may have a strong potential to exert influence through critical coverage, but this potential is not fully realized, due to certain prevailing journalistic norms and practices by which news coverage tends to reflect and be correlated with the political environment. Thus, the basis for understanding and explaining the actual impact of the media on foreign policy is logically dependent on the professional standards and norms that define the behaviour of journalists and media institutions. The news media become an agent of social and political change of a society, reflecting the prevailing debate and the degree of consensus among political elites:

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<sup>41</sup> This argument comes in slightly different versions. Nacos et al. (2000:46) make a distinction between what they call *source indexing* (‘sources and viewpoints are ‘indexed’ (admitted through the news gate) according to the magnitude and content of conflicts among key government decision makers or other players with the power ... to affect the development of a story’) and *power indexing* (‘reporters pay special attention to the views of authoritative sources who are, in the media’s judgement, most likely to project and influence the outcome of particular policy issues’). See also Robinson (2002: 13) distinction between an *executive* version and an *elite* version of the argument.

<sup>42</sup> According to Hallin, US news coverage of the war in Vietnam can be thought of as three concentric circles: *the sphere of consensus*, with issues regarded by journalists and most of society as non-controversial; *the sphere of legitimate controversy*, which is the area of acceptable political disagreement; and *the sphere of deviance*, with actors and views journalists and the political mainstream reject as unworthy of being heard (Hallin 1986: 118–19).

[W]hen consensus is strong, the media play a relatively passive role and generally reinforce official power to manage public opinion. When political elites are divided on the other hand, the media become more active, more diverse in the points of view they represent, and more difficult to manage. (Hallin 1986: 11)

The indexing hypothesis has received support in a series of empirical studies (see Mermin 1997, 1996; Zaller & Chiu 1996; Eachus & Livingston 1995; Nacos et al.. 2000). One of these is the recent study by Piers Robinson, *The CNN effect: The myth of news, foreign policy and intervention* (2002). The study represents a further advancement of this particular approach, and offers what Robinson calls a two-way ‘policy–media interaction model’ to explain why media influence may occur when policy is uncertain and media coverage of humanitarian emergencies is critically framed and empathizes with suffering people. Using the long-standing debate on the role played by the news media during the Vietnam War as a cue, he makes the following synthesizing move:

In short, Hallin is most likely correct in arguing that critical news media coverage followed rather than caused elite dissensus over Vietnam. But Culbert [claiming that the media played a far more significant role than suggested by Hallin] might also be correct because this coverage actually took sides during the elite debate over policy, and, in doing so, helped shift US policy towards withdrawal. In short, by theorising the conditions under which the media influence policy and building upon manufacturing consent theory, the policy–media interaction model enables us to make sense of both arguments. (Robinson 2002: 35)

Robinson applies this model to several humanitarian crises of the 1990s. In relation to the US-led intervention in Somalia in December 1992 and ‘Operation Provide Comfort’ in Northern Iraq after the Gulf War in April 1991 – both of which have been suggested as cases where the intervention was effectively driven by the news media (George Kennan 1993<sup>43</sup>, Shaw 1996) – Robinson finds that the media at most ‘enabled policy-makers, who had decided to intervene for non-media-related reasons, by building domestic support for action. But in no sense did media coverage drive or compel policy-

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<sup>43</sup> George Kennan in *The New York Times*, 30 September 1993.

makers into taking action where they would have otherwise not' (2002: 71). However, this does not imply that the media should be generally considered as impotent. Robinson (2002: 128) suggests that news coverage may still be influential under certain specific conditions, or what he calls situations of 'policy uncertainty' combined with 'critical and empathy-framed' media coverage of dramatic events.<sup>44</sup> Robinson's model represents an important step forward with regard to the indexing hypothesis, adding to it the notion of policy uncertainty and media framing and providing for an understanding of the media/state relationship according to which the media can influence policy outcome.

As a common theoretical ground position, the indexing hypothesis offers a clear approach to understanding the government/media relation in foreign policy on the basis of journalistic practices, and is an advanced example of a journalistic theory of media power. It offers a straightforward description of how media power can be interpreted and analysed as an effect and by-product of the established professional behaviour of leading press organizations and individual journalists. In *Debating War and Peace: Media coverage of U.S. Intervention in the Post-Vietnam Era*, Jonathan Mermin (1999) summarizes, within the US political environment, the shared view of indexing theorists such as Lance Bennett and Piers Robinson:<sup>45</sup>

[The press] does not offer critical analyses of White House decisions unless actors inside the government (most often in Congress) have done so first. This means the media act, for the most part, as a vehicle for government officials to criticize each other. (Mermin 1999: 7)

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<sup>44</sup> To substantiate this position, Robinson uses the air-power interventions in Bosnia (1994 and 1995) during the Clinton presidency as an empirical example: 'The hypothesis that media influence occurs when policy is uncertain and framing is critical, is supported by the two Bosnia case studies in which critical and empathy-framed news media coverage helped cause policy-makers, uncertain of whether or not to intervene, to move to defend threatened "safe areas"' (Robinson 2002: 117–18). Robinson offers an eloquent relational model of media influence. This is a model where actual media coverage and framing (i.e. the potential of the news media to drive policy-makers down a particular path) are interwoven with variations in the political context in which the media are embedded. The main weakness of the model is that it does not spell out how 'critical and empathic-framed' media coverage influences actual policy. Robinson cites the cause but does not as clearly provide the causal mechanism. Nor does the model offer an explicit conceptual understanding of power, apart from asserting certain causal relations.

<sup>45</sup> Robinson's model clearly operates within the basic theoretical formula and assumptions offered by the 'indexing hypothesis' (Robinson 2002:30–31). The basis of explanation is the norms and practices of individual journalists or joint work of journalists within the media institution, establishing the centrality of the level of consensus among the political elite, as explored by Hallin (1986) and by Bennett (1990)

Within the current academic debate, this indexing hypothesis is definitely the dominant, and even a paradigmatic approach to the role of the news media for the conduct of foreign policy. The hypothesis sustains the notion of the news media as a political actor primarily reporting/reflecting the political atmosphere of a democratic society, and it downplays the influence of the news media because of individualized journalistic norms characterizing the media coverage of foreign policy.

## ***2.2. Systemic theories of the media in IR***

The second type of theoretical approaches to the function of the news media in international relations are *contextual* or *systemic* theories. Just as with journalistic approaches, systemic theories are also generic theories that focus on the political role of the news media in relation to foreign policy decision-making, especially the professional behaviour of leading press organizations and the practices of individual journalists. However, and in contrast to journalistic theories, contextual theories view the behaviour of the media within a far wider political and ideological horizon. Here, the impact and the influence of the media on the conduct of foreign policies depend on paradigmatic formations of the international and domestic strategic and ideological climate in which the news media are embedded.

The perhaps clearest expression of a contextual theory of media power is ‘the frame-contestation model’ proposed by Robert M. Entman (2000: 25 ; 2002: 5). The model has since been refined, developed and re-presented as ‘the cascading activation model’ in Entman’s *Projecting Power: framing news, public opinion, and U.S. foreign policy* (2004). This study is the synthetic end-product of a series of contributions by Entman to the study of the government/media nexus in US foreign policy news media and foreign policy after the end of the Cold War.<sup>46</sup> It represents one of the most thorough

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<sup>46</sup> The most important of these are Entman (1991): ‘Framing United States Coverage of International News: Contrast in Narratives of the KAL and Iran Air Incident’, Entman (1993): ‘Framing: Towards Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm’, Entman (2000): ‘Declaration of Independence. The Growth of Media Power after the Cold War’.



counterweights to the dominant view within the scholarly debate – the indexing hypothesis – that the media have a much less independent impact on foreign policy than is often assumed because the media generally function like a litmus paper indicating the prevailing political climate among the political elite. In contrast to this view, Entman (2000: 11–12, 2002: 4–5) argues that the impact and influence of the news media on the conduct of US foreign policy have been growing. ‘With the end of convincing demons [of the Cold War] and the associated difficulty of invoking patriotism, the media become more independently powerful in defining problems for American foreign policymakers.’

Working from the basic assumption that ‘the media’s political influence arises [in the domestic foreign policy debates] from their ability to frame the news in ways that favour one side over another’, and defining ‘media framing’ as the selecting and highlighting of some facets of events or issues,<sup>47</sup> Entman (2000: 12) argues that a weakening of established frames and associative thinking of US foreign policy may boost the independence of the media, by framing foreign policy and international relations.<sup>48</sup> The end of the Cold War has been particularly important for this development (Entman 2004: 95–144). The systemic shift away from a bipolar international system, and the withering away of the ideological antagonism between East/West and socialism/liberalism, have opened up new political space for the news media. Concurrent with this relative dissolution of clear ideological and interstate cleavages, a more confused and disputed understanding of national interests has increased the influence of the media. The media, Entman (2000: 12) hypothesizes, ‘seek to fill the cognitive and emotional gap with their own theories of international politics’. Focusing on US experiences, he elaborates on this as follows:

With the dissolution of the worldwide communist enemy, the main themes now are a pastiche – human suffering, lack of democracy, terrorism, instability that could cause

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<sup>47</sup> The whole definition of *framing* as used by Entman: ‘selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution’. Elsewhere Entman (1993: 52) has defined ‘framing’ as ‘select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described’.

<sup>48</sup> For other works on media framing in US politics, see the collection of articles in *Framing American Politics* by edited by Karen Callaghan & Frauke Schnell (2005).

refugee problems – rather than a tightly knit core of interrelated problems whose diagnosis and labelling symbolized the moral evaluation of evil communism and the standing remedy of U.S. vigilance [...] Ordinary Americans’ interests in solving or even knowing about the new problems are diminished compared with what obtained during the Cold War. Risks and potential costs become more visible, as does uncertainty about the effectiveness or logic of remedial intervention – about the very definition of the situation. (Entman 2000: 13)

Entman does not restrict his argument to the systemic shift of the Cold War. He sees the growth in the news media’s ability to freely define the representation of international relations and foreign policy (thereby limiting the government’s political control of framing) as part of a wider tendency. ‘Under the pressure of the civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements and the Watergate scandals, government and governing processes opened up. Openness lent urgency to contests over the public framing of issues, clashes in which the president, though always the one to beat, is no sure winner’ (Entman 2002: 5). Thereby Entman challenges and supplements the major approach to understand the relationship between foreign policy and the news media, the indexing hypothesis, from two different angles. (See Entman 2004: 4, 12, 18, 147–68; 2000: 22–23.) On the one hand his critique is a contextual one: that, after the collapse of the Cold War, differences among political elites in Washington are no longer the exception but the rule. On the other hand, his position involves an inherent theoretical critique, and an attempt at further developing the work of Bennett, Hallin and Mermin, discussed in the section above.<sup>49</sup>

Entman’s studies are inventive and important contributions to the study of US politics, public opinion and the media, with critical implications for the generic

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<sup>49</sup> Entman (2004: 5) underlines this, arguing: ‘[A]lthough indexing convincingly emphasizes elite opposition as a vital determinant of whether the news will deviate from the White House line, it does not explain fully why leaders sometimes contest the president’s frame and other times keep quiet, or just how *much* elite dissent will arise, or what it will focus on. Nor do previous models delineate comprehensively the public’s role in the larger system of communication linking presidents, elites outside the administration (including foreign leaders), journalists, news texts, and citizens. Building particularly on the work of Hallin, Bennett, and Mermin, this book offers some initial answers in form of the *cascading activation* model.’

understanding of the media/state relationship.<sup>50</sup> However, Entman does not, in an epistemological sense, profoundly contradict the indexing paradigm described above. Rather, the argument works within the same theoretical parameters. What his model seems to suggest is simply that international relations, particularly after the end of the Cold War, have entered a phase marked by deep policy uncertainty, and lack of elite consensus and clearly defined interests or strategies. This lack of an overarching global strategic and ideological climate inflates the ability of the news media to independently frame and define the problems facing US foreign policy-makers, as well as enabling the media to criticize the policy establishment. This does not necessarily imply that the logic of ‘indexing’ has met its end – only that the ‘mainstream debates’ have become less coherent and more diversified. But whenever the policy is clarified, or if a new overarching policy frame is re-instituted (as may well have happened in the USA after the events of 11 September 2001), one would expect a return to a situation described by the indexing paradigm.

Systemic theories of media power are not restricted to the particular model proposed by Entman. The general contextual and systemic argument can be extended to include all theories that seek to understand changes in the actual or potential political role played by the media, by pointing at enduring shifts in the international political and ideological climate: level of interstate conflicts; threat perceptions, or other systemic and historical variations of international politics.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> It is the perceived, not necessarily the actual, public opinion that influences the government and politicians. For officials and policy-makers, Entman argues (2004: 123–42) the public opinion that exists, and the public opinion that matters, is that which officials perceive and anticipate. Accordingly, the impact of the public on government policy often arises from an anticipated or perceived majority, instantaneously manifested through the framing of the news media coverage.

<sup>51</sup> In Appendix 4 for instance, I argue, partly in contrast to both Entman’s frame-contestation model and the indexing hypothesis, that news media coverage does more than merely reflect elite opinions and the existence of established frames and associative thinking of foreign policy. The media may also function as a conserver and transmitter of what I will call the *doxa* foreign policy, often confronting and criticizing the political elite on the basis of a traditional, backward-looking and customary view of the international context and national foreign policy. In other words, the key background assumption of both the indexing hypothesis and Entman – that critical media coverage is unlikely as long as there is a high degree of certainty and political consensus among the political elite – may be secondary to the media’s tendency to preserve old overarching foreign policy frames, and national values and traditions.

### **2.3. Socio-economic theories of the media in IR**

*Socio-economic theories of the media in IR* represent a third type of approaches to the function of the news media in international politics. By socio-economic theories of the media I mean theories of media/state relations that seek to understand media influence, not as determined by agents and their behaviour, but by studying the impersonal social and economic structures that define a given society (Giddens 1984:16–25). For instance: While journalistic theories seek to define the influence of the media by focusing on the behavioural effect of individual journalists, a structural theory concerns the determination of capacities and interests of the media understood as a social institution (Barnett & Duvall 2005: 53). Thus, the basis of explanation is not the behaviour of individual journalists or single media outlets, but how institutionalized news production is embedded and shaped by certain economic, social or ideological structural factors. In a presentation of what he calls ‘Depth Theories’ of media studies, Paddy Scannell (1998: 255) puts this in more general terms:

To get beneath the superficial ‘naturalism’ of phenomena is the task of Theory. It must find the hidden structural, structuring causes that produce things as they are [...] It hypothesizes an underlying structure that, when found, will serve to explain the form and content of things as they ordinarily appear to us.

There are several ways of stipulating a structural approach to the media/state relations. The role of ownership, corporate integration, or expansion of media organization are all well-known approaches (Herman & McChesney 1997). Others include the role of national cultures (Gurevitch 1991) or the invention of news media technology (van Dijk 1988; Dyan & Katz 1992), or types of political systems.

The most explicit structural theory of media influence in foreign policy is that developed by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent: The political economy of the mass media* from 1988. Here the authors develop what they call ‘a propaganda model’ of US media/state relations aimed at analysing how the mainstream US media work and why they perform as they do, and at unveiling a certain regularity

underlying the operations of the media (Herman & Chomsky 2002[1988]: xi–xvi, 1–2). The essential ingredient of the propaganda model is a set of different ‘news filters’. Or as Herman (1996) has clarified the approach: ‘In trying to explain [a certain regularity] we looked for structural factors as the only possible root of systematic behaviour and performance patterns’.<sup>52</sup>

In sum, Herman and Chomsky (2002: 306) find that:

...[T]he mass media of the United States are effective and powerful ideological institutions that carry out a system-supportive propaganda function by reliance on market forces, internalized assumptions, and self-censorship, and without significant overt coercion. This propaganda system has become even more efficient in recent decades with the rise of national television networks, greater mass-media concentration, right-wing pressures on public radio and television, and the growth in scope and sophistication of public relations and news management.

Although they rarely invoke Marxist terminology, Herman and Chomsky position the news media in a socio-political role through which news production becomes an instrument of class domination. Somewhat unfortunately, however, the Marxist underpinnings of their theory are not spelled out or discussed (Rai 1995).<sup>53</sup> The same goes for what appears to be a hidden intellectual source entrenched in their argument: the political writings and social analyses of the Italian historical materialist and thinker Antonio Gramsci (1971). For Gramsci, as well as many other historical materialists, a social group or class exercises dominance in part by force, but more importantly by consent. That means dominance by obtaining the consent of the majority. The media thus play a central role in developing public compliance.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> These ‘news filters’ or socio-structural factors are as follows: i. ownership of the medium; ii. the medium’s funding sources; iii. economic and official sourcing of news information; iv. negative response from powerful individuals, groups or interests; v. commitment to consensual ideology.

<sup>53</sup> For a precise critiques of Chomsky/Herman see Milan Rai’s (1995) *Chomsky’s Politics*.

<sup>54</sup> Gramsci (1971) formulates what he sees as the reproduction and maintenance of a particular ideological hegemony as follows: ‘[D]ominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the ‘spontaneous consent’ of subordinate groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups.’

Much of the same view is also evident in Chomsky and Herman's understanding of the political role of the mass communication. They reject the analysis that the media enable the public to control the political process by providing a plurality of ideas, information and opinion. The media police the limits of debate in ways that protect the dominant conglomerate and state interests in society. And they do so, not through coercion or institutional constraints, but because this serves the basic social function of the news media, which is not to inform but to maintain the existing economic and social system.

In other words, socio-economic theories of the media in IR are based on a rather holistic view of the relationship between politics and society. Herman and Chomsky, for instance, end up with a theoretical model of the world in which media organizations and editors are the institutional and personal expressions of impersonal structures of power, thereby effectively obliterating the individuality of individual journalists as part of the explanation. In so doing they offer an almost purely structural approach to the media/state relationship. This affords scant room for *the agents* and represents a clear departure from the methodological individualism of the indexing hypothesis. Not only does the socio-economic fabric of society constrain the production of news information: it constructs the interest, and the very identity and self-understanding, of the news media.<sup>55</sup>

#### ***2.4. Globalization theories of the media in IR***

A fourth type of theoretical approaches are what I shall call *Globalization theories of the media in international relations*. By this I mean a theoretical understanding of the function of the news media that highlights how global mass communication may challenge and transcend the anarchical culture of the Westphalian state system, and the worldviews, sympathies, cultures, and moral conscience traditionally associated with independent and limited national societies.

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<sup>55</sup> This concerns the 'agent-structure problem'. See Anthony Giddens' *The Constitution of Society* (1984). With reference to international relation and foreign policy, see respectively Wendt (1987) and Carlsnaes (1992). See also Wendt (1999: 26–27).

There exist today at least two important types of globalization theories of media power relevant for understanding the news media/foreign policy nexus (see Robertson 1992; Castells 1996: 327–76; Volkmer 1999). The first type includes what we can call theories of *phenomenological globality*. According to these theories, the foreign policy news agenda is increasingly becoming a worldwide homogeneous news reality, leading to a more unified approach to international politics, and to the advancement of the public political sphere, increasingly autonomous of the nation-state context.<sup>56</sup> The German communication theorist Ingrid Volkmer (1999: 3) has introduced the concept of *bios politikon* to describe such a process towards phenomenological globality. In a comprehensive study of the impact of CNN on global communication, she argues that there exists ‘a worldwide homogeneously time-zoned *bios politikon*, instantaneously affecting worldwide political action or interaction via press conferences or public resolutions transmitted around the world by CNNI [CNN International broadcast]’. The IR scholar Martin Shaw (1996, 2000) has formulated a similar general argument about phenomenological globality somewhat differently. Viewing the communication and flow of international news items as the constitution of a global civil society, Shaw (2000: 32) writes:

The internationalized political order has been increasingly liberal in content, facilitating transnational and, increasingly, globalized communications and culture. It is in these circumstances that press and television have become, more and more, frameworks for transnationalized and globalized information and ideas. Although many have located the emergence of a global civil society in globalist social movements – environmental, feminist, human rights, and so on – the common framework of this emerging form has been the transformed public sphere of the mass media.

Shaw’s general argument is based on his empirical study of the Western response to the Kurdish refugee crisis in the weeks after the end of the first Gulf War in April

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<sup>56</sup> The ‘phenomenological globality’ position of Volkmer and other communication theorists (Robertson 1992) has proponents also within the study of international relations. Some writings on globalization subscribe to the view, making the generalized proposition that global communication is a supporting element of ‘a historical process which transforms the spatial organization of social relations and transactions, generating transcontinental or interregional networks of interaction and the exercise of power’ (Held & McGrew 2002:1–2, Held 1995:124).

1991, in *Civil Society and Media in Global Crisis* (Shaw 1996). The book stands as a somewhat unprecedented publication within academic study of the media/foreign policy nexus. The indexing hypothesis, and indeed, most academic media researchers, are quite vague on the actual political influence of news media coverage, and the capacity of the news media to force national decision-makers to deal with the reported problems.<sup>57</sup> Shaw, on the other hand, presents empirical evidence in favour of the opposite conclusion, arguing that ‘[t]he Kurdish intervention... [was] a major diversion from planned policy forced overwhelmingly by television through its effects both on elite and popular opinion, albeit working on strategic and political commitments already made’ (Shaw 1996: 180). The main reason for this, Shaw argues, was ‘the graphical portrayal of human tragedy and the victims’ belief in Western leaders [that] was skilfully juxtaposed with the responsibility and the diplomatic evasions of those same leaders to create a political challenge which it became impossible for them to ignore’ (1996: 88) .

To be sure, Shaw views the global flow of news information, and the visual and televised representation of faraway tragedies and suffering, as an enlargement of territorially fixed civil society. The reason for this process is primarily phenomenological – or what he defines as a global reduction of ‘emotional and psychological distance’, leading to more global civil society that may transcend the traditional national limitations and focus foreign policy (1996: 8). Within such an approach to media influence on the global scene, the long list of factors often associated with the increased global reach and practices of the news media (satellite communication, fibre-optic transcontinental cables, global news events, CNN, BBC World, Al-Jazeera etc., the worldwide web) becomes more than simply the advance towards an increasingly interconnected interstate society (Zürn 2002: 236–37). Rather, globalization should be understood as complex multifaceted processes that transform the very spatial organization of world politics, generating a shift towards one unified and merged transcontinental society – or ‘the global village’ as envisioned by Marshall McLuhan (1964) at the dawn of the satellite

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<sup>57</sup> Shaw’s book is a multifaceted and unusually stimulating academic publication. He makes important contributions also to the framing literature and the role of policy uncertainty arguing that ‘[i]t may be that the loss of certainty over strategy in the aftermath of the Cold War opened up a particular window for media influence which [...] Western states now wish to close down after their experiences in Bosnia and Somalia’ (1996: 181).



age.<sup>58</sup> In this sense, one could argue, globalization does not simply infringe on the actual ability of territorial societies to govern the social, political and economic forces affecting them. The global news media infrastructure may also internationalize the very understanding and politicization of these forces – affecting the way international organizations, individuals, and political societies perceive the global reality in which they are embedded, limiting the room for specific national or regional horizons, interests, interpretation, understandings and approaches to international politics. Hence, while non-cognitive elements of globalization may challenge the *de facto* sovereignty of states, the global news flow can be described in terms of a withering of the phenomenological entity of the nation-state.

Globalization theories of media power of a second type involve what I shall call theories of global *phenomenological diversification*. Unlike theories of phenomenological globalization, phenomenological diversification implies that the strongest effect of an increasingly transborder news media infrastructure is the multiplication and verticalization of news sources and information, and not the homogenization of the news focus. Accordingly, the transborder news flow generates a differentiated audience in terms of the messages it receives, and an increase in the different global news horizons and interpretations of global reality.

The strongest proponent of this view of the new global media is Manuel Castells. Taking his cue from the article ‘The new media’ by Francoise Sabbah, Castells (1996: 339) makes the rather startling claim that we are about to experience the historical ‘end of the mass audience’. The new global media are ‘no longer mass media in the traditional sense of sending a limited number of messages to a homogeneous mass audience’, Castells argues. And he continues, ‘not everybody watches the same thing at the same time, and each culture and social group has a specific relationship to the media system’ (1996: 341).<sup>59</sup> Hereby Castells contradicts both Shaw and Volkmer’s thesis of

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<sup>58</sup> David Held & Anthony McGrew (2002:1–2) make the point quite clear in their introduction to a recent collection of seminal articles about global governance. Globalization, they argue, ‘refers to a historical process which transforms the spatial organization of social relations and transaction, generating transcontinental or interregional networks of interaction and the exercise of power’.

<sup>59</sup> Yet, and somewhat contradictory to this, Castells also acknowledges that the global flow of information is becoming increasingly ‘oligopolistic’, dominated by a few news producers that have monopolized the coverage of international emergency situations and major political events, forcing even politicians and

phenomenological globality. Due to the vertical and horizontal diversification of news outlets, the global news media are not fuelling the evolution of one uniform global civil society. Consequently, in his view, the global news agenda infrastructure offers no certain avenue towards a universal phenomenological consciousness.

### **3. Conclusion**

This chapter has made no claim to present an exhaustive typology of all currently existing approaches to the study of the role played by the news media in international politics. Rather, starting from Eytan Gilboa's survey of the application of the concept of 'the CNN effect' within 'the media/foreign policy debate', I have offered two general arguments about the academic study of the media/foreign policy nexus.

The first argument involves a brief criticism of the CNN effect as a scholarly concept for the study of media power; it maintains that the study of the media/foreign policy nexus will gain clarity if we can simply steer clear of the CNN effect as an analytical concept altogether.

The second argument represents a continuation of this line of reasoning: It shows that there exists a rather broad literature on the function of the news media in international politics not yet included in mainstream IR. This lack of contact and dialogue is unexpected, insofar as the role of news media clearly falls within the general scope of the IR discipline. The intellectual separation, therefore, seems an unwarranted limitation on the production of knowledge of international politics within IR. There is no academic reason why this gap should not be bridged. As a first step in that direction, I have reviewed central contributions to the study of the news media in international politics in recent decades, and noted that this wide literature from various sub-fields of the social sciences represents four different yet 'hidden' theories of the news media in IR.

One vital task concerning the academic 'media/foreign policy debate' has not been addressed in this chapter. For, as pointed out, the current academic debate grew out

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journalists to follow CNN full-time. He also notes that the actual content of most programming and the underlying semantic formulas do not differ substantially from one network to the other.

of a number of concrete experiences just before and after the end of the Cold War, and represents a rather integrated research programme. However, and like all other mutually inspired and combined research endeavours, any such research programme is by definition liable to certain defining and limiting analytical structures and conceptual preferences. The aim of the next chapter therefore is to define some of the main conceptual favouritisms and analytical limits of the academic 'media/foreign policy debate', and in so doing identify the theoretical range of the debate, and the analytical restrictions of the empirical findings and conclusions.

## The Limits of Current Academic Knowledge

The discussion so far seems to indicate a rather multifaceted and diverse academic discourse of the function of the media in international politics. Yet, this is an academic debate of somewhat less diversity than it seems. That is not to say that current academic research is uniform. As the previous chapter has shown, it is not. The point is rather that the current academic debate on the media/foreign policy relationship is marked by a certain intellectual centre of gravity, with almost all research on the function of the news media in international politics falling within what I have described and defined as ‘journalistic theories of the media in IR’, analysing the role and power of the news media in international politics according to a relatively unified set of conceptual assumptions and explanatory models inspired by the ‘indexing hypothesis’. Piers Robinson (2002: 13) has summarized the focus of the current academic research in the following way:

The undemonstrated assertions within the CNN effect debate sit uneasily with a wealth of critical literature written over the last 25 years in which the political and economic positioning of major news media institutions is seen to lead to a situation in which news accounts tend to support dominant perspectives ... [T]he thesis that news media coverage of ‘foreign’ affairs is ‘indexed’ (Bennett 1990) to the frames of reference of foreign policy elites receives substantial empirical support.

The ‘wealth of critical literature’ that ‘sit[s] uneasily with’ the fashionable notion of a strong media in international politics, to which Robinson refers, is the literature published by indexing theorists over the past few decades. It is the leading school of current scholarly research on the role of the news media in international politics. The task

to be tackled in this chapter is to identify the boundary and some of the conceptual limitations of this school of research:

- (1) What are the conceptual favouritisms and, thus, limitations defining our current academic knowledge of the news media/foreign policy relationship?

### **1. Defining the current research programme**

The argument to be defended in the next pages is that the ‘indexing hypothesis’ – presented at some length in the previous chapter – is more than a theoretical proposition. It is a leading research program, or as Page (2000: 85) formulated it, ‘[a] pillar of political-communication research – built up over the years by many scholars...’. This ‘indexing hypothesis’ is by far the preferred approach and has evolved through a long series of books and articles published since 1970, marked by a rapid increase in the number of publications after 1990, and with only some few references to pre-1970 literature – among them Lippmann (1922) and Cohen (1963).<sup>60</sup> Using terminology familiar from the theory of science debate of recent decades, the ‘indexing hypothesis’ developed by Cohn (1963), Hallin (1986), Bennett (1990, 1994) and refined by others constitutes a conceptual ‘hard core’ within which the debate on media/foreign policy

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<sup>60</sup> In addition to the various works reviewed in Chapter II, a great many different frameworks for analysis and theoretical approaches have been proposed over the last years. James Der Derian’s (2001) work on the ‘virtualization’ of American politics and of war via media manipulation, profoundly inspired by Jean Baudrillard’s (2000 [1991]) essays about the media coverage of the 1991 Gulf War, is one. (The most famous of Baudrillard’s essays about the media coverage of the 1991 Gulf War is ‘The Gulf War Did Not Take Place’). Thomas Meyer’s (2002) *Mediokratie* is another. And the list of recent theoretical contributions specifically focusing on the state/media relationship is quite extensive: Lee Edwards’ (2001) wide-ranging account of ‘how mass media has transformed world politics’, assuming rather than analysing the power of the news media; Regan’s (2000) quantitative approach to media coverage and US military interventions; Patrick O’Heffernan’s (1994) ‘mutual exploitation model of media influence in US foreign policy; Robert M. Entman’s (1991, 1993, 2000) different versions of what he has labeled the ‘frame-contestation model’; and Eytan Gilboa’s (2003) study of the constraints that television coverage inflicts on foreign policy decision-making processes, have all made their mark on different sub-fields of the study of news media and foreign policy.

nexus unfolds (Lakatos 1974). Much of the research has been either presented, discussed or developed within this conceptual core.<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, the academic media/foreign policy debate is, on the whole, an Anglo-American academic formation. And the evolution of the research programme, and its theoretical ambitions and characteristics, must be understood historically: On the one hand, the research has been stimulated by specific events such as the Gulf War (1990–91), the humanitarian intervention in Northern Iraq (1991), the outbreak of the civil war and the US intervention in Somalia (1992), the Balkan wars, and a series of explosive humanitarian crises and other dramatic global media events. On the other hand, the academic debate corresponds with technological innovation, in particular the increase in live television reporting of international crises that began with the satellite coverage of the Tiananmen incidents in 1989.

To make this kind of general argument – the argument that there exists a more or less consistent research programme within a relatively extensive research literature – is inevitably a somewhat arbitrary endeavour.<sup>62</sup> After all, the number of publications is immense.<sup>63</sup> There is always the problem of totalizing the literature. My attempt to reduce this problem builds on the British philosopher of science, Imre Lakatos (1974), and his insistence on defining academic research programmes by a limited number of general theoretical hypotheses that form the basis from which the empirical research is developed. For Lakatos, a research programme is an analytical structure that provides guidance for future research, and it is developed around what he calls the *hard core* of a given research programme. This ‘hard core’ is not something to be rejected or modified.

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<sup>61</sup> In addition to Bennett’s (1990, 1994), Cohen’s (1963) and Hallin’s (1986) own work, important references are Strobel’s (1997) study of peace operations, Jonathan Mermin’s (1996) empirical research on the Panama invasion and the Gulf War, Livingston & Eachus’ (1995) study of ‘Operation Restore Hope’ in Somalia, Andrew Natsios (1996) and Livingston’s (1997) general discussion of the CNN effect, Piers Robinson’s (2000, 1999) ‘Policy–media interaction model’, Patrick O’Heffernan’s (1994) ‘Mutual exploitation model’, Althaus et al.’s (1996) study of the Libya crisis in 1986, Entman & Page’s (1994) work on ‘power indexing’, and also the anthologies *Taken by Storm* (Bennett & Paletz 1994) and Nacos et al. 2000. See also Note 29 and 31 for more references.

<sup>62</sup> For example: Seminal studies within the ‘media affect tradition’, such as Katz and Lazarfeld’s (1955) work on media and voting behaviour or George Gerbner’s (1969) theory of collective perceptions, might be theoretically applicable to the study of media and foreign policy on a general level, even when the main focus is elsewhere (see Newbold 1995:118).

<sup>63</sup> See Note 35 above for an overview of the research.

It is protected by a 'protective belt' consisting of the basic assumptions and central models underlying the research, and constitutes the conceptual space within which the debate takes place.

But exactly what kind of common conceptual space is this? The key originator of the indexing hypothesis, W. Lance Bennett (1990), offers three clarifications: Firstly, the theories have a common core in seeking to explain political actions by *studying the behaviour of 'leading' press organizations* that set professional standards and influence the daily news agenda (Bennett 1990: 106). Secondly, the central mechanism is *a causal relationship between news media coverage and foreign policy making* (Bennett 1990: 107). In three studies, the CNN effect has been symptomatically defined: as a 'cause-and-effect relationship between media and foreign policy' (Gowing 1996: 81); 'that changes in policy [...] by definition follow changes in media content' (Livingston & Eachus 1995: 416); and described as the ability of news media coverage to cause intervention (Robinson 1999/2002). Thirdly, and as Bennett's own study of the news media coverage of US policy-making on Nicaragua in the mid-1980s illustrates, *the favoured methodological approach for exploring the role of the media is 'content analysis'* of media coverage. The media-effect thesis is tested empirically by measuring whether the decision to act – in Somalia, Kosovo, Panama, or elsewhere – has come before or after massive media coverage of the particular crisis, or whether critical coverage correlates with policy uncertainty and disagreement.<sup>64</sup> As Livingston and Eachus (1995: 416) present the essential analytical methodology: 'If key decisions follow surges in media content or brief but highly dramatic single news episodes, then the CNN effect is real: Shifts in policy come in response to media content, and policy makers, in some measures, have lost control of policy making to the news media.'

As pointed out above, the indexing hypothesis and the empirical research programme fostered by this theoretical proposition cast doubt on the media's ability to influence the actual conduct of foreign policy directly. The news media may affect the tempo and the procedures of the foreign policy decision-making process, but they are not likely to set the agenda, or to force politicians to do something they would not otherwise do. As discussed by Robinson (2002), the only likely verifiable exception is when an

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<sup>64</sup> See Strobel (1997); Nacos et al. (2000); Robinson (2002)

issue suddenly arises and no policy is in place, or if there is disagreement, conflict of interest or uncertainty between executive subsystems (Robinson 2002). If there is a strong media effect at work in international politics, this is simply a case-by-case effect that is activated due to uncertainty or disagreement among the political leadership itself.<sup>65</sup>

## **2. Some limits of the current media/foreign policy debate**

The indexing hypothesis and the supporting empirical research provide an undoubtedly important corrective to the conventional view, expressed by observers and decision-makers of foreign policy, of a strong direct media effect that defines the operations of states on the international scene. Nonetheless, the analytical comprehensiveness and breadth of the indexing hypothesis, and thereby an important part of current scholarship on the role of the news media in international politics, are predicated by a certain underlying conception of power. For even though power is arguably a primary concept of social science and any scientific investigations into the political role played by the news media, there has been little explicit connection between analyses of the role of the news media in international politics and the broader conceptual analysis of power within political science and political sociology (Barnett & Duvall 2005, Giddens 1984: 283,

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<sup>65</sup> For example, this may explain why the UN Security Council did not take action to prevent the genocide in Rwanda in the summer of 1994 despite massive news coverage of the manslaughter, whereas the international community under US leadership did intervene in Somalia in December 1992 (Rotberg & Weiss 1996). The difference in outcome was not dictated by the media coverage, but, and as the indexing hypothesis assumes, was a result of the interaction between news media coverage, on the one hand, and interests, decisions and the level of consensus within the political elite, on the other (see Livingston & Eachus 1995). But for most part – with ‘Operation Provide Comfort’ in Northern Iraq (1991) as a possible empirical exception (Shaw 1996) – the role of news media coverage of international affairs falls within the parameters that Hallin found in the case of the Vietnam War: the media as ‘a follower rather than a leader’. The political steering wheel is still in the hands of foreign-policy makers, and to the extent that there is a relocation of that power to news media institutions, that is a result of intra-governmental factors, not the mass media as such. This does not, however, necessarily imply that the news media did not expand their ability to affect the conduct of Western crisis management and foreign policy in the 1990s. But such an expansion would not, according to the dominant paradigm of recent research, lead to an increase in media power as such, unless accompanied by a decrease in the clear foreign policy strategies, priorities and national interests provided by the Cold War.



Lukes 1974).<sup>66</sup> This is surprising for at least two reasons: First, many of the scholars themselves do indeed view their research as a study of political power.<sup>67</sup> And second, much current research is based on a specific, implicit, conceptual understanding of power. The dominant strand of the media/foreign policy research reviewed above has been preoccupied with a concept of media effects that coincides with the ‘pluralist’ or ‘one-dimensional’ view of power within political theory (Lukes 1974: 11). This view of power is rooted in the works of e.g. Max Weber.<sup>68</sup> It is most clearly expressed by Robert Dahl (1957). The typical media/foreign policy research questions – like ‘Can the news media cause a military intervention?’ or ‘Why did the West not intervene to stop the genocide in Rwanda or the massacre in Srebrenica?’ – are causal questions. They evoke a mechanistic picture of power reminiscent of what Thomas Hobbes, in his *De Corpore* [1650](1994: ch. X), defined as a relation between an active pushing ‘agent’ and a passive ‘patient’:

Power and Cause are the same thing. Correspondent to cause and effect, are power and act; nay, those and these are the same things [...] For whensoever any agent has all those accidents which are necessarily requisite for the production of some effect in the patient, then we say that the agent has the *power* to produce that effect, if it be applied to a patient [...] Wherefore the *power of the agent* and the *efficient cause* are the same thing.

Hobbes’ cause-and-effect picture of power was consistent with the mechanistic imagery of the natural sciences that enjoyed strong resonance during the 17th century. This mechanical-causal view of political power has also had a strong grip on social scientists, and has remained dominant within much of political science (Lukes, 1974: 11–15). Robert Dahl (in Lukes 1986: 41), for instance, writes: ‘our idea about underlying measure of influence [power] rest on intuitive notions very similar to those on which the idea of force rests in mechanics’. For Dahl, the way to operational this ‘intuitive’ concept of power is ‘...something like this: A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to

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<sup>66</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of different concepts of power see Barnett & Duvall 2005, Lukes 1986, Dahl (1957) and in particular Lukes’ (1974) study *Power: A radical view*.

<sup>67</sup> See Bennett 1990, Hallin 1986, Page 2000, Livingston 1997.

<sup>68</sup> Similarly, in *Economy and Society* Max Weber (1978: 942) defines ‘[...] domination in the quite general form as power, i.e., of the possibility of imposing one’s will upon the behaviour of other persons...’

do something that B would not otherwise do' (Dahl 1957). Or as Nelson W. Polsby elaborates Dahl's point: [O]ne can conceive of 'power' [...] as the capacity of one actor to do something affecting another actor, which changes the probable pattern of specified future events.' This can be envisaged most easily in a decision-making situation, concurrent with Lukes' (1974: 13) definition of a one-dimensional view of power, i.e. a focus on behaviour in the making of decisions on issues over which there is an observable conflict of (different actors') interests. Accordingly, the media effect is a causal and direct form of power exercised by an identifiable agency.

If confirmed by empirical research, this could count as an assumption of the colossal influence of the news media on the conduct of foreign policy, and would imply a radical transfer of power, from responsible deliberative organs of government to news media organizations. However, the fact that the indexing hypothesis casts doubt on the existence of this form of media influence does not logically imply that we can refute the existence of other forms of media power. The empirical findings are limited to the conceptual assumptions and implicit theory of power built into the research programme (see Bourdieu 1991: 52–53).

My aim here is not to challenge the empirical findings of current state/media research or the unifying indexing hypothesis. The existence of a rather unified research programme is a symptom of consistency and scientific reliability, and such research offers a significant corrective to the widespread popular notion of a powerful media effect driving or taking full control over the conduct of foreign policy, based on solid empirical research. My point is a different one – it relates not to what the indexing paradigm says about the power of the news media in international politics, but what it excludes.

To specify: in the conceptual underpinning of the 'indexing hypothesis', and thus the main focus of current research we can identify at least four empirical and conceptual favouritisms, somewhat limiting the analytical scope:

1. The role of the news media is largely studied as a behavioural-causal relation, what Steven Lukes (1974) has labelled a one-dimensional view of power. Media power is operationalized as the capacity of the news media to directly affect the behaviour of political actors and political actions.

That is to say, media power is theorized as a relation between cause and effect, between an active pushing ‘agent’ (mass media) and a passive ‘object’ (decision-making/agenda-setting).

2. As a result, the central object of the research itself remains largely limited to first-order media effects.<sup>69</sup> By this I mean that the effect of the media on foreign policy decision-making is analysed in terms of the media as an independent actor capable of forcing politicians and states to do things they would not otherwise have done. The favoured methodological approach has been to measure whether the decision to act (whether in Somalia, Kosovo or elsewhere) has come before or after the media coverage of the particular crisis (see for instance Bennett (1990: 113–23), Livingston & Eachus (1995: 419–27, Strobel (1997: ch. 4) and Nacos et al.. (2000: 50–58)).
3. It follows that the strength of the indexing hypothesis lies not in explaining the capacity of the news media to affect foreign policy, but in demonstrating how contextual constraints prevent the potential media power from having real influence on the conduct of foreign policy.
4. Finally, much of the current research is (empirically) tilted towards the USA and its foreign policy in ways that make the theories and empirical findings contextual; it is questionable to what extent the debate and main findings are applicable to the foreign policy of smaller states and other types of democratic systems.

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<sup>69</sup> In my view the most sophisticated conceptual discussion of the CNN effect is Livingston (1997) and Gilboa (2005a).

### 3. Conclusion

The current academic debate on the function of the news media in international politics and foreign policy orbits a distinct intellectual point of gravity: Much of the theoretical understanding and most of the empirical research falls within the ‘indexing hypothesis research programme’. This literature covers vital theoretical and empirical ground, and offers critical correctives to a widespread and often simplistic notion of a type of media power that has effectively taken control over where, when and how foreign policy elites behave and act internationally. However, and notwithstanding the advances, part of the literature is also characterized by some conceptual favouritisms and limitations. Firstly, one limitation involves a certain conceptualization of what a media effect is – largely restricted to what Wendt (1999: 105–06) has labelled ‘causal theorizing’ – viewing the relationship between the news media and the state agency in international politics as a relation between ‘independent’ and ‘dependent’ variables. Secondly, the literature also seems to be limited by a general under-theorizing of what media influence and power really mean – largely confined to an implicit causal understanding of media power, seeing it as an influence between independent agencies able to force states to do things they would not otherwise have done.

In sum, the main empirical finding of recent academic research – casting serious doubt on how influential the news media really are for the conduct of states in international politics – may be less conclusive than often assumed. The empirical conclusions of the research are likely to apply only to forms of media influence covered by its underlying concept of power. This fails to account for other kinds of media power. And, more importantly, it also seems to fail to grasp ways in which the media are felt as an influential force among decision-makers and may affect how states operate on the international scene. This is more than a mere conceptual limitation. For, as we shall see, the current media/foreign policy debate is marked by a striking empirical paradox: while the scholarly research and representatives of the news media tend to downplay the influence of the news media in the actual conduct of states, the actors themselves tend to

highlight its importance. This empirical paradox, and its implications for theorizing on the role of the news media in international politics, is the subject of the next chapter.

## **The Actors' View of Media Power in International Politics**

In this chapter we take a step from an academic to a practical type of knowledge of international politics. The aim is to contrast the academic insights of the effect of the news media, as discussed in the previous chapter, with insights from a non-scientific side of the spectrum, namely the actors themselves. To be sure, the analytical approaches most common within the social sciences seek to expand our knowledge using already existing theoretical positions as their point of departure. We are all familiar with this method of scientific inquiry – either from books and articles, or from own attempts to analyse and write about concrete problems. If, for example, we seek to answer an analytical question, such as how to understand the US attack on Iraq in March 2003, we typically begin with the professional literature that has addressed questions about how states wage war, identifying the generic academic knowledge that can be used either for a theoretical analysis or as empirical hypotheses concerning why the USA went to war in Iraq.

Yet, and as briefly mentioned in the introductory chapter, there is an alternative theoretical starting point for social research, also this with deep roots in the Western scientific tradition. This approach is not concerned with links to the production of an existing body of theoretical knowledge or to an academic research programme.<sup>70</sup> It starts from another, less academically cultivated position – rooted in what, among others,<sup>71</sup> G. E. Moore (1959) has defended as a common-sensical philosophical method and mode of establishing knowledge, or proto-theoretical approaches, outside the existing body of

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<sup>70</sup> 'Research programme' is used here in a way consistent with Imre Lakatos' (1974) definition in his 'Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes'. See Chapter III for further discussion.

<sup>71</sup> See also John Rawls (1971). In a different context – ethical reasoning – Rawls (1971: 34) has put the general point plainly: 'we are simply to strike a balance by intuition, by what seems to us most nearly right'.

academic literature.<sup>72</sup> Within the academic discipline of IR, following in the intellectual footsteps of sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu (1990) and Schatzki et al. (2001), several scholars have recently referred to this approach as a turn towards ‘practice’ (Bauer Brighi 2008, Rytövuori-Apunen 2005, Neumann 2002, and Günther Hellmann 2002). They propose using a source of direct and commonsensical knowledge ‘by which they simply mean general and abstract accounts of incorporated and material patterns of action that are organised around the common implicit understandings of the actors’ (Neumann 2002: 629).

In this chapter I will make use of Moore’s general defence of common-sense reasoning, and Bourdieu and others’ notion of ‘practice’ and ‘common understandings’. By a ‘theory of practice’ – as opposed to other types of scholarly informed modes of theorizing – is meant the generic views and understandings generated from ordinary, personal, and direct knowledge and experiences by the political actors themselves. What I do in the following pages is investigate the role and influence of the media on foreign policy from a perspective that is as direct and intuitive as possible, applying a somewhat naïve and proto-theoretical mode of inquiry. And I intend to do this by posing two questions:

- (1) How do the relevant actors themselves, through their own practices, view the role and influence of the news media if we ask them ‘to strike a balance by intuition’?
- (2) Do these common understandings, expressed by the actors, contain any particular proto-theory of media influence in international politics?

## **1. Interviewing the actors**

According to the scholarly debate, as we have seen in Chapters II and III, the true influence and role of the news media may be less than often assumed in the public

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<sup>72</sup> Moore’s essay was highly influential in the epistemological debates of the 20th century. It takes a position against scepticism by arguing that at least some of our beliefs about the world are absolutely certain.

discourse – as well-known figures like Richard Nixon, George Kennan (1993), Henry Kissinger (2001), and others have repeatedly suggested. Yet, even this type of ‘conventional wisdom’ and utterances by political figureheads are merely circumstantial evidence, based on a general feeling, anecdotal data and single quotations picked up here and there. What about a more systematic inquiry into the common-sense knowledge? What is the more precise understanding of the influence of the news media in the realm of foreign affairs as expressed by the relevant actors themselves – the journalists and political decision-makers active in highly mass-mediated democracies?

In the period between February 2006 and December 2008 I carried out a series of semi-structured interviews<sup>73</sup> with the top decision-making body of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry under three consecutive governments,<sup>74</sup> including the ministers and the deputy ministers, in addition to the principal communication adviser/spokesperson at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Office of the Prime Minister. In order to maintain consistency and at the same time political variation I interviewed three similar groups of decision-makers within the three governments. In addition to the Minister of Foreign Affairs this includes the two senior Deputy Ministers for foreign affairs from each of the governments. Each interview was personal, semi-structured, held under conditions of anonymity, and took between 25 and 45 minutes (see Appendix). During the same period I also conducted similar interviews with the foreign desk editors of Norway’s most influential news media covering foreign affairs, on TV, print and internet.<sup>75</sup>

### ***1.1. Interviewing the media***

The interviews with the journalists and editors confirm the findings of current academic scholarship, casting doubt on how influential the media really are. Their responses are categorized in Table 4.1.

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<sup>73</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>74</sup> The first government (*Stoltenberg I*, March 2000 – October 2001) was a Labour (*Arbeiderpartiet*) minority government. The second government (*Bondevik II*, October 2001 – October 2005) was a Centre/Right minority coalition government (*Høyre/Venstre/Kristelig folkeparti*). The third government (*Stoltenberg II*, October 2005–) was a Centre/Left majority coalition government (*Senterpartiet/Arbeiderpartiet/Sosialistisk Venstreparti*).

<sup>75</sup>For full list of interviewees see Appendix. (Four of the interviewees responded in writing.)



**Table 4.1: Power of the news media according to foreign news editors**

<b>Level of influence</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Some</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Typical description</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– limited political role</li> <li>– no great influence</li> <li>– the power of the media is vastly exaggerated</li> <li>– very little</li> <li>– weak influence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the media have a certain amount of influence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– quite a lot of power and influence</li> <li>– I’d say quite considerable</li> </ul>
<b>Number of interviewees</b>	10	3	2

As many as ten of the fifteen interviewees described their personal and institutional political influence as generally exaggerated, and defined the political power of the news media as ‘weak’ or ‘limited’. Two interviewees described the general influence of the media as ‘relatively strong’, and one was uncertain.

The interviews with editors also included a question about how they would describe their own role, and how they would define themselves as political actors. Responses to this question were in keeping with the general academic understanding of the influence of the news media. Editors typically expressed an institutional and personal self-understanding of themselves as extra-political actors, politically neutral, whose role was confined to ‘providing information’, ‘reflecting events’ and ‘describing politics and indicating relevant connections’, whose political role found expression only through commentaries and editorials. All the principal editors of Norway’s largest foreign news-desks seem to subscribe to such a view of their own personal role. This confirms that the notion of the news media as a descriptive and non-political medium is a symptomatic part of the journalistic self-understanding. Four of the interviewees – all of the editors of the three biggest Norwegian foreign desks over the past six years – described their own role in the following symptomatic manner:<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> These news desks are those of the national broadcasting (NRK), *Aftenposten* and TV2. The ranking is based on the numbers of journalists.

Editor 1: ‘The way I see my role, I head an editorial staff whose primary job is to try to mirror events, international events, try to explain these events and place them in a context, on the basis of their importance. And in that connection also to assess foreign policy critically in relation to these events.’

Editor 2: ‘We play two roles. The one is that we describe politics as neutrally as possible. Indicate relevant connections to our readers, who can’t see these things themselves. Explain and describe politics. That’s the main thing. And secondarily, to comment on politics. That gets more directly political, when we say that something is right or wrong. We aren’t an actor with a particularly clear programme, but we do comment on politics on the basis of our perspective and fundamental principles.’

Editor 3: ‘I don’t think that any journalists working with foreign policy feel they have a lot of influence. They feel that they can mean something in individual cases and that things might change course a little, that we can create a stir in the Foreign Ministry. But we rarely have had cases that really changed course. Of course when Labour leader Jens Stoltenberg declared [in 2004] his scepticism to prolonging Norway’s military involvement in Iraq, as well as to having Norwegian military instructors there, well, then he was obviously dependent on the media, for political effect. But the media served more like a little microphone jack, that’s all.’

Editor 4: ‘I do not exaggerate the role of the news media when it comes to foreign policy and the decision-making. In my experience, the influence of the news media is slight [...] But I do think that the media have a rather strong impact on how ordinary people perceive and view the world.’

It seems quite clear that editors/journalists are inclined to downplay their own role in defining the foreign policy agenda and in the actual operations of states on the international scene. According to the views expressed by many journalists and also the central findings of the academic trade, the influence of the news media on the operation

of states is modest – not the potent political force that conventional wisdom would seem to suggest.

### ***1.2. Interviewing the decision-making elite***

However, the empirical data also contain important evidence supportive of the opposite conclusion. For despite the findings of much recent academic research, and despite the self-description of journalists and editors, the foreign policy elite – the foreign policy decision-makers – tend to view the role of the news media quite differently. As mentioned briefly in the introductory chapter, to those responsible for the daily operation of states, the policy-makers, the news media do indeed have a strong impact on the practice of foreign policy and international politics. Responding to a direct question on this, as many as nine of the twelve interviewees described the general influence of the media within the foreign policy arena as ‘strong’, ‘important’ or ‘very strong’, and only one respondent claimed that the media had little influence. (See Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2: Power of the news media according to the foreign policy elite**

<b>Level of influence</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Some</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Typical description</b>	– As I experienced it, foreign policy is not very much steered by the media	– The media are important for understanding what drives foreign policy – when it comes to big events, the media have great importance	– in general the media have very great influence – the media are of great importance – policy gets shaped by the media focusing on issues and aspects of these issues
<b>Number of interviewees</b>	1	3	8

One of Norway's most experienced diplomats and foreign affairs decision-makers leaves little doubt about his own experience of the impact of the media. He summarizes his own twenty years of daily affiliation with Norwegian foreign policy by distinguishing between long-term foreign-policy interests and the actual practice of policy:<sup>77</sup>

I believe it is correct to say that Norwegian foreign policy, at its most fundamental level, is based on some relatively unchanging main interests that cannot, in general, be influenced. That does not mean, however, that in specific situations one cannot be considerably influenced by the way that the media deal with issues and focus on them. Nor does it mean that we don't devote too much energy to dealing with how the media angles and focuses on things. In fact, and with all respect for the role of the media, what does happen is that we sometimes sit down and think, 'Hmmm, it's not so bad, but we could be doing things that were a lot more important for the country's interests, and for the sufferings of humanity, if we didn't have to get mixed up in all this.' It may seem far-fetched to think like that, but one can be tempted at times, because of all the time and energy involved [...] And what suffers is, after all, our long-range political work, because we have to do something about these balls that get thrown into our court almost every single day.

The view that the news media affect how interests and motivations are played out does not seem to vary along the ideological axis. The key foreign-policy spokesman in a government from the opposite side of the political spectrum of the one quoted above makes the point no less clearly. He defines the interaction between the news media and the political elite in terms of a relation where the policy evolves through what he calls a 'dialectic' process:<sup>78</sup>

I feel that the power of the media is generally quite large. [...] Look at the PM's press conferences. They're based on the fact that we know we have a four-year project [*Parliamentary elections are held every four years in Norway – transl. note*] and that we aren't going to panic just because, after only eight months, people jump up and down and say that there are two or three things that could be better, or that we haven't delivered on

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<sup>77</sup> State secretary, personal interview, June 2006.

<sup>78</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, interview, June 2006.

everything. So we are very much aware that we have to have stamina. On the other hand, of course the media are entitled to answers, responses. That means there's a dialectic process all the time, between me and the media, and it involves a kind of joint understanding. To take one concrete example: Today we're facing an impending Israeli invasion of X. I've been working on this for some days already. The media element becomes very much of a rotating factor in our decision-making processes.

## 2. Understanding the difference between academic and practical knowledge

If we now take the conclusions of the last chapter and compare these against the findings from the interviews above, we are confronted with an obvious empirical discrepancy. What is present here is a clear and evident inconsistency between, on the one hand, how people in the media view their own role and established academic knowledge about the media's influence on the actors in international politics; and, on the other, the very self-understanding of these political actors themselves. We find empirical material to support two opposite conclusions: one describing the news media as a potent force in the conduct of foreign policy, the other downplaying the importance of the media and underlining the central findings and conclusions within the academic foreign policy/media discourse discussed in the previous chapter.

This discrepancy runs parallel to two types of obtainable knowledge of the political role played by the news media – a practice or common-sense approach versus an academic approach to knowledge about social reality. And the inconsistency is striking, as it also relates to differences among the actors themselves. (See comparison in Table 4.3 below.)

**Table 4.3: Difference in perception of media influence; editors and foreign policy elite**

Level of influence	Low	Some	High
Editors	10	3	2
Decision-makers	1	3	8

How can we make sense of this apparent empirical paradox – the gap between academic findings downplaying the role of the news media for the conduct of foreign policy, and the perception of the role played by the media among the foreign-policy decision-makers themselves? What is the reason for this pattern? How can we understand that the decision-makers apparently cleave to the ‘wrong’ perception, going against the empirical findings of much of the current academic research into the subject? The general answer that I will seek to explore, which takes us back to the conceptual discussion in the previous chapter, is that what at first seems like a paradox may not be a real-world paradox at all. Different conclusions about the political influence and power of the news media may simply be an expression of different views and understandings of what the ‘news media’ and influence and power in politics really mean. The discrepancy may be epistemological, not ontological. Or to put it more bluntly: Both sides may be right. The scholars and editors may be right because the news media have limited power in the sense of a directly measurable effect of news coverage on the decisions and behaviour of states and statesmen, which is the focus of much of the current academic ‘media/foreign policy debate’. And yet, the political elite and foreign policy decision-makers may also be right, because they experience and observe another form of media effect and influence, one that falls outside the framework of much current academic research.

In order to substantiate an answer along these lines I shall, in the following section, present transcriptions of interviews with the Norwegian foreign policy decision-making elite between 2000 and 2006. The sample includes a systematic selection of three successive governments between March 2000 and July 2006, altogether nine interviewees, three Foreign Ministers and six Deputy Ministers.<sup>79</sup> All of the interviews

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<sup>79</sup> The interviewees are all public persons and, in a Norwegian context, are easy to identify. In an attempt to maintain some anonymity, I shall refer to them in the following way: Minister (A): A former head of the Conservative Party, leader of the Parliament’s Defence Committee, with more than 20 years’ experience in foreign work. Minister (B): A former prime minister, head of the Labour Party, leader of the Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee, with more than 20 years’ experience of work in foreign policy. Minister (C): A former director of a major NGO, top positions as civil servant, high position in international organization, and political adviser to the Prime Minister. One is a former leader of the Norwegian Conservative party (*Høyre*). The other two are members of the Labour Party (*Arbeiderpartiet*): one of them is also a former leader of the party and has served as prime minister in a minority Labour government. All have long

focused on two main topics. First, I was interested in how each of the politicians explains how media influence is related to their political practice. Second, I was interested in the degree of centrality they ascribe to the news media and the representation of their policies and actions.

With only one exception, all the Ministers and Deputy Ministers expressed the common view that the media has a significant influence on their individual roles as decision-makers.<sup>80</sup> The most experienced decision-makers among the Deputy Ministers (Deputy (1)), for instance, gave the following general description of what he called ‘the omnipresence of the news media’:

Foreign policy is very much steered by events. Often there is a lot of talk about tackling the various cases that pop up [...] Sometimes you’d prefer to let things lie for awhile, at a lower level, the civil service level, the press level, individual press spokespersons. Or maybe we wish for cases that can readily be seen as being at a lower level but that are good for us to use as markers. And the tempo is vital, because now we have the online net media. We notice that. The people who ask are often better informed than you or me. And that’s a new challenge, because the Foreign Ministry used to have enormous access to

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political and/or international experience. The six Deputy Ministers I shall refer to in the following manner: Deputy (1): Long political experience and three years as a Deputy Minister; Deputy (2): Long political experience and two years as a Deputy Minister; Deputy (3): Little political experience and one year as a Deputy Minister; Deputy (4): Several years of political experience and three years as a Deputy Minister; Deputy (5): Long political experience and four years as a Deputy Minister; Deputy (6): Several years of political experience and four years as a Deputy Minister.

<sup>80</sup> *Deputy (2)* is the only interviewee among the politicians who explicitly expressed some doubt about how influential the news media really are. I asked him about his own impression of the role of the media, and he responded by saying that as far had he experienced ‘the media were not involved in steering my everyday work to any great extent’. The reason may be that his main portfolio within the Ministry was to initiate a long-term project on global governance unrelated to current affairs and the handling of day-to-day politics. Interestingly, despite Deputy (2)’s explicit rejection of any strong media influence in his daily work at the Ministry, the role of news media does indeed seem to have a lot to do with his own political life and practice, and his deep-felt frustration about how long-range policies and initiatives are generally neglected and politically devaluated. Describing his own work, he notes certain forms of media influence: ‘As a politician one can see that people will talk a lot about an issue even if it’s not big in the media. For example, people might talk a lot about something to do with the social security system, or maybe a question about immigration. Even the media don’t cover it, it can be a big issue for the man in the street. But when it comes to foreign affairs and foreign policy, people don’t have experiences of their own to draw on. There everything gets decided by the media, paying attention to certain specific issues, etc. But I think there’s a danger in that. I feel there isn’t enough media awareness in Norway about broader questions of foreign policy, and there’s not enough discussion. Many big issues just pass us right by. I think that [for me working with foreign policy issues] it was striking how difficult it was to get interest and awareness of such questions. Myself, I tried to start a project about globalization and how to create a new international order [...] and strengthen world society. But it was incredibly hard to get people interested.’

information, but that comparative advantage is nearly gone now. Almost anyone can access all kinds of information.

Deputy (3) has observed the same tendency. He defines the relationship between the news media and foreign policy as a constant balancing act. He uses an analogy of playing on two different chessboards simultaneously, claiming that he experienced the conduct of foreign policy '[...] like playing two games of chess at the same time. You constantly have to make moves on both chessboards, but the configurations are different. You have one chessboard that is media reality – political reality in Norway – and then you have the other board, and that's – shall we say – the chessboard of the diplomatic world and international effects.'

In order to exemplify this chess analogy, Deputy (3) referred to the 'cartoon debate' in 2006: the situation of riots and attacks on the Norwegian embassies in Teheran and Damascus after a Norwegian periodical (*Magazinet*) had printed cartoon caricatures of the Prophet Muhammed previously published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllandsposten*:

We had a dilemma like that in connection with the cartoon debate [...] If you chose to make moves that would help to calm things down, create an image of the Norwegian authorities as open to dialogue and understanding with the regard to the fact that many [Muslims] were offended or hurt, which would be an advantage in relation to the outside world and to the concrete situation, then we risked appearing, to the audience in Norway, to be giving in to fundamentalists. So it's clear that here it was a question of balancing between two games, a kind of double message.

The analogy of the two chessboards is interesting. It seems to assume a kind of distinction between two different types of political 'reality', or a balancing act between two different modes of politics – between media-independent instrumental and symbolic media-dependent policy techniques and problem-solving strategies. Moreover, Deputy (3) offered a clear explanation of why the news media become an important arena also for the conduct of the foreign policy. For, as he implicitly pointed out above, the news media reality and the domestic political reality equal each other and are the same, because the domestic constituency (or the political opposition) has only one sole source through



which to comprehend, judge and understand the international realm: the media. Thus, one can argue, the media has a strong influence on the field of foreign policy: the news media representation of the international realm is monopolistic in the sense that our societies have no direct contact with international events, actions and issue-areas. Further, the role of the news media reality becomes particularly strong in democratic states because the government will have to seek legitimacy and support from a democratic constituency whose worldview is significantly defined by the communicative filters of the news media.

Both Deputy (4) and Deputy (5) formulated much the same point, but in a different way, presenting the news media as a chief arena for the operation of states. Asked how he would define the relationship between his work as politician and the news media, Deputy (4) responds:

A very strong relationship – the media are a political arena. The media are where we politicians do gets judged and noticed [...] But, in my experience, this doesn't mean that the [news] desks decide what is important, they do that only to a certain extent [...] On the other hand, the media are a vital arena that all the different actors – from the news-desks to the political opposition, interest groups, commentators and so on – fill with content, and in that way influence what the overarching agenda is. But real media power, that means having control of what the question is – not what the answer turns out to be. In other words, it means defining the framework and the angles, or framing the question. The media tell us what there is to talk about.

Within the grammar of this logic, and quite symptomatically for all the Deputy Ministers, Deputy (4) said, 'it's essential to have time to experience your own policies the way they are experienced through the media'.<sup>81</sup> And he explained: Those who don't manage [to have a clear profile, an opinion] are often on the losing end of things. There are those who sit back and think to themselves, *Well, I'm not really doing so badly, it's just that no one notices*. In theory, that might be so, but in my opinion you don't succeed if you're not seen to have opinions, not in today's politics.

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<sup>81</sup> This is not part of the transcribed interview but was said to the author after the interview session.

Deputy 5 formulated much the same point in a different way. Asked to describe how he personally, as a Deputy Minister and long-time top diplomat, would describe the role of the media, he replies:

The easiest way to say that is to say that the role of the media is very, very important. To a considerable extent, it shapes the agenda and is a very important part of our activity, something that defines most of our days in the ministry. Partly I feel it's too much, we become reactive and set off barking after the ball instead of dealing with the hounds and letting the caravan go on its way.

I followed up the question, and asked him: 'But do the media, apart from taking up time and defining the day-to-day political focus, in any way affect actual policy – how the government deals with real issues and events?' Deputy (5) responds:

Yes, I think so. I think that policy is shaped by the media and the authorities focusing on specific issues, and various aspects of those issues. It's easy to say that this doesn't lead to any change in policy, but policy is made by making a whole series of small choices as to the path to follow, and in the end that results in *one* path, so to speak. And gradually, the choices we make as we go along become – I hope – a coherent policy. To a considerable extent those choices will be influenced by the specific assessments we make in each given situation, about a concrete matter. But it's not just the overarching strategic interests that play a role, but also the specific political and tactical assessments made then and there, that must be incorporated into the broader picture. And yes, the media influence is definitely present.

Deputy Minister (5) then went on to criticize his superior at the time, the Foreign Minister, for not realizing how the 'media-ization and tabloid-ization' has increased, changing both the conditions and the actual practice of foreign policy:

One of the things that he [the FM] is concerned about, is making a distinction between strategic and operative leadership. In principle, it's easy to understand what he means. He wants to focus on the basic, long-range aspects [of Norway's foreign policy], not just implementing policies but shaping policies that should be kept distinct from day-to-day

solutions to specific tasks. Even though I can agree with this as a concept, my problem is that in political reality it's nearly impossible to maintain a distinction like that. So much of our work involves coping with the operative needs of dealing with the media that there isn't much time left for a long-range, coherent and predictable strategic policy defined by the political leadership.

Deputy Minister (6) was a member of the same government. He expressed much of the same view as his colleague. In principle he was in favour of a foreign policy leadership that focuses on long-term strategic interests and policies, disregarding the media agenda. However, he clearly admitted that any attempt to follow such a principled track is likely to backfire: 'The decision to not play along with the news media was a matter of personal instinct, but also a heartfelt political principle on the behalf of the Foreign Minister. In hindsight, however, it was misjudgement [...] If you are open to the media and have the ability to express yourself in a way that suits the media format, then you have a great potential for being perceived as a good Foreign Minister, and being recognized for clear and sound policy judgements.'

During my interviews with the foreign ministers, each of the ministers was invited to reflect on his own personal experience with the news media, and to describe, from a general point of view, how the news media had interacted with his own political achievements and manoeuvres.<sup>82</sup> Minister A, whom I briefly quoted in the introduction this thesis, claimed to be extremely aware of the media. He referred to his political experience from the time before he was appointed Minister, and answered the general question about his own personal relationship to the Norwegian media by stating '[...] that I am extremely aware of the importance of the media, and that I define the media as quite central to the work that I do. I have to stay in constant touch with the entire Norwegian population. And that's why I'm so aware of the importance of the media when it comes to my work.'

Somewhat later in the interview, reflecting on his own daily interaction with the media, Minister A downplayed the importance of clear and fixed political strategies.

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<sup>82</sup> The exact formulation varied a little bit, but were all based on two formulations: 'What has been your experience with the role of the media in politics?' 'How important do you feel the media have been for your own political work as FM?'

Rather, he said, politics is something that evolves through the daily interaction with the media, and through the responses to developments, events and issues that are often raised by the news outlets:

It [work in connection with the media] varies a bit. Right now I'm preparing for an interview with *Aftenposten* tomorrow, about main issues in foreign policy. [...] I can get some inputs from the various divisions here, maybe try to work out some formulations, some sentences. In general, I'd say that politics is less devious than its reputation would have it. It's much more a question of day to day ... responses to a reality that's changing, than it is devious and orchestrated. For my part, it's more a matter of developing through the reasoning, the situation, at the moment.

According to Minister A, the role of the media is not simply to serve as a broadcaster and transmitter of politics. The news media are an intimate part of what politics is about, and a communication strategy is not merely a way of presenting the political work, but an integral part of politics and a pivotal instrument for defining the premises for how the public understands and judges policies. Communication through the news media, he argues, is an instrument for defining the reality that politics refers to. And he repeatedly refers to the media as almost synonymous with public opinion. When I ask, 'Do you have any deliberate strategy for the way you deal with the news media?', he responds:

In a way it's all very responsive and communicative. In my work as a politician I try to follow this principle: *you shouldn't over-estimate what the public knows*. By that I mean that, when you sit here, working with these issues every day, you know a lot, and there are 700 staff working in the ministry here and 2000 abroad [...] so you can't expect that the public out there, who experience you through the media, will have the same knowledge [...] In that way you shape the premises for how people see things, and there the media are your tool.

Minister A pauses for a moment, and I use the brief interlude to add one more question: 'So, you say that you use the media politically?' Minister A continues:

I am very conscious of that: it is the definition of reality. And that is an important part of my communication. My first rule is: 'never over-estimate the knowledge that the public has'. You can't go around expressing yourself in words and terms that presuppose that people know the things you do. No, they sit there around the coffee table, or at their desks, or maybe they've just been through a divorce, or they're sitting there in a totally different world. [...] You have to create reality... well, maybe it seems arrogant, to say that you shouldn't over-estimate what the public knows. But what I mean is showing sympathy and understanding[...] And it is arrogant if you go around talking about things that require almost a PhD to make sense of.. My second rule is 'never under-estimate the wisdom of the public.' And there I seem to be on a different track from some other politicians who have been politicians for a long time, who become cynical, seeing the public as idiots who will swallow anything, so the media can say anything.

Minister B and C have a less explicit strategy for their dealing with the media than Minister A. They both also refute the proposition that the news media have the capacity to force politicians to do something against their own interests. Minister B explicitly disapproves of paying much attention to the news media during his time as Foreign Minister:

For many years now I've reflected on the paradox that I, who have always lived by being elected, was far less interested in how I was covered by the media while I was foreign minister, in comparison to other [FMs] who never had to stand for election. [...] I'm not saying that it wouldn't have been wise to be more preoccupied with how the media react. It probably would have been. But all I can say is that I wasn't so very bothered about it.

Minister C reasons in much the same way. To some extent they seem to agree that the news media have a limited ability to define and dictate specific political decisions directly. Nonetheless, they also underline the importance of the news media for the general trends and tendency of interstate foreign policy, and both of them assume a profound media-political transformation of the very practice of international politics. Minister C gives the following description of what he sees as a mainly negative development:

In general, if you consider the entire global media scene, the tendency is to focus on the big events, the tragedies, as well as a lot of celebrity stuff. [...] That's a sign of the kind of global culture we're getting. And as a result, attention is distracted from much of the really basic problems in world society.

But how would Minister C explain this? If he questions the ability of the news media to affect individual decisions and directly influence decision-makers, how then can we understand a change in the conduct of foreign policy that he claims is highly media-dependent? His response is reminiscent of that given by Minister A above. He describes what seems to be an increasingly hyperactive tendency of international politics, and considers it to be a translation and transformation of some basic characteristics of mass communication onto the conduct of foreign policy:

I feel that the media do have an influence, because events become so powerful. They affect us so strongly because the news events come right into our living rooms. That's how they influence the decision-makers, because of course they're affected by how the public is thinking [...] So politics, on both the national and the international levels, is getting very events-oriented. We seize the events, and then work out a strategy on the basis of a single event. But since these individual events appear so powerful, maybe we end up exaggerating things out of proportion. And our policies become highly events-oriented. We leap from event to event. Politics comes bounding after us, focused only on the one big event and nothing else.

This is a rather straightforward description of what I in Chapter I suggested was a 'monomaniacal' tendency of foreign policy as well as the coverage of international relations. And Minister B is no less explicit about what seems to be a communicative tendency of international politics. Explaining how the new media alter the conditions for conducting international crisis management operations, he says:

The problem is that the media can lead their own life. It's clear that for a lot of people, reality is what they can read in the papers and see on TV. And then there comes the question of how to allocate our time [...] And that's the problem: the media create their own realities, and those realities are what we have to spend a lot of time on.

### 3. Conclusion – towards a proto-theory of media power in IR

In Chapter III, I argued – along the lines developed by Steven Lukes (1974) in his conceptual analyses of power – that much of current research and academically informed debate on the role of the news media in international politics and influence on states' conduct of foreign policy seems to apply a causal and one-dimensional understanding with deep roots within behavioural political science, clearly expressed by among others Robert Dahl (1957) and Max Weber (1978: 942). 'Power', in this sense, is a property of individual agents and is described by a one-way or two-way relation between ontologically autonomous entities.<sup>83</sup> Accordingly, the potential power of the news media, as studied and tested within 'indexing theory', is that of an independent actor that exercises strong instrumental power by affecting the behaviour of politicians, shaping their foreign policy agenda. Or in the language of Robert Dahl: making decision-makers do things they would not otherwise have done. But there are other ways of viewing power relations and the relationship between mass communication and politics.

Power and influence cannot simply be restricted to direct causal and mechanical relations between independent agents. Power may, for instance, take the form of a constitutive relation. The French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1991), offers one definition of what kind of influence this may be:

...of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself (Bourdieu 1991:170).

According to this definition of what Bourdieu calls 'symbolic power', power should not be viewed only as the relationship between independent interest-seeking actors who do or do not have the ability to influence each other's behaviour on specific issues. Instead power may be thought of as the ability to define the common understanding of the world in which political actors operate and act, thereby constituting

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<sup>83</sup> In a celebrated analysis Bertrand Russell (1975:25) defined power accordingly as 'the production of intended effects'.

the very reality in which politics are played out (Weimann 2000: 5). In a general discussion of the concept of power in the study of international relations, Barnett and Duvall (2005: 46), clarify the distinction:

This conceptual distinction between power working through social relations of interaction or in social relations of constitution tracks fairly closely with a distinction that frequents the literature on power: 'power over' and 'power to'. Concepts of power rooted in behaviour and interaction point to actors' exercise of control over others; they are, then, 'power over' concepts. Concepts of power tied to social relations of constitution, in contrast, consider how social relations define who the actors are and what capacities and practices they are socially empowered to undertake; these concepts are, then, focused on the social production of actors' 'power to'.

Theoretically, the distinction between a causal and constitutive notion of power is not too difficult to convey. Barnett and Duvall's description is only a reformulation of Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power or definitional power, and of Lukes' (1974) well-established categorization of three different dimensions of power.<sup>84</sup> Yet, one cannot be sure that the apparent disagreement between journalists and politicians concerning the news media has anything to do with differing notions of how the news media and politics are intertwined and interrelated. Perhaps things look different simply because the news media are viewed from two different perspectives; moreover, when asked about the influence of the news media, politicians have a general tendency to confuse actual influence with general frustration at the media's ability to skew responses, take up time, criticize and highlight problems. So the question is this: What do politicians mean when they talk about 'media influence'?

First of all, we note that there is a striking imbalance, even a contradiction, between the predominant academic findings of the 'media/foreign policy debate', on the one hand, and the self-descriptive and direct understanding of the role of the news media

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<sup>84</sup> The 'three-dimensional view' of power is described by Lukes (1974: 28) as: 'Is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial?'



among relevant political actors themselves, on the other. In contrast to much of the scholarly debate and empirical findings, there seems to be widespread agreement among political decision-makers within the foreign policy elite that the news media do indeed have a strong impact on the practice of foreign policy, underscoring the conventional belief that news media possess the ability to drive the making of foreign policy. But this is not only an imbalance characterizing the material presented in this chapter. It also concerns the self-understanding of the *agens* themselves: While journalists and editors generally tend to downplay the influence of the media, the political actors are by and large eager to emphasize the importance of the news media for the conduct of foreign policy.

There are two reasonable ways of approaching this incongruity. Either one of the two positions is the correct one and can be determined through more extensive empirical exploration; or the difference is merely an apparent one and stems from different views and understandings of what influence and power really mean. My suggestion is that the discrepancy between the journalists' and the decision-makers' self-understanding should be interpreted as a concrete expression of two different views of how foreign policy and mass communications interact and how the mass communication of news affects the practice of foreign policy.

While much attention has been given to the direct effects of news coverage on the decisions and behaviour of states and statesmen, there exists another effect – a constitutive effect – whereby more and more of the rationale of politics is related to the communicative representation of actions and utterances, something that, over time, enables the basic communicative structures that characterize the media to structure foreign policy. While the empirical material presented in this chapter is illustrative and far from conclusive, it does support the proposition that what seems to be an empirical inconsistency may simply be an expression of different views of how news communication and political behaviour are related to each other, and of how journalists and decision-makers relate to the world outside.

Now, and as hinted at above, I believe that the interviews with the ministers and deputy ministers point towards a particular way of viewing the role of the media in international politics; one in which political influence is theorized, not as an interaction

between independent actors, but as a constitutive relation. Indeed, I would say that including the news media into the study of international relations and foreign policy must begin with a distinction between the two fundamentally different meanings of the news media introduced above in the introduction. On the one hand, there is the concept of the news media – that informs current academic exploration – by which the media are understood as a *political actor*. Accordingly, one is concerned with how the news media, through coverage of real-world events or policy processes, become a political actor directly affecting the conduct of foreign policy. On the other hand, there is a distinctively different conceptual understanding of news media, as what we may call the news media as *political field*.

This alternative view of the media is not concerned with how the coverage of specific events influences particular policy priorities and responses. Instead, it is concerned with how the news media's representation and mediation of international events become a primary arena for acting politically – reshuffling the order of political significance between non-mediated issues, facts and events on the international scene and the expression of those events, facts and issues by the news media. Or as a long-time observer of Norwegian foreign policy summarized his understanding of how the news media increasingly plays into the making of foreign policy on the Norwegian political scene: 'I think that, to an increasing degree, the politicians measure out their policies in the press. They gauge the impact in the press. And that moves the political debate out of the official organs and into the news media.'<sup>85</sup>

I believe that this exemplifies a view of the interplay between the news media and the conduct of policy that opens up for an alternative way of understanding how the media influence the operation of states in international politics. Instead of considering the news media as an agency consisting of a multitude of separate news-desks, editorial boards, or news outlets expressing specific views, interests, critical voices or ideologies communicating certain news-bites that may affect and influence politics, the media may be conceptualized as a functional system inscribed with a certain communicative logic that systematically structures not only how the international realm is presented, but even how it is approached politically (Luhmann 2000: 27). The news media constitute and

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<sup>85</sup> List of interviews, see Appendix 1.

define the field, space or environment in which politics is played out and represented, and thereby the operations of states take on certain qualities of the news media over time. As mentioned in the introduction, this can be understood analogical to evolutionary social theory whereby the subject (in this case, the foreign policy actors and apparatus) adapt to changes in the environment (the media), in which the subject is embedded.<sup>86</sup> Hence, rather than considering power as a one-dimensional causal effect, we may view power in terms of a process of adaptation.<sup>87</sup> Or as Pierre Bourdieu (1993: 78) also has defined what he has called the '*power of adaptation*': a type of influence where the subject '[...] constantly performs an adaptation to the outside world'.

According to this line of reasoning, the challenge for future research would be to explore how systematic patterns of communicating international politics – the filtering, dramaturgy, selection etc. of international events, issues and problems – are reflected in the conduct of foreign policy. This should help to move the analysis of media power beyond the 'CNN effect' discourse.

The next two chapters explore how such a research endeavour might look: first, by indicating a theoretical grounding for a constitutive understanding of media power in IR inspired by how the practitioners of foreign policy view the role of the media discussed in this chapter, and second presenting ways in which such a theory can be applied in empirical research.

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<sup>86</sup> For a good discussion of evolutionary social theory and 'power of adaptation' see Geoffrey M. Hodgson's (1998) discussion of Thorstein Veblen's evolutionary economics.

<sup>87</sup> Pierre Bourdieu writes about this in *Sociology in Question*, London: Sage, 1993.

## Beyond the CNN Effect

If we now compare the previous chapters, put them side by side, we find a striking imbalance between the way scholars and journalists on the one hand, and the political actors on the other, view the effect of the news media in foreign affairs. Leading academic scholarship downplays the media effect. By contrast, many of the actual political actors express a clear recognition of a fundamental political influence vested in the news media institutions. I have suggested that the source of this discrepancy between academic and practical knowledge may in fact be less complicated and irresolvable than it may seem. The imbalance could be interpreted as a concrete expression of two different ways of viewing the interrelationship between the news media and politics. While scholars (and editors and journalists) perceive the potential effect of the news media in terms of a traditional causal concept of influence, many decision-makers seem to view the media–foreign policy relation as a constitutive and interwoven relationship, whereby the news media possess power by having the capacity to define the representation of the realities confronting foreign-policy politicians and can force decision-makers to adapt to the basic communicative signature of the news media. Seen this way, the media do not possess influence on foreign policy in terms of a causal relationship between the media and decision-makers as independent entities. The relationship as described by the leading foreign policy elite is far more symbiotic, and the influence of the media lies in the ‘power of adaptation’.

In turn, that would mean that, as an alternative academic approach, we need to formulate a theoretical model of media influence in international politics able to account for the views expressed by the foreign policy elite themselves. That is precisely the aim of this chapter. Building directly on the previous discussion, this chapter offers a theoretical perspective on the effect and influence of the news media in international

politics. It presents three general claims: The first is that the news media serve as a prime focal point and as the main arena or field for states' foreign policy actions and political utterances in the international realm. Second, that the media's representation of the international realm is systematically defined by a rather uniform communicative praxis and format in the dominant news-media technologies and outlets. The third and most radical claim is that these systematic patterns of communicating the international realm may be reflected or reproduced in the actual operation of democratic states – that, in open societies, the instrumentalization of politics, the prioritizing and perception of threats and challenges, and the policy agenda are all to some extent synchronized and harmonized with the dominant medium of mass communication. In short, I propose that not only are our day-to-day observation and understanding of the international political field defined by the specific communicative and technological characteristics of the dominant medium of transmitting the world to us, but that the filtering of the international reality by the news medium also in part defines how and when our societies behave towards this reality. Hence, we could say, the quality of the global systems of communicating the international and the quality of approaching the international politically are closely interwoven and symbiotic.

According to the theoretical argument I present here, studies of media power in international politics should not focus primarily on the 'content' of the news. To determine whether the US media coverage of Iraq or Vietnam was critical, or whether, as Bennett (1990), Robinson (2002) and Herman & Chomsky (1988) have suggested in their seminal studies, the main news outlets tended to follow the political lead is important if we are to understand the direct political role of the media in individual issues. However, the influence of the media comes not only from its content. The influence of the media cannot simply rest in what the media it is being used for, or who it is controlled by. The impacts also stem from the form of the media. More than forty years ago Marshall McLuhan (1964: 19), in his famed *Understanding Media*, put the point rather bluntly: 'Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot.' And he presents his own position equally unswervingly: 'If the formative power in the media are the media themselves, that raises

a host of large matters that can only be mentioned here, although they deserve volumes.’<sup>88</sup>

Here, focusing on international politics, I shall make use of McLuhan’s general insight, but in a less polemic fashion. Drawing on the works of C. Wright Mills (1970) and Niklas Luhmann (2000), I argue that including the news media into the study of IR must begin with a distinction between the two different concepts of the news media mentioned in the concluding section of the last chapter, only one of which has so far been incorporated into mainstream academic research. Further, I contend that the expanded role of the news media in covering international events should be understood in terms of a ‘differentiation’ (or ‘doubling’) of the international political field (Luhmann 2000), systematically re-orienting the focal point of foreign policy towards reality as observed through the news media.

This ‘differentiation’ of international political reality may have important implications for our understanding of the foreign policy of democratic states. Theoretically it implies that states’ responses to dramatic events will have to be understood as a continuous balancing act between two different modes of politics – between instrumental and symbolic problem-solving strategies. Similarly, I theorize, the foreign policy decision-makers’ awareness of and responses to events in international politics are influenced by the degree of correspondence between the communicative qualities of the events/issues and the communicative format of the prevailing medium of mass communication.

This chapter proceeds in three main steps:

- (1) In the first section I introduce the notion of ‘doubling’ of international reality.
- (2) The second section presents two different concepts of the news media in international politics.

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<sup>88</sup> McLuhan (1964) uses a wide definition of the media which is not limited news media but includes a variety of technologies and innovations for transportation and communication (like alphabets, printing presses, TV, radio waves, and even speech itself). McLuhan’s work also includes the well-known distinction between ‘hot’ (‘high definition’) media and ‘cool’ (‘low definition’) media. ‘Any hot medium allows of less participation than a cool one, as a lecture makes for less participation than a seminar, and a book for less than a dialogue’ (McLuhan 1964: 25).

(3) The third section illustrates the main theoretical proposition using the US missile attacks on Afghanistan and Sudan in August 1998 as an example.

### **1. C. Wright Mills and the ‘differentiation’ of international reality**

Let us first briefly imagine the following tale from Greek mythology. We could call it *Hermes’ dilemma*.<sup>89</sup>

Hermes was a son of Zeus. His functions were many, but he served primarily as the messenger of the gods, particularly of Zeus. Hermes was the fastest of the gods, and travelled extensively to inform Zeus about life in the human realms, so that Zeus could make his rulings and decide his actions. Now, Hermes himself had no interest in trying to influence the rulings of Zeus. He was perfectly satisfied being a medium, a transmitter passing on information, as accurately as possible, from the human world to the gods. However, Hermes had the physical capacity to visit only three, or at the most four, different towns every day. And since there were many more towns in the ancient Greek world, Hermes could not know whether the rulings made by Zeus every evening, based on the information he had delivered to the ruler on Olympus, would reflect the most important events or problems among humans that day. In other words: Hermes, being merely the messenger, could not be certain whether the way that Zeus decided to rule the human world was not systematically structured by the operations of Hermes himself, rather than by actual occurrences in the human world. And this posed a dilemma.

Hermes’ dilemma stems from a basic condition underlying practically all kinds of political actions and considerations: no collective institution or single actor, not even the mythological Zeus, directly confronts a world of solid facts, but is instead dependent upon observation posts, witnesses and interpretations of information. Hermes, thus, controls a source of influence that applies in virtually all political decision-making situations, namely the incongruence between the sphere of the world that decision-makers

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<sup>89</sup> The term ‘Hermes’ dilemma’ has been used within the field of anthropology by Vincent Crapanzano (1992) with a meaning distinctively different from the way it is used here.

are in direct contact with, and the sphere of the world they seek to control and affect through political actions.

Of course, modern international political life features many intervening factors that would ease the dilemma confronting Hermes. Most importantly, there are multiple sources of information: a wide range of technologies and systems of transmitting information, thousands of news-producing institutions, and a vast institutional apparatus of diplomatic, scientific and intelligence gathering of data. In addition come all those factors that dictate the conclusion of political decision-making processes prior to and independently of information, thereby marginalizing the role of the messenger. In relation to the conduct of foreign policy such factors may include clearly defined national interests, established strategic outlooks, bureaucratic procedures, or fundamental beliefs and mindsets, etc.

The idealized incongruence between the object of actions and knowledge about that object, described here in the form of Hermes' dilemma, has in one way or the other long been part of the informed scholarly debate about mass communication (Weimann 2000: 3–13, Lippmann 1922) and within political sociology (Luhmann 2000, Gumbrecht & Pfeiffer 1994). In 1959 C. Wright Mills published one of the most celebrated contributions to the sociological study of communication, 'The Cultural Apparatus' (1970: 405–22). 'The first rule for understanding the human condition is that men live in second-hand worlds', Mills wrote in the opening sentence of this article. And he continued:

They are aware of much more than they have personally experienced; and their own experiences is always indirect [...] Their images of the world, and of themselves, are given to them by crowds of witnesses they have never met and never shall meet [...] For most of what he calls solid fact, sound interpretation, suitable presentations, every man is increasingly dependent upon the observation posts, the interpretation centers, the presentation depots, which in contemporary society are established by means of what I am going to call the cultural apparatus. (Mills 1970: 405–6).

What Mills calls 'the cultural apparatus' is (functionally) equivalent to the role occupied by Hermes among the Greek gods of Olympus. The cultural apparatus is what



stands '[...] between men and events [...]; the lens of mankind through which men see; the medium by which they interpret and report what they see' (Mills 1970: 406). However, this cultural apparatus is not merely a transmitter of information. Mills defines the cultural apparatus broadly as an elaborate set of institutions: it contains the news media, but also the schools, census bureaus, museums, literature and all forms of knowledge production that create 'the images, meanings and slogans that define the worlds in which men live...'. These received interpretations 'provide the clues to what men see, to how they respond to it, to how they feel about it, and to how they respond to these feelings. (...) No man stands alone directly confronting a world of solid fact', Mills (1970: 405) argues. People's 'images of the world are given to them by crowds of witnesses they have never met and never shall meet'.

What Mills does here is to expand the simple model of Hermes. He takes Hermes' dilemma one important step further: He suggests that the increasingly important role played by the news media and other observation posts leads to a 'differentiation' of social reality. The means of observing and interpreting the world constitute an intermediate institutional reality that stands between events and actions, what Mills calls 'second-hand worlds' – reality as experienced through the lens of the cultural apparatus.

Mills does not defend what has been labelled 'radical constructivism' within the IR discipline (Adler 2002: 99). To the contrary, he refutes the supposedly radical view that assumes that, since most of our knowledge is dependent upon 'observation posts' and 'interpretation centers', there are no solid facts – consequently, the radical concludes, the study of society must be restricted to ideas, the subjects of observations and practices of representing.<sup>90</sup> Mills' theory of the cultural apparatus is generated empirically: the basic condition of all social actions is that most of what we are aware of and on which we base our judgments, is communicated to us by witnesses and interpreters. This does not imply that one cannot make truth-claims about events, or a collapse of reality into forms of representation. But it does certainly affect the way in which reality is approached. According to Mills, these second-hand worlds become so forceful – emotionally, intellectually and visually – that the various operations of experiencing this reality

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<sup>90</sup> Jean Baudrillard's (2000 [1991]) famous essay 'The Gulf War did not take place' has also been misunderstood in this regard.

indirectly become the central collective object of reference. In a sense, ‘reality’ is hijacked by the very institutions that were supposed to communicate it. Or as Mills (1970: 407) points out: ‘So decisive to experience itself are the results of communications that often men do not really believe what “they see before their very eyes” until they have been “informed” about it by the national broadcast.’

In this way the theory of the cultural apparatus, as presented by Mills, contains a hypothesis of a particular form of mass media politics: To act, and in political terms, to solve a problem or crisis, is a question of behaving in ways that harmonize with how the problem/crisis is communicated by the mass media, and how it is perceived by the consumers of mass-communicated information and interpretations of the surrounding world. More penetrating and forceful practices of communicating second-hand worlds change the social and political point of gravity, elevating the processes of collecting, interpreting and transmitting information as the central reference for how societies observe reality and collective actions.

Mills’ sociological approach is wide-ranging, and not restricted to the news media as such. In an extension of the theory of social systems, the late German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (2000) applied Mills’ line of reasoning directly to the role of the media. Just as Mills defines the cultural apparatus, Luhmann views the mass media as a key cognitive system by means of which modern society constructs a description of the world that society uses to orient itself. Thereby, Luhmann suggests, the expansion of mass mediation leads to a ‘differentiation’ (or ‘doubling’) of social reality, generating a divergence between a ‘first reality’ and a mass-communicated ‘second reality’ – or, in Mill’s terminology, first-hand and second-hand worlds.

[W]e can speak of the reality of the mass media in another sense, that is, in the sense of what *appears* to *them*, or *through them* to *others*, to be reality. Put in Kantian terms: the mass media generate a transcendental illusion. [...] In order to hold on to this distinction, we can speak (always with reference to an observer) of a **first reality** and of a **second** (or observed) **reality**. (Luhmann 2000: 4)

## 2. Two concepts of the news media

Where does this lead? It would at least take us to a re-interpretation of the Hermes' dilemma above, based on the distinction between two different concepts of media politics. For, to return to Zeus and the other Olympian gods, we have already established that Hermes possessed a capacity to influence the rulings of Zeus – given that he actively selected, framed and dramatized information, and given that Zeus did not have a clearly defined strategy, alternative sources of information or direct control over Hermes. But let us now assume instead that Zeus did in fact rule the human world according to an explicit long-term strategy and a predefined plan of future actions. Let us further assume that Zeus received information about the human world from several different sources, and that Hermes' travels (just as the indexing hypothesis asserts) followed Zeus' instructions so that Hermes depended upon Zeus when defining and framing the news agenda. Would this rule out Hermes' capacity to influence the rulings of Zeus, and thus Hermes' power?

According to the traditional description of the CNN effect discussed in previous chapters, it surely would. The CNN effect is a causal effect answering a causal question, defined in a seminal collection of articles as 'the ability of the first truly global television network to [...] force national decision-makers to deal with the reported problems and issues quickly – often without sufficient time to deliberate' (Nacos et al.. 2000: 2). This kind of media effect would not exist if Zeus were dealing with the human world on the basis of a fixed plan, with multiple sources of information, and if he had no sensitivity towards the emotional effect of Hermes' stories on the other gods. If, however, we apply Mills' theory of 'the cultural apparatus' and Luhmann's notion of 'differentiation' of social reality, the argument looks quite different, and Hermes may still occupy a powerful position among the gods.

Mills and Luhmann open up for an understanding of media politics and media influence that does not presuppose the news media as an independent agent that causes particular actions, or as a loss of policy control to the news media. Instead, the relationship between the news media and politics should be understood in terms of how mass communication constitutes a separate communicative reality for the utterance and actual conduct of politics, affecting the very referent object of acting politically. From

this it follows that studying the political power of increased mass mediation in international politics cannot be limited to analysing the media as a 'new' actor or variable that affects (or causes) the outcome of specific decision-making processes, but must be expanded to capture how practices of mass communication become the actual field of policy operations.

My argument here is that Mills and Luhmann's interpretation, as applied to Hermes' dilemma, opens up for the distinction between two different concepts of the news media, introduced in the previous chapter. The *first* concept is what we can term *the media as political actor*. It is concerned with how the news media, by transmitting and framing information, become a political actor that directly affects decisions and the conduct of foreign policy related to specific events and issue areas. It answers questions like: 'Can massive media coverage bring about a military intervention?', or 'why did the West respond to the violent collapse of the Somalian state in 1992?'

The *second* concept of media politics is what I will term *the media as political field*. In applying this concept to the study of international politics, one is concerned not with how media coverage of specific events affects particular political priorities and responses, but with how increased mass mediation divert the focal point of policies and actions towards reality as represented by the news media. The relationship between politics and the news media is constitutive. Media politics involves techniques of shaping the observed reality and to act and appear in ways that correspond with a society's observation of particular events and/or a chain of events through the system of mass communication.

Hence, and as we have already recognized, the concept of 'the media as political field' offers a quite different understanding of media power. The news media's exercise of political power does not presuppose the idea of a pushing force or an independent agent. The power relation is not causal but structural and constitutive. To a significant degree, the news media constitute the field (or arena) towards which political utterances and behaviour are oriented, and the power of the media is vested in the ability of the media over time to inscribe this field with their own communicative logic. The political effect, thus, is structural adaptation, and originates from the progress of at least two factors: First, democratization, and the obvious political interest among political actors

within a democratic political system in dealing with the world as it is expressed by the news media to the democratic constituency. Second, the development of the news media as a communicative system selecting, representing and formatting the world (Luhmann 2000: 27).<sup>91</sup> The sum of which is that the news media can be viewed as a political field – the environment in which politics is embedded – inscribed with a certain communicative characteristics that may change over time, and which the expression and behaviour of foreign policy will adapt to. Hence, the media possesses what I have called the *power of adaptation* (See Chapters I and IV.)

But does this theoretical proposition have any real-world relevance and resonance?

### **3. Media-dependent politics: From Hermes to ‘Operation Infinite Reach’**

One last time we must visit Hermes and the other gods on Olympus. In fact, Hermes’ dilemma gives an oversimplified account of how Zeus kept himself informed about daily life in the human world. To be sure, Hermes was not the only informant used by Zeus. The birds (the eagles in particular) were equally important messengers. So, just as in modern political decision-making processes, Zeus received a steady flow of data and information from multiple sources.

Imagine now that Hermes, not possessing a monopoly on information, was still the most gifted storyteller among the messengers of Zeus. He was also the only one that continued to spend much of his time talking to the other gods. Every evening he gathered all of them, giving lively, dramatic, and always fresh presentations about current events and the impact of Zeus’ power on human society. The presentations were almost always about events in which Zeus had involved himself. In this way Hermes tended to follow Zeus’ lead. However, as Hermes focused solely on episodes with a certain dramatic quality, the content of his stories was also defined by a fixed communicative logic:

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<sup>91</sup> In this way, the power of the media is, in Bourdieu’s (1991:170) sense of the term, symbolic: ‘constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world.’

Important but slow-moving developments were rarely included, episodes that had little dramaturgical potential or news value were often left out, and long-term actions by Zeus to prevent conflicts and human suffering were overshadowed by his more dramatic interventions, in particular those when he used his infamous thunderbolts.

Zeus' position on Olympus was not eternally guaranteed. He had come to power after overthrowing his father, Cronos, and his supremacy was ultimately conditional on the continued support and cooperation of the other gods. Zeus, therefore, used to listen in on Hermes' presentations to see how the other gods reacted. He soon realized that most gods were quite disinterested in the human world apart from the daily dramas that unfolded through Hermes' presentations. And so, Zeus told himself, the only way I can experience my own actions, and the only way to let my power and my actions be known and celebrated by the gods, is to behave in ways that fit with the basic logic of Hermes' narrative. An event is not really an event, and my actions are not really actions, unless they are part of Hermes' stories. Human society is my scene but Hermes' narrative defines my political vocabulary, Zeus reasoned.

In this way, Hermes constrained the actions of Zeus. It became less opportune for the ruler on Olympus to follow the sober advice from his other messengers, or to focus on preventing problems and meeting demands that could not be observed by Hermes or that diverged from the basic logic of Hermes' communicative practice. On the other hand, Hermes' daily presentations also gave Zeus new degrees of freedom. Through his interventions into human society he could determine the focus and much of the content of Hermes' presentations. Zeus also realized that it made sense to spend most of his resources on those aspects of an event that he knew would be reflected by Hermes, just as it made sense to intervene in the human world in a dramatic fashion rather than through slow-moving long-term initiatives.

This little fable from Olympus underscores Hermes' ability to influence the way Zeus operated in Greek society. However, the influence does not lie, as it does with the CNN effect or the indexing hypothesis, in the ability to force Zeus to deal with individual reported real-world events. Rather, Hermes' influence rests on his ability to re-shuffle the order of significance between actual occurrences in the classical Greek world and the representation of those occurrences on Olympus. Thereby, Hermes is more than simply a

political actor in a strict sense. He – or rather his daily presentations to the gods – is the principal arena of politics, and Zeus’ actions become inscribed by the dramaturgic and narrative logic that defines that arena. Zeus’ policies thus become embedded in the dominant practice of mass communication on Olympus.

This analogy of Hermes and Zeus is a simplified illustration of what Mills and Luhmann recognize as a ‘doubling of reality’, and the concept of the media as political field. Taking their argument one step further – and leaving the mythological world behind – we can make an instructive analytical distinction between two different forms of problem-solving policy actions in international politics. On the one hand, an instrumental form of problem-solving policies that are directed primarily towards media-independent facts, or what Mills calls real-world events and ‘solid facts’. And on the other hand, media-dependent or symbolic policy techniques, understood as different political strategies primarily related to events as observed (indirectly) through the news media by a mass audience. Mills calls these second-hand reality events.

There are many ways of illustrating these two modes of policies in the actual conduct of states in international politics, especially in the case of state responses to international emergencies and the implementation of international crisis management operations. President George W. Bush’s famous telephone conversation with Prime Minister Tony Blair the morning after the ‘9/11’ terrorist attacks against the USA offers a curious exemplification in this regard. In the course of the conversation, the British PM expressed shock and horror, pledged his ‘total support’, and said he assumed that the US President was considering an immediate response. The president replied, ‘Obviously, you know, we’re thinking about that’, but added that he did not want to ‘pound sand with millions of dollars in weapons’. The two men then agreed that the question of a military response presented a strategic dilemma: the choice between a ‘*rapid*’ and an ‘*effective*’ response to the terrorist attacks.<sup>92</sup>

The conversation between the two statesmen underscores Mill and Luhmann’s notion of media politics as an uneasy balance of manoeuvring politically in a media-independent or a mass-mediated reality. Responding rapidly to dramatic events may not bring about an optimal or lasting solution to a given threat or crisis, but as long as the

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<sup>92</sup> All the quotations are based on a news report in *International Herald Tribune*, 29 January 2002.

action plays along with communicative logic of the news media and harmonizes with how the crisis is perceived by the mass audience, a rapid response may nevertheless be a sound political approach by which a negative dramatic event can be neutralized by a similarly dramatic positive counter-event. To be sure, as long as there are news media covering the unfolding of events and a certain degree of sensitivity to public opinion among political decision-makers, the policy of dealing with dramatic events may always open for ‘second-hand’ symbolic policy techniques as the preferred and most effective policy approach.

Consider another example: President Bill Clinton’s response to the terrorist bombing of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam on 7 August 1998. On 20 August 1998 – a little more than three years before the US-led ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ in Afghanistan from October 2001 – the USA launched a cruise missile attack against targets in Afghanistan and Sudan (‘Operation Infinite Reach’). The same day, from his holiday home on Martha’s Vineyard, President Clinton called a press conference where he announced the objective of the military strikes. Claiming that the strikes were launched against installations used by the jihadist group suspected of the terrorist attacks, Clinton stated: ‘Our target was the terrorists’ base of operation and infrastructure. Our objective was to damage their capacity to strike at Americans and other innocent people’ (CNN int. 20 August 1998).

Using Mills and Luhmann’s terminology, we could say the terrorist attacks and the US response in August 1998 occurred both as material events (independent of media observation) and as media-dependent events (observed by observing the news media’s observation). For example: Non mass-mediated events would be the physical destruction of the embassies by car bombs; the launching of US cruise missiles 13 days later; the infrastructure used by the terrorists; the target hit by the missiles, etc. Second-reality events, by contrast, are facts that require human institutions for their existence. One important set of such facts established by the news media are causal beliefs.<sup>93</sup> By this I mean the beliefs and interpretation of cause–effect relationships that make some policy instruments seem irrelevant and others relevant, by synthesizing and linking brute facts into a coherent narrative and sequence of events. In the case of the US missile strikes in

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<sup>93</sup> See Judith Goldstein & Robert O. Keohane (1993) for a discussion of beliefs and foreign policy.



August 1998, the storyline of the news coverage presented the bombing of the embassies and the subsequent US attack against targets in Sudan and Afghanistan in a chronological and logical fashion. CNN International<sup>94</sup> consistently described the US strikes as ‘Counter Terrorist Attacks’, whereas the BBC phrased it ‘US strikes against terrorism’.<sup>95</sup> In their visual narrative, both networks integrated images of the wrecked embassies and images of cruise missiles taking off and hitting targets, into one coherent sequence of events – attack and counter-attack. The actual TV images were also digitally merged into one single picture-frame, showing the embassies and the subsequent strikes as two-layer photography.

The important point here is not whether the news media coverage was critical or uncritical, or whether the strikes were instrumental in limiting the future threat from jihadist groups (al-Qaeda in this case) against US interests. In fact, despite the possible irrelevance of ‘Operation Infinite Reach’ as a counter-terrorist operation, President Clinton could (intentionally or not) utilize the political potential of Mills’ ‘doubling of political reality’. The strikes were a viable second-reality problem-solving strategy. Its political rationale was not mainly dependent on the media-independent facts on the ground, but on the news media’s systematic production of a second (media-relative) reality by a few dominant news media institutions, and hence shaped by the way the news media as a communicative filter systematically filtered international reality.

Restricting the scope to the type of state-sponsored crisis-management operations that Clinton conducted after the bombing of the US embassies in August 1998, we infer three general claims about the role played by the news media:

- The power of the news media is symbolic in the sense of constituting the political reality presented by the news media as a principal reality for the conduct of states.
- The policy of responding to acute and dramatic events in international politics should be viewed both as a media-independent and a media-dependent form of

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<sup>94</sup> Taped ‘top-of-the-hour’ CNN International news coverage, 20 and 21 August 1998. See Appendix II.

<sup>95</sup> Taped ‘top-of-the-hour’ coverage on BBC World, 20 August 1998. See Appendix II.

problem-solving policies and actions. While the first is directed towards the non-mediated existence of events, the media-dependent policy is related to responding to and shaping the mass mediation of those events. The power of the news media is to tilt the political *modus operandi* of foreign policy from the first towards the latter, making foreign policy an uneasy balancing act between symbolic and instrumental problem-solving approaches.

- The quality of politics adapt to the quality of communication. Over time, in theory, there will be a tendency for the outlook, interests and foreign policy instruments of states to become harmonized with the dominant communicative format and system of representing international reality. For instance, in an historical period when the TV is the central supplier of news, political actions and utterances will increasingly harmonize with and imitate the basic visual and dramaturgy requirements and characteristics of televised news coverage; leading to increased use of visual and dramatic short-term instruments (military operations, rapid humanitarian assistance operations etc.) rather than long-term and process-oriented instruments, and a general over-focusing on visual and expressive aspects of the international reality.

The terrorist attacks of August 1998 offer one possible illustration of a particular form of media-dependent foreign policy. But in a sense the example is somewhat ill-chosen, since the very counter-terrorism operation itself was widely seen as yet another symbolic manoeuvring technique, by which the US president sought to exploit the embassy bombings in order to distract public attention away from the ongoing Monica Lewinsky scandal in Washington. Yet, it illustrates the key point that the foreign policy operations of democratic states are embedded in the practice of producing Mill/Luhmann's second realities. It illustrates that understanding the policies presupposes inquiries into the communicative structure and patterns of the news medium.

That said, it would be mistaken to assume that the concept of 'the media as political field' asserts a fixed location or direction of media power in international

politics. Actions of states and the operations of the news media exist in a constitutive relationship. The news media may have a constraining effect on state policies, but they also offer states a way of manipulating the reality that is communicated. This does not have to happen through direct control of the media, or censorships and propaganda as it did during the first Gulf War (Taylor 1992: 31–87). Instead the state can utilize the news media's dependence on information for the necessary continuation of their news coverage, and in particular the TV networks' perpetual need for images and live pictures. This mutual dependency between state and media was clearly demonstrated by the system of 'embedding' news reporters with coalition forces during the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Katovsky & Carlson 2003). Establishing itself as the main provider of information, the US military made participation in the pool of embedded reporters a prerequisite for live coverage of the invasion, thereby exploiting the competition for market ratings between news networks in order to promote US interests.

#### **4. Conclusion: towards operationalization**

Thus far, drawing on the works of Mills and of Luhmann, I have argued that the relationship between politics and communication cannot be fully understood if we begin from the premise of an analytical distinction between the object of political actions and the mass mediation of those actions. Rather, the media representation of events, issues and challenges on the international field and the mass consumption of the news information may be the overriding political reality. Theoretically, this can be described as a 'differentiation' ('doubling') of foreign policy between policy techniques of manoeuvring in a media-independent and a media-dependent political reality, confronting the actors with two different (but interrelated) arenas for staging their policy and developing their strategies. I have also argued that any news media are characterized by certain communicative qualities, filters, format, technologies that in part define the news media's representation of the international realm. These communicative qualities are reflected, imitated or reproduced in the actual operation of democratic states on the international scene.

Some of the analytical and empirical implications that can be derived from the general theoretical argument are self-evident. For instance: In relation to responding to an international emergency or dramatic event, we can study the policy response as a balancing act between media relative/irrelative problem-solving strategies and actions. President Bush, vacillating between ‘rapid’ or ‘effective’ ways of responding to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, in his telephone conversation with Tony Blair, represents a pithy expression of these two modes of politics.<sup>96</sup>

However, there are other and perhaps more far-ranging implications to be drawn from the conceptual argument presented here, concerning various fields of foreign policy. For instance, in relation to security policies: threats, issue-matter and regional or global dangers of a kind that have few structural communicative similarities with the dominant narrative and the technological format of the principal medium of mass communication are much less likely to get political attention and activate a response. Dangers or issue-areas of the kind that easily match most of the communicative patterns of the news medium, on the other hand, will tend to dominate the political agenda and the public discourse.<sup>97</sup>

Yet, this kind of media effect cannot be limited to the foreign policy agenda. It may also affect the instrumentalization of policies, justifying types of responses related to easily communicable and symbolic features of a particular event or issue-area – for instance, dramatic military strikes rather than long-term poverty alleviation or emergency prevention. And if we turn to the flip side of political actions, for instance the intentional production of security threats, much of the same logic applies. Increased mass mediation stimulates the production of specific forms of global man-made security dangers by

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<sup>96</sup> Interestingly, Osama Bin Laden’s mentor and right-hand man, Ayman al-Zawahiri, expressed an almost identical understanding of role of the news media for al-Qaeda’s battle against the USA. Discussing at length the future strategy of global jihad before the events of 9/11, al-Zawahiri justified the importance of launching spectacular attacks as a way ‘to break the media blockade on the jihadist movement’ (Kepel 2004: 94–99).

<sup>97</sup> As an empirical implication of the general conceptual argument, therefore, we should expect the level of ‘politization’, ‘securitization’ and ‘violization’ of an issue-area or a particular real-world event (Wæver 1995, Buzan et al. 1998:23–25) to be correlated with the degree of correspondence between the communicative characteristics of the issue-areas/events and the format of the dominant medium of mass communication.

rationalizing threat formations that directly exploit the communicative logic of the news media, as demonstrated by multiple new forms of terrorism.

Most importantly, according to the general theoretical proposition in this chapter, the news media are not to be viewed simply as a multitude of separate news organizations and independent news-desks, but should be understood as a system of communication encased in a coherent communicative structure and logic that are reflected in the actual operations of states on the international scene. If this is accepted theoretically, it confronts us with an extensive agenda for future research, where the primary task would be to unveil systematic patterns of communicating international politics, and how these patterns are reflected in the way international reality is conceived of and acted upon, through the conduct of foreign policy.

One approach to these challenges is to reduce the communicative structure of the news media to a limited number of specific ‘news media selectors’ – mechanisms that single out the significant and most typical criteria for selecting and communicating news information. The advantage this approach is that the principal news selectors are already known from empirical research within the fields of journalism and mass communications.<sup>98</sup> The remaining task would be limited to exploring if, how, and under what conditions these selectors attract certain foreign policy actions and strategies. Such a research agenda poses several new difficulties. And these are challenges for the next and final theoretical chapter.

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<sup>98</sup> See especially Luhmann (2000), Galtung & Holmboe Ruge (1965), Entman (1993), Bell (1991).

## News Media Selectors

The argument so far, as well as the policy implications mentioned in the previous chapter, are derived from a conceptual formula. However, we should take care not to confuse the theoretical argument with empirical knowledge.<sup>99</sup> Even though Zeus may have listened in on Hermes' theatrical presentations on Olympus, we cannot be sure that Zeus' dealings with human society were in fact influenced by Hermes' narrative. The same goes for the possible empirical implications of the theoretical argument: my suggestion that the politicization of global dangers or the instrumentalization of crisis management operations is conditioned by historically dominant communicative practices of the news media. These are all inferred implications – logically reasoned, but still restricted to a set of *a priori* propositions. Are they reasonable? Will IR scholars find the inferences plausible in the light of empirical evidence?

Here are two main challenges for future research. The first challenge is to identify patterns in how international events are covered and communicated by major global or national news media. The second challenge is to distinguish the imprint of these communicative patterns on the actual instrumentalization, justification and conduct of foreign policy. On this note, I suggest that one way of tackling these challenges is to apply an analytical lens analogous to that offered by evolutionary theory.<sup>100</sup> What I have in mind here is what I previously have called 'the power of adaptation' (Bourdieu 1993: 78), a type of media influence where foreign policy decision-making constantly performs an adaptation to the communicative characteristics of the news media over time. By viewing the news media within democratic societies as a main reality or arena for

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<sup>99</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu (1977: 27–34) for an interesting discussion of how social research tends to confuse epistemological and ontological arguments.

<sup>100</sup> For evolutionary approaches to the study of international politics, see Thayer (2000).

political behaviour (as we did in the previous chapter), the news media are to some extent conceived of analogous to an environmental condition. And to the extent this condition is inscribed by a certain universal communicative structure, the conduct of foreign policy will – in part, and over time – adapt to and satisfy these conditions.

In order to understand the role of the media in international politics, therefore, one has to identify the systematic patterns in how the news media transmit and communicate international political reality, independent of the media's political or national predisposition and biases. I shall suggest that one way of doing this is to apply Niklas Luhmann's (2000) notion of *news media selectors*.<sup>101</sup> By this I mean an analytical approach where the communicative quality of the news media is reducible to a limited number of universal structural factors that defines the way different types of news media outlets are likely to select, transmit, frame and communicate international events and occurrences, and that may invoke an adaptation on the side of politics.

Two general questions define the focus of this and the subsequent chapter:

- (1) What are the important structural factors for prioritizing, selecting and framing news about international politics?
- (2) And what does this mean for how foreign policy appears through the filter of the news media?

## **1. The structure of 'news values'**

Let us begin by taking a step back. In the previous chapter I asserted that the news media's representations of the international realm are systematically defined by the communicative logic of the dominant news-media technologies and outlets. But how can we know this? And how can it be captured? Does a 'communicative logic of the news media' actually exist? If so, how is this reflected in the news media's representation of events on the international scene?

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<sup>101</sup> For discussion of different types of communicative qualities of the media, see Luhmann (2000), Galtung & Holmboe Ruge (1965), Entman (1993) and Bell (1991).

This chapter seeks to formulate a conceptual point of departure for answering these questions. Here we are facing a classic problem in the study of mass communications. This problem is linked to what Allan Bell (1991; Bell & Garrett 1998) has called ‘the language of news media’.<sup>102</sup> By this Bell means the systematic way in which the news is selected, and how it is told. There is a profusion of studies and approaches within recent research touching upon questions linked to the language of the news media, many of which seem rather self-evident. Here is a selection of such questions:

- ‘What are the ideologies behind different television reports through the way the news actors are labelled?’ (Davis & Walton 1983)
- ‘How are enemy images constructed in the news coverage of the Gulf War?’ (Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2001)
- ‘What are the discourse structures and language style of newspapers and global news networks?’ (van Dijk 1988, Allan 1998)
- How do political leanings in the textbook used by students of journalism affect the media’s representations of the international order?

This list of questions and ways of posing problems can be extended, and we might include a whole arsenal of different methodological approaches – everything from discourse analysis, quantitative content analysis, semiotics and gender analysis, to hermeneutics. Likewise, we might analyse a whole series of different types of news: pictures, texts, segments, introductions, headlines, full articles, use of colours, use of expert commentators, etc. (Bell & Garrett 1998). Simplifying a little, we may say that what Bell calls ‘the language of news media’ is a collective concept for all those circumstances that determine how we experience the world around us as news material, whether by television, radio, the press or the internet. Bell himself (1991) describes the daily abundance of impressions and opinions via the news media in the following manner:

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<sup>102</sup> Allan Bell’s (1991) *The Language of News Media* is a seminal textbook on the subject. A more recent state-of-the-art presentation is found in the edited volume, *Approaches to Media Discourse* (Bell & Garnett 1998).



People in Western countries probably hear more language from the media than they do directly from the lips of their fellow human beings in conversation. Society is pervaded by media language. Even in a nation as small as New Zealand, the media pour out daily almost two million words of that primary media genre, news, through some 35 newspapers, newscasts carried by a hundred radio stations and three television networks [...] But media language is heard not just by one or two people but by a mass audience. It is the few talking to the many. Media are dominating presenters of language in our society at large. (Bell 1991:1)

Earlier in this thesis we saw that what we here call ‘the language of news media’ also has a central place in the study of media power in foreign policy. One example of this is Robert M. Entman (2004)’s study of ‘framing’ – how the media select and highlight reality (i.e. framing) is central to understanding the political influence of the news media. Similarly, we have seen that proponents of the indexing hypothesis – like Robinson (2002), Bennett (1990) or Hallin (1986) – stress how political consensus in a country is decisive for whether the media make use of critical angles in their coverage of foreign affairs and thereby have the possibility to affect policy.

My focus is more restricted. I want to formulate two important limitations:

*First of all*, I am not interested in *all* aspects of the language of the news, but only in what can be called ‘news values’ linked to foreign policy; in other words, the factors that are decisive for what leads one thing to be ‘judged more newsworthy than another’ (Bell 1991: 155–61). I am thus looking for systematic features that determine what sides of international politics are chosen and given priority as news material, and which factors are particularly important to this choice. This involves no assertions about whether it is possible to operate with an endless list of factors. I only wish to identify the most general, noticeable and systematic factors that are important and that are relevant to international news media coverage of international politics.

*Second*, according to the previous argument my focus is confined to structural factors – defined according to Anthony Giddens (1984: 377) as features of news media institutions stretching across time and space – that can be decisive in our daily experience of the world via the news media. That is, I am not searching for definite criteria or

variations in or through individual journalists and different news editors – ideological relations, political interpretations, education, journalistic methods, etc. Instead, I view news as a product and an expression of a reproductive institutional news system inscribed with ‘certain rules and resources’ (Giddens 1984: 5).

To do this, I shall once again seek assistance from the work of Niklas Luhmann (2000: 27). In conformity with Luhmann I regard the news media, not in terms of its individual organizations (editorial boards, correspondents, etc.), but rather as a certain unified ‘function system of the mass media’. This means looking for systematic characteristics concerning the selection and communication of the world via the news – independent of political orientation, interests, ownership, ideology, geographical location in the world, relations to power, journalistic tradition or other general or specific relations often considered central to how the media treat news about the world (Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2008, 2001, Hammond & Herman 2001, Herman & Chomsky 1988).

In this way, the focus is not on news journalism as such, but on the purely communicative qualities of the news media – how the medium contains a definite logic which affects its renderings of the world, and which only to a small degree varies between the different news institutions and journalists. To put it another way, I am interested in whether the representation of international reality that we are served on a daily basis via the media is to some degree directed by, or perhaps to a substantial degree formed by, factors that individual journalists or editors do not have much to do with.

## **2. Technology and community**

A series of social science works have tried to answer questions like these.<sup>103</sup> One of the most influential of these academic studies is the article ‘The Structure of Foreign News’, written by Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge, and published in 1965.

This article is an attempt to answer a simple question: how do ‘events’ become ‘news’? The authors examine news coverage of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus crises in

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<sup>103</sup> Discussion of various aspects of what I call ‘news value’ are found in Bell (1991), van Dijk (1988), Bell & Garrett (1998), Peltu (1985), Fairclough (1995). See also Bell & Garrett (1998: 1–21)’s overview of discourse approaches to the media, and Bell’s (1991) textbook, *The Language of News Media*.

three Norwegian newspapers and present a series of factors they consider to be crucial for how an occurrence comes to be deemed newsworthy. The choice of factors is linked to a particular psychological assumption about news-consumer perceptions. Using the radio receiver as an analogy, they write:

[W]hat we choose to consider an ‘event’ is culturally determined. The set of world events, then, is like the cacophony of sound one gets by scanning the dial of one’s radio receiver, and is particularly confusing if this is done quickly on the medium-wave or short-wave dials. Obviously this cacophony of sound does not make sense; it may become meaningful only if one station is tuned in and listened to for some time before one switches to the next one. Since we cannot register everything, we have to select, and the question is what will strike our attention. This is a problem in the psychology of perception... (Galtung & Ruge 1965: 65).

On the basis of this basic psychological assumption Galtung and Ruge suggest twelve factors that determine the flow of news from abroad.<sup>104</sup> Their study deals with translating common-sense psychology of perception into a study of mass communication. The authors argue for instance that we are more likely to bring high intensity and a sense of relevance to events that are unambiguous, unexpected and negative in meaning, than we are toward events that have a lower degree of these qualities. And they also predict that there are certain culture-bound factors that influence the transition from events to news, such as reference to elites and elite nations, or cultural proximity (Galtung & Ruge 1965: 68). They conclude – not atypical of the dominant political and theoretical atmosphere at the time – that ‘the consequence of all this is an image of the world that gives little autonomy to the periphery but sees it as mainly existing for the sake of the center – for good or bad – as a real periphery to the center of the world.’

This implies that foreign news coverage is reducible to what the authors claim is a universal characteristic of human beings as communicative subjects. With reference to Galtung and Ruge’s analytical perspective, the human being can be compared to a radio receiver. This receiver prioritizes information according to certain psychological

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<sup>104</sup> Among the most important factors are: *right frequency, threshold, absolute intensity, intensity increase, the lack of ambiguity, meaningfulness, cultural proximity, relevance, consonance, unexpectedness, composition.*

principles and qualities. These are again crucial for determining what we pay attention to and find interesting. Ultimately they will also determine which news items have the greatest news value, and consequently come to dominate the news agenda. What we see of the world via the news media, and what dominates the political agenda, is thus to a significant degree defined by the psychology of perception. Galtung and Ruge advance a biological and evolutionary view of media coverage of the world that sees the media, as Marshall McLuhan formulated it a year before them, as ‘an extension of man’.<sup>105</sup>

‘The Structure of Foreign News’ has been called the fundamental study of news values (Bell 1991: 155). The factors defining newsworthiness suggested by Galtung and Ruge have been applied and found valid for a wide range of different types of news coverage in several countries (Peterson 1981, van Dijk 1988). Allan Bell (1991) is one of those who have systematically proceeded to develop Galtung and Ruge’s study further. Bell uses the twelve factors proposed by Galtung and Ruge as a springboard for constructing his highly expanded typology: a list of 22 different factors influencing the media’s selection of news.<sup>106</sup>

Such lists of factors relevant for determining those events that are intercepted as news, and yet are hidden, are helpful. The problem is, however, that Bell’s list of over 22 factors – similar to Galtung and Ruge’s perception psychology approach – is so comprehensive and general that it loses relevance for achieving its analytical goal. It is a summary of what at any given time might be the main content of any specific news broadcast.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, this involves the chosen factor in a reductionist and ‘anthropological’ explanation of what governs the formulation of the news reality. The reasons for the media’s selection and prioritizing of news are not sought within the media themselves. What people see, hear and experience via the news media is a reflection of

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<sup>105</sup> Galtung & Ruge do not refer to McLuhan’s work in their article. This is somewhat surprising, since as the basic idea/intuition of their article is almost identical with McLuhan’s (1964) work. This work was published in the book *Understanding the Media*, the year before Galtung & Ruge’s article appeared in the *Journal of Peace Research*.

<sup>106</sup> Bell (1991: 156–160) divides the twenty-two factors into three classes: 1. Values in news actors and events: *negativity, recency, proximity, consonance, unambiguity, unexpectedness, superlativeness, relevance, personalization, eliteness, attribution, facticity*. 2. Values in the news process: *continuity, competition, co-option, composition, predictability, prefabrication*. 3. Values in the news text: *clarity, brevity, colour, lead*.

<sup>107</sup> However, just like Galtung & Ruge (1965), Bell suggests two main principles concerning how news factors operate. First, the news factors are not independent of one another, but are cumulative; and second, the lack of one factor can be substituted with another.

the human being's distinctive capacity as an observant being endowed with certain psychological characteristics.

Despite these weaknesses, I will follow Galtung and Ruge's method and basic assumption that it is possible to trace definite news factors that may explain how certain events become news. At the conclusion of the previous chapter, I described these structural factors as *news media selectors*: those properties of the news media's treatment of information that cannot be easily altered or adjusted by individual agencies, and are implicated in the reproduction of the news media.<sup>108</sup> The use of the word 'selectors' here is not to be taken to indicate that there is freedom of choice – or as Luhmann makes the point (2000: 27):

From empirical research we know the significant criteria for the selection of information for dissemination as news or as a report. Information itself can only appear as (however small) a surprise. Furthermore, it must be understandable as a component of communication. The principle of selection now seems to be that these requirements are *intensified* for the purposes of the mass media and that more attention must be given to making the information readily understandable for the broadest possible circle of receivers. Incidentally, 'selection' here is not to be taken to mean freedom of choice. The concept refers to the function system of the mass media and not to individual organizations (editorial boards, whose freedom to make decisions in choosing the news items they run is much less than critics often suppose).

From such a perspective, the news media can be regarded as a system for the methodical selection of information. And this selection is based on certain governing principles. But what type of selectors are we talking about here?<sup>109</sup> I suggest that we can find two categories of such news media selectors capable of investigation in all media: 1) 'communicative selectors' and, 2) 'communitarian selectors.'

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<sup>108</sup> This definition is based on Anthony Giddens (1984: 16–17).

<sup>109</sup> Luhmann (200: 28–30) considers five main media selectors: *surprise, conflicts, quantities, local relevance* and *norm violations*.

## 2.1. *Communicative selectors*

One type of news media selector linked to technological and form-related characteristics of the media is what I shall call *communicative selectors*. By this I mean the formative and narrative features, and technological constraints that determine the selection and framing of international news items. The main proposition is that every selection, prioritizing and further refining of information and events via the news media, bears with it traces of the information medium through which it has been filtered. Some of this will consist of purely narrative features such as the elements of surprise, conflict, speed and change, a continuous dramatic storyline, or requirements such as a provocative headline, a clear lead and an abrupt shift of focus.<sup>110</sup> Some will be systematic communicative features of selecting and giving priority to events and happenings – for example, that an item of information contains an element of surprise and discontinuity, drama, immediacy, visuality and the possibility of being effectively photographed, or that the media favour information items with particularly high quantities of information. Thus, the news media's immense interest in covering wars, humanitarian emergencies, natural catastrophes, and so on, may be viewed as a manifestation of news items with a particularly high level of communicative quantity and quality. Communicative selectors also include the purely technical conditions that make it possible to prepare and communicate material – like the correspondents, satellite links, cameras, and so on.

Galtung and Ruge place only limited emphasis on the purely formal, technological and communicative features of the news media. Nevertheless they have formulated a highly relevant exemplification of what I here mean by communicative selectors. With reference to radio and print news they give the following description of the relation between information technology and the selection of definite events and pieces of reality:

Just as the radio dial has its limitation with regard to electro-magnetic waves, so too will the newspaper have limitations, and the thesis is that *the more similar the frequency of*

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<sup>110</sup> For a discussion of some of these communicative selectors see Bell (1991: 161–74) and Daniel Dayan & Elihu Katz's analysis of live television broadcasts of 'historic' events (Dayan and Katz 1992). For an interesting discussion of news and in-depth reporting, see Niklas Luhmann (2000: 25–41).

*event is to the frequency of the news medium, the more probable that it will be recorded as news by that news medium.* A murder takes little time and the event takes place between the publication of two successive issues of a daily, which means that a meaningful story can be told from one day to the next. But to single out one murder during a battle where there is one person killed every minute would make little sense – one will typically only record the battle as such [...] Correspondingly, the event that takes place over a longer time-span will go unrecorded unless it reaches some kind of dramatic climax (the building of a dam goes unnoticed but not its inauguration) (Galtung & Ruge 1965: 66).

Thus, communicative features and technological requirements of the media have significance for what is covered and for how it is done. The proposition, as formulated in the introduction, is that when we witness international political events on television – in the form of war, threats of terrorism, or political meetings – it is not simply international politics we are witnessing. Part of the experience is that of the medium's own communicative qualities – in relation to both the selection and the mediation of information items about the world we are living in.

## ***2.2. Communitarian selectors***

In addition to communicative selectors – news media selectors linked to general features of the media themselves – there is another important factor mediating international news material. This is a type of selector not bound to information technology or to the formal or formative demands of news communication, but which has to do with the social, political and cultural context in which the news media are embedded. Here we are speaking of social structures (social rules and norms) to a greater degree than structures defined by technological relations or the media's demands regarding form-related demands of information communication.

This type of news media selectors I call *communitarian selectors*. The concept identifies characteristics of the way the news media choose, prioritize and slant international news events linked to the collective self-understanding and the dominant

national identity of the media's main general public. This proposition – that international news information is interpreted and presented according to a particular national framework – is not particularly controversial. Among communications theorists the process of interpreting international events and issues within a national framework is often referred to as the 'domestication' of international news production (Thompson 1995, Clausen 2004: 27–28, Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2001: 18–19). The notion of domestication was established within the academic trade by Curran & Gurevitch (1991:206) and defined as follows:

Media maintain both global and culturally specific orientations – such as by casting far-away events in frameworks that render these events comprehensible, appealing and relevant to domestic audiences; and, second, by constructing the meanings of these events in ways that are compatible with the culture and the dominant ideology of societies they serve.

Perhaps the clearest historical account of communitarian selectors in the news media's processing of international news and its political role is given by Benedict Anderson (1991) in his work on 'imagined communities' and their sense of nationality. Writing not on globalization of news flow or international affairs, but rather on 19th-century Latin American nationalism, Anderson (1991) proposed that the press played a crucial role for the construction of separate nationalities among historically, idiomatically and culturally indistinguishable geographical areas like Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela. He argues: 'the very conception of newspapers implies the refraction of even 'world events' into a specific imagined world of vernacular readers [...]' (Anderson 1991: 62–63). In a global setting then, the existence of communitarian selectors suggests a particular process of counter-globalization, whereby the daily flow of massive coverage of international events is not only prioritized and highlighted, but also framed according to national outlooks and storylines constituting the world not as one, but as an anarchical cognitive society of separate nation-states.

However, the existence of 'communitarian selectors' not only suggests that the news media employ national references, values, interests and outlooks when communicating international news items: it also suggests that the news media, to some



extent, act as preservers of national identity, automatically defending and protecting a certain political culture. This makes them a substantial contributor to protecting established understandings and interpretations of national interests, foreign policy strategies and self-understanding of the foreign policy-making elite. Within a more conceptual approach, we are speaking here about political processes that have to do with the *doxa* of foreign policy. The concept ‘doxa’ is taken from the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1990: 26, 110) and refers to social and political ideas and presentations that are taken for granted, and cannot be subjected to critical investigation.

One of the Appendices accompanying this thesis presents empirical documentation of how *doxa* is reflected in the Norwegian media’s coverage of international affairs. (See Appendix: ‘The existence of communitarian news media selectors in Norwegian foreign policy’.) The general point here, however, is that although the international news focus and the framing of the news may be largely homogeneous, according to the notion of communicative selectors, the normative interpretations are to high degree defined by the national values and outlooks that characterize the majority of the national audience. This is a type of news media selectors not linked to information technology or to the formative demands of news communication, but which has to do with the social, political and cultural codes and the context in which the national news media infrastructure is embedded.

But does this not contradict the suggested universal existence of communicative news selectors? If the news media cover international affairs according to a national outlook, that would seem to leave limited room for the basic assumption central to this thesis: that media coverage of international affairs is systematically defined by a uniform communicative logic. In fact, this is not automatically the case. The notion of what I have called ‘communitarian selectors’, and as this has been documented by Curran & Gurevitch (1991) and other communication theorists, does not necessarily affect the focus or the news coverage. What the communitarian selectors do, are to contextualize the news items within a national universe. The media cast their coverage of far-away events and international issues in ways that are appealing and relevant to their national audience, making reference directly to the national society of the core audience.

But the news focus (= the selection of events) and the framing of the news (= the highlighting of certain facets of events)<sup>111</sup> may still be largely homogeneous across different national societies. Hence, the communitarian selectors need not contradict the basic technologically and formatively driven structures of international news coverage associated with the description of the news media as a universal system for selection of information and mass communication.

### 3. Conclusion

So far the argument has been that the media's selection and prioritizing of news can be understood not only from general principles about what is topical and relevant, but also, and to a crucial degree, in terms of structural features of the news media<sup>112</sup>. The news media can be regarded as a system for the methodical selection of information. Every selection, prioritizing and further refining of information and events via the news media bears with it significant traces of the information medium through which it is filtered, or what I have defined as *communicative selectors*.

This must be made more concrete. Up to this point, I have basically indicated two kinds or types of news media selectors that can be crucial for the processing of news items – one linked to communicative characteristics and the other to national context of the news media. But what kind of factors are they? And are these communicative selectors more than mere theoretical concepts? Do they exist in the news media's coverage of the real world?

These questions cannot be answered *a priori*. No certain empirical information may be inferred from generic models or suggestions of this kind. The only way to

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<sup>111</sup> This definition of 'framing' is based on Robert Entman (2004: 5). He defines framing as 'selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation and/or solution.'

<sup>112</sup> Luhmann (2000: 36) formulates the point, rather mechanically, in the following manner: 'The mass media do not follow the code true/untrue, but rather the code information/non-information, even in their cognitive area of programming. This is apparent in that untruth is not used as a reflexive value. It is not important for news and in-depth reporting [...] that untruth can be ruled out. Unlike in science, information is not reflected in such a way that, before truth is asserted, it must be established truthfully that untruth can be ruled out.'

substantiate and develop the theoretical assumption that news coverage is structured by certain news media selectors that in turn are reflected in the focus, interests and outlooks of foreign policy decision-makers, is to identify these structural properties empirically. As we have noted, the academic literature can offer a long series of proposals for what kinds of indicators are crucial for determining which aspects of political and social life are considered information items with news value and which therefore lend themselves to broad news coverage. For example, Bell's list consisted of 22 different indicators or selectors – so many that there is hardly a single event or field of issues that does not fulfil one or several of the selector criteria. Malcolm Peltu (1985: 137) has proposed a linked list of eleven indicators that determine the news value of an issue or event. Similarly, Niklas Luhmann (2000: 27–34) has developed a typology of nine different indicators that he claims are typical in all kinds of news reports.

Table 6.1: Typical indicators defining *News value*

Peltu	Luhmann
(1) Immediacy	(1) Surprise
(2) Drama and conflict	(2) Conflicts
(3) Negativity because bad news usually has both drama and conflict	(3) Quantities
(4) Human interest	(4) Local Relevance
(5) Photographability	(5) Norm violation
(6) Simple storyline	(6) Moral judgement
(7) Topicality (current news)	(7) Simplicity/non-complex
(8) Media cannibalism	(8) Topicality/single events
(9) Exclusivity	(9) Expression of opinion disseminated as news
(10) Status of the source of information	
(11) Local interest	

These are two lists of indicators that should clarify how the media are pulled in the direction of certain issues and happenings, and how they ignore others. But like those

of Bell, both Peltu's and Luhmann's listings are rather long and fairly general. There are few imaginable issues or occurrences in international politics that would not satisfy the criteria of at least one, or presumably several, of their named categories. And the lists are also somewhat contradictory in the sense that only five of the indicators listed by Peltu are on Luhmann's list. In addition, the lists devised by Luhmann and Peltu concern all possible forms of news, domestic news in particular.

This necessitates at least two adjustments to the selectors defining news value typically found in the research literature. First of all, we need to reduce the number of indicators, making the overview simpler and, hopefully, more universal. Second, we should make the empirical indicators more directly relevant to news of foreign affairs or international relations. This is the task of the following chapters. Instead of undertaking a more or less arbitrary and unqualified choice based on a long series of previous studies with a range of different focuses, we shall seek to identify a possible universalized communicative logic in the mass communication of international news transmission through empirical studies, and examine the possible adaptation of this communicative logic on to the field of foreign policy. Hence, the aim is to ascertain the plausibility of the general argument: to consider the existence of a limited number of universal communicative selectors that structure the global news horizon and leave their imprint on the actual conduct of foreign policy because of the tendency, on the part of the foreign policy elite, of a re-orientation towards reality as observed through the news media.

## **Part Three**

### **Empirical Probes**

## Introduction to Part Three

So far the discussion has been primarily theoretical. The aim has been to suggest a theoretical model that may bridge the (identified) incongruence between the way scholars and the political actors tend to view the effect of the news media in foreign affairs, directly inspired by the political actors' own self-understanding of the role of the media. But does the theoretical argument make empirical sense? The third part of the thesis examines the plausibility of the general argument. However, my ambition here is limited as it is specific. As mentioned in the 'Preface', the task is to conduct a *plausibility probe* of the general theoretical argument using a number of detailed case studies (Eckstein 1975). There is no claim, therefore, to be exhaustive or conclusive. Rather, a plausibility probe is a method used to further develop a theoretical proposition and warrant its statement in a more precise form, and to determine whether or not a more rigorous study of this proposition may be fruitful. Chapter VII focuses on the existence of structural elements of international news transmission, what I have called communicative selectors in the previous section. Chapter VIII analyses the possible political adaptation of these communicative selectors, tracing historical changes in the official Norwegian foreign policy debate within the legislative body of the government. The findings of these two chapters demonstrate that the basic intuition that underlies the theoretical argument developed in the previous chapters, is plausible.

## The Communicative Logic of International Politics

To what extent is our experience of international politics via the news media an experience of uniform communicative logic of the medium itself? As we have just discussed, there exist various different suggestions of typical indicators which will help us to determine which aspects of international political life lend themselves to broad news coverage (see Berger 2000: 13–14, King et al. 1994, Ottosen 1993: 45).<sup>113</sup> In the following pages we shall keep these indicators in mind while taking a fresh look at the news coverage of international politics from an empirical point of view.

Through four limited case studies of the news coverage of the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the worldwide coverage of international politics during the autumn and winter of 2004/2005, the aim is to identify the structural elements of global news transmission (or news media selectors). The case studies are based on the following issues and events: *First*, the television coverage by BBC World and CNN International of ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ in Afghanistan between 8 and 15 October 2001.<sup>114</sup> *Second*, the coverage of the same event by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK). *Third*, the news coverage of the first elections in Iraq after the US-led invasion of

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<sup>113</sup> Teun A. van Dijk (1988), for instance, has developed a framework for analysing the discourse structure of news stories. For van Dijk, as with many other critical discourse analysts (Bell 1991: 161–74, Allan 1998: 107–16, Fairclough 1995), news stories consist of a certain semantic structure, and are viewed as discourse-bearing institutions that can be disentangled and clarified either through semiotic, rhetorical or ideological textual analysis. For an overview of approaches to media discourse, see Bell & Garrett (1998). For a general introduction to qualitative and quantitative approaches, see Arthur Asa Berger’s (2000) *Media and Communication Research Methods*. On linguistics and the language of the news media, see Allan Bell (1991).

<sup>114</sup> NRK coverage is based on ‘Dagsrevyen’ [‘The Day in Review’]. The data from BBC World and CNN International are based on daily 30-minute recordings of the networks’ continuous news coverage between the hours of 19:00 and 19:30 and 20:00 and 20:30.

the country (30 January 2005), in eight major national newspapers around the world.<sup>115</sup> The analysis is additionally based on recordings of the continuous election coverage by BBC World and CNN International, and NRK's coverage. And *finally*, the foreign policy news section in 21 of the world largest national newspapers worldwide (including internet editions), carried out on 20 randomly selected days between 6 October 2004 and 31 January 2005.<sup>116</sup>

These four cases are used to discuss, in total, four interrelated questions.

- (1) Comparing CNN and BBC World's coverage of 'Operation Enduring Freedom' I ask: Are there systematic similarities or variations between different global TV news carriers covering the same international event?
- (2) In a second case I compare the news coverage of these two global news networks with NRK's coverage of the same events. What are the similarities or variations in international news coverage between national and global news carriers?
- (3) The third case, the elections in Iraq, is used for a different analytical purpose. The aim is to compare news coverage of similar events by two different news outlets – TV and newspapers. Is there significant and systematic variation in how different types of news outlets (TV/newspapers) cover similar events?

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<sup>115</sup> *The New York Times* (USA), *El Universal* (Mexico), *The Globe and Mail* (Canada), *The Mail & Guardian* (South Africa), *The South China Morning Post* (China/Hong Kong), *The Hindustan Times* (India), *Aftenposten* (Norway), and *The Financial Times* (UK).

<sup>116</sup> Newspapers were selected on the basis of four criteria: geographic variation, national circulation, language [available in English editions for papers in other languages than Norwegian, Swedish, German, French, English, Spanish and Italian]. The data are based on the PDF version of printed edition with the exception of the *China Daily*. The following newspapers were selected: USA: *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*; Canada: *The Globe and Mail*; Mexico: *El Universal*; Colombia: *La Republica*; France: *Le Monde*; Sweden: *Dagens Nyheter*; Germany: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*; UK: *The Daily Telegraph*; International/USA: *International Herald-Tribune*; Italy: *Corriere de la Serra*; Iran: *Iran Daily*; Israel: *Haaretz*; South Africa: *The Mail & Guardian*; India: *The Hindustan Times*; China/Hong Kong: *The South China Morning Post*; China: *The China Daily*; Australia: *The Sydney Morning Herald*; Argentina: *La Nacion*; and Norway: *Aftenposten*. Apart from *The China Daily*, these are all available in PDF format, which offers facsimile reproduction of the actual newspapers.



(4) Finally, analysing the proposition that the international news coverage is structured by a rather uniform communicative logic that defines the representation of international politics independent, we also have to consider a fourth question: To what extent is today's international news focus both globalized and homogeneous, and thus independent of geography, culture or foreign political differences? To offer a preliminary answer, I wind up the empirical discussion with a comparison of the worldwide news horizon on 20 randomly chosen days in newspapers all around the world.

To answer these questions I conduct two different types of comparisons of the empirical data. First, a *vertical comparison* of news coverage, where I try systematically to uncover common features of and variations in media coverage by comparing different news purveyors' coverage of identical events (comparison 'cross cases') (Pennings, Keman & Kliennijenhuis 2006: 40). Thus, I keep constant the object (the news event), but vary the subjects (the news carriers), and look for systematic similarities or variations. Second, I carry out a *horizontal comparison*, comparing the coverage by particular news media of different events looking for differences and likenesses. Here I hold the subject (the news carrier) constant while the object (the event) will vary (comparison 'across time') (Pennings, Keman & Kliennijenhuis 2006: 39–42).

In addition to investigating patterns of media treatment of international news events I also compare different types of news format, with two units of analysis: newsprint and television coverage. Further, to determine the national variation in coverage of international events, I need to include units of analysis, and compare news outlets that are explicitly oriented towards an international audience.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> The international news sources included in the study are *CNN International* and *BBC World*. The national source is Norway's NRK. Major national newspapers from eight countries have also been included: Mexico, the USA, the United Kingdom, Norway, India, China (Hong Kong), Canada and South Africa. The analysis of global news events includes a total of 22 newspapers worldwide.

## 1. How do global TV news carriers cover similar events?

This first analysis is based upon coverage of the first week of the US bombing of Afghanistan ('Operation Enduring Freedom') between 9 and 14 October 2001 on two television channels, CNN International and BBC World. The data set is based on three hours' recording of the evening news broadcasts of both new networks, six days from the second day of the operation. The comparison is based on monitoring of the headlines and the main news focus and news frame throughout the evening broadcast.

There are four main reasons for choosing CNN and BBC and their coverage of 'Operation Enduring Freedom'. The first is that CNN and BBC are the main global suppliers of news whose primary audience is not nationally based but international; second, that both have their headquarters and main funding in the countries of the two most important invading parties (USA and UK) during the conflict, which opens up for comparing similar cases; and third, the war in Afghanistan during the autumn of 2001 was a type of dominant news event where one would expect broad coverage from both BBC and CNN, making comparison possible.

In Table 7.1 I compare the two channels' *news focus* (the selection of events) and *news frames* (the highlighting of certain facets of events) between 8 and 14 October.<sup>118</sup> The news focus on BBC and CNN is strikingly similar throughout this period. The organization and prioritization of the daily news agenda are almost identical. The top story (new focus) is also identical on all six days. The same similarity between channels was also found in relation to the news frames. The only exception was on 'Day 3', when CNN angled its coverage toward television pictures that the Taliban regime in Kabul maintained were a record of civilian losses as a result of US bombing, while BBC's main news item was that the Pentagon had released to public television some pictures of air attacks carried out the night before. In all other respects the two channels paralleled one another, as regards both which individual events were selected and the highlighting of facets of these events.

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<sup>118</sup> This definition of 'news frame' is based on Robert Entman (2000, 2004). See Chapter II for a presentation of Entman's main argument. See Chapter VI for further definitions. *Framing of the news* means: the highlighting of certain facets of events on which the media focus. *News focus* means media's transfer of focus from issue to issue: for example, from one humanitarian catastrophe to the next.

**Table 7.1: Main focus and frames (CNN, BBC 8–14 October 2001)**

	CNN International	BBC World
Day 1	News Focus: Continued Bombing of Afghanistan News Frame: 'Bombs Rain Destruction in Afghanistan'	News Focus: Continued Bombing of Afghanistan News Frame: 'A Third Night of US-led Attacks...'
Day 2	News Focus: Continued Bombing of Afghanistan News Frame: 'US War Planes Take to the Sky'	News Focus: Continued Bombing of Afghanistan News Frame: 'US, Another Round of Air Attacks'
Day 3	News Focus: Continued Bombing of Afghanistan News Frame: 'Taliban Claim Scores of Civilian Killed'	News Focus : Continued Bombing of Afghanistan News Frame: 'Pentagon Reveals Pictures of Attacks'
Day 4	New Focus: Terrorism in the US News Frame: 'Anthrax at the NBC'	News Focus: Terrorism in the US News Frame: 'Anthrax at the NBC'
Day 5	News Focus: Continued Bombing of Afghanistan News Frame: 'A US Bomb Strikes the Wrong Target'	News Focus: Continued Bombing of Afghanistan News Frame: 'US Bomb Hit Civilian Area'
Day 6	News Focus: Afghanistan News Frame: 'Bush Has Rejected Latest Offer from Taliban'	News Focus: Afghanistan News Frame: 'Bush Rejects Taliban Offer'

To some extent, these similarities between BBC and CNN can be explained by the specific working conditions the media faced during the early weeks of 'Operation Enduring Freedom'. Apart from Reuters and Al Jazeera, there were no international television media present in Kabul, Kandahar or other cities attacked by the USA during the early days of the war. The availability of pictures was therefore extremely circumscribed, and the possibility of varying coverage was correspondingly limited. However, the similarity between CNN and BBC is not only related to the coverage of the conduct of the war in Afghanistan. Table 7.2 shows the larger news agenda and news frames for the channels' three major issues over the same six days. Priority, focus and framing are not merely similar: they are almost identical.

**Table 7.2: Daily news agenda (CNN, BBC 8–14 October 2001)**

	CNN International	BBC World
Day 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continued Bombing of Afghanistan</li> <li>2. Demonstrations in Pakistan – ‘Angry Crowd’</li> <li>3. Anthrax – ‘Two Mysterious Cases’</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continued Bombing of Afghanistan</li> <li>2. Demonstrations in Pakistan – Anti-American Demonstration in Muslim Countries’</li> <li>3. Afghanistan – ‘Northern Alliance’</li> </ol>
Day 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continued Bombing of Afghanistan</li> <li>2. Demonstrations in Pakistan – ‘Anti-American’</li> <li>3. Most Wanted Terrorists – ‘The US steps up the Hunt’</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continued Bombing of Afghanistan</li> <li>2. Political Meeting – ‘Islamic Ministers Worried’</li> <li>3. Most Wanted Terrorists – ‘Bush Reveals a List of 22 Most Wanted’</li> </ol>
Day 3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continued Bombing of Afghanistan</li> <li>2. Blair in Cairo – ‘Reinforce Anti-terrorist Coalition’</li> <li>3. One month after 9/11 – ‘Remembering the Victims’</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continued Bombing of Afghanistan</li> <li>2. Blair in Cairo – ‘The PM says the Ground Troops are Ready’</li> <li>3. One month on – ‘Bush Leads America in a Day of Remembrance’</li> </ol>
Day 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Terrorism in the US/Anthrax</li> <li>2. Afghanistan – ‘Muslim Holiday/Fewer US Attacks’</li> <li>3. Protests – ‘Anti-American Demonstrations’</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Terrorism in the US/Anthrax</li> <li>2. Afghanistan – ‘The US Show Pictures of Attacks’</li> <li>3. Protests – ‘Violent Protests in the Muslim World’</li> </ol>
Day 5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. US Bomb Hits Civilians in Afghanistan</li> <li>2. Peace Demonstrations in Europe – ‘In London’</li> <li>3. Terrorism in the US/Anthrax – ‘NBC and Other Cases’</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. US Bomb Hits Civilian in Afghanistan</li> <li>2. Terrorism in the US – ‘Anthrax in Letter’</li> <li>3. Peace Demonstrations in London – ‘Against the War’</li> </ol>
Day 6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Afghanistan – ‘US Rejects Offer from the Taliban’</li> <li>2. Continued Bombing of Afghanistan – ‘Attacks Near Kabul’</li> <li>3. Demonstrations in Pakistan – ‘Up roar – One Killed’</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Afghanistan – ‘US Rejects Offer from the Taliban’</li> <li>2. Continued Bombing of Afghanistan – ‘Air-raids Begin Near Kabul’</li> <li>3. Terrorism in the US – ‘Anthrax – Three More Positive’</li> </ol>

Both CNN and BBC placed their daily news coverage of the warfare in Afghanistan within the framework of a ‘macro-narrative’, by which I mean the main heading which frames the whole coverage of the war in Afghanistan and other places. In relation to Afghanistan, the macro-narratives were used as visual background, projected behind the news anchor in the studio, as headlines at the beginning of the broadcast, and as headlines over the names of those being interviewed, etc. At CNN the macro-narrative was ‘Strike Against Terror’. For its part, BBC made use of two macro-narratives. One was ‘War on Terrorism’ and the other, ‘Strike on Afghanistan’. BBC used these in

relation to one another, and often in such a way that ‘Strike on Afghanistan’ appeared as a subheading under ‘War on Terrorism’.

What about the visual expression? In its coverage of the assault on Afghanistan, BBC used a permanent visual template. This template was the same colour as the signature colour of the television channel itself, light red, and it contained a subdued background picture of the remaining ruins of the World Trade Center after the terror attacks of 11 September. Also CNN made use of permanent visual vignettes. Its main vignette was composed of a series of dramatic pictures in black and white accompanied by background music. With this series of pictures CNN showed the 11 September 2001 damage in New York, the face of President Bush, an image of a population suggesting Muslim masses, and US military planes taking off from an aircraft carrier.

These templates conveyed an explicit political message. On the one hand they confirmed the major political reason for the war by juxtaposing the events of 9/11 and the subsequent attack on Afghanistan. By thus associating the two events by these highly charged pictures of the consequences of the terrorist activity in the USA and the USA’s use of military power as a reaction to terror, CNN and BBC presented the two events as part of the same story. In other words, both BBC and CNN vouched for the established political basis for the war – not directly as an expression of the channel’s editorial line, but through their communicative practice and the desire to create dramatic and hypnotic television coverage of international events. As we saw in Chapter V in relation to the discussion of President Clinton’s 1998 decision to launch attacks on Sudan and Afghanistan in response to terror actions against the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, such confirmations of political assertions about correlations and causal relations, achieved by mixing together pictures from different events, are symptomatic of war coverage by both BBC and CNN.

Also, when it comes to much of the daily use of visual material, the coverage of Afghanistan by both BBC and CNN is almost symmetrical. In the course of the six days studied, more than three-quarters of the photo material used in the first five minutes of the broadcasts on Afghanistan were based on four sources:

- i) Al-Jazeera and Taliban photos of the aerial bombardment of Kabul and the destroyed targets in various places in Afghanistan

- ii) Interviews with news correspondents in Islamabad<sup>119</sup>
- iii) Pictures from press conferences and political statements made in Washington
- iv) Archive pictures or new shots of US military hardware: aircraft carriers, airplanes and missiles taking off, fighter planes and bombers in the air.

In this way the first five days of the war were in practice covered from four identical observation posts: Al-Jazeera camera in Kabul, BBC and CNN's correspondents in Islamabad, pictures from US aircraft carriers, and meeting rooms where press conferences were held in Washington.<sup>120</sup>

This in itself is not surprising, as access to visual material was limited.<sup>121</sup> What is interesting, however, is the close connection between the availability of pictures, on one hand, and on the other hand, the news focus and news frame that dominated coverage of Afghanistan. The existence of pictures seems significantly to have defined the coverage, and also the priority given to the news from Afghanistan. With the exception of 14 October, both the frame and focus of news in all major CNN and BBC broadcasts were linked directly to visual sources and visual materials (see Table 7.1). As to the three most important news issues during those six days, 75% of these were linked to one of the four places where CNN and BBC were already located with their television cameras (see Table 7.2).

From this perspective it appears that the media coverage of the war was defined by factors that were not related to the war itself, but were the result of conditions at the time. Therefore we cannot necessarily say that coverage was guided by actual events or by what was essential. It seems that, to a striking degree, the availability of visual material was crucial not only in determining which events were selected as major news

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<sup>119</sup> BBC's correspondent was Lyse Dytet and CNN's, Christiana Amapour.

<sup>120</sup> Several news media also had stationed their correspondents and film teams in northern Afghanistan and/or in Tadzhikistan. CNN and BBC also followed suit. Gradually as the Northern Alliance began to move toward Kabul these journalists were increasingly central to the coverage. At the beginning they were less prominent but did dispatch reports and stand-up interviews.

<sup>121</sup> This was underlined not only by the fact that both CNN and BBC made use of the same television pictures from Al Jazeera, but also that both television channels, on several occasions between 10 and 14 October, even used television footage filmed by the Taliban regime. Moreover, on 11 October CNN used Al Jazeera's Kabul correspondent as eye-witness and commentator.

items, but also for the specific angle from which those events were approached and interpreted. The importance of visibility or photographability also enters the equation, since on several occasions it was the visual material itself and not the event that was the main news item: for example, on 12 October when BBC's second news item was 'The US Shows Pictures of Attacks'.<sup>122</sup>

Two features stand out in relation to the coverage of 'Operation Enduring Freedom' by BBC and CNN in the period 9–14 October. The first, as noted, was the importance of pictures and visuals. The other was the importance of 'drama and change'. None of three top issues during those six days transcended a short-term time horizon to any significant degree. There was nothing that had to do with extended social, economic or political processes, no thorough background story leading up to the events – nothing on the long-term consequences associated with the argument for using military power, the struggle against terrorism, nor, in fact, any connection with the events of 9/11. This also held true for the channels' use of commentaries and analyses, whether as interviews with correspondents or external professionals included in the broadcasts. All these interviews were slanted toward the descriptive and the short-term.<sup>123</sup>

Thus, the 1965 hypothesis of Galtung and Ruge – that 'the more similar the frequency of events is to the frequency of the news media, the more probable that it will be recorded as news by that news medium' – seems clearly relevant as well for the news coverage of the war in Afghanistan. Only situations that change from day to day were given significant attention, and considerable weight was placed on the dramatic and theatrical: dangers, threats, surprise and risks. It is symptomatic that the only day when developments in Afghanistan were not the top news items on either BBC or CNN was

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<sup>122</sup> On 11 October both CNN and BBC devoted time to covering the news that Al Jazeera had for the first time shown pictures of US daytime attacks. Also on the same day, in an extended news coverage, CNN's Jim Clancy hosted a longer debate about whether television channels and networks 'should broadcast visual messages and statements from Al Qaeda' in relation to the fact that Al Qaeda in Afghanistan had at that moment released a recorded statement.

<sup>123</sup> Both BBC and CNN conducted several interviews with experts on the Taliban and the situation in Pakistan, from their temporary outdoor studios in Islamabad. The Pakistani general, Lt. Gen. Talat Masood, was, for instance, interviewed by Lyse Ducet (BBC, 12 Oct.), on whether the Pakistani security forces could manage to control the protests in Pakistan. Similarly, CNN's John Vause (10 Oct.) interviewed the Pakistani political analyst Rifaat Hussain about developments in Afghanistan, more specifically the immanent consequences of the US-led bombing campaign on the Taliban control over Afghan territory.

Friday, 12 October – the first time in five days that the USA had not escalated its bombing but had reduced the number of attacks.<sup>124</sup>

## **2. Is there significant variation between national and global news carriers?**

Let us now turn from the international news broadcasts for a moment and instead observe news coverage of the conduct of the war in Afghanistan from a national standpoint. I make this shift in light of what I have called ‘communitarian selectors’: namely, that although the ‘news focus’ (= the selection of events) and the ‘framing of the news’ (= the highlighting of certain facets of events)<sup>125</sup> are largely homogeneous, the normative and moral interpretation may be defined by the national values and outlooks held by the national audience. Here I have examined the coverage of ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK)<sup>126</sup> and have compared this with parallel coverage by BBC and CNN.<sup>127</sup>

Like CNN and BBC, NRK used a macro-narrative in its coverage of the US attacks on Afghanistan. During the three first days after war broke out on the evening of 7 October, there appeared the macro-narrative ‘Struggle Against Terror’ – coverage almost identical to that of CNN and BBC. Thereafter the macro-narrative was changed to the more descriptive and neutral ‘War in Afghanistan’. The vignette used by NRK was also more neutral than those of CNN and BBC. It consisted of a map of Afghanistan and an image of a fighter plane, and indicated no association with the events of 9/11 or the World Trade Center.

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<sup>124</sup> Correspondingly symptomatic is the fact that on 12 October, in relation to issue number five, BBC used the headline ‘THE FOOD CRISIS’ in capital letters covering half the television screen. This occurred even though food security in Afghanistan had not been mentioned as a news item the day before, nor was it repeated again in the days that followed.

<sup>125</sup> This definition of ‘framing’ is based on Robert Entman (2004: 5). He defines framing as ‘selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation and/or solution.’

<sup>126</sup> This analysis is based on NRK’s major daily news broadcast ‘Dagsrevyen’ [‘The Day in Review’] which has a viewing audience of about one million (or slightly less than one-fourth of the total population of Norway).

<sup>127</sup> The comparison is based on NRK’s main news broadcast at 18:00 GMT.. In the analysis I have put to one side NRK’s coverage of purely national material during this period.



As to the use of pictures, the situation was again almost identical with the picture material that made up the visual component of the war coverage by CNN and BBC.

Coverage was dominated by three visual sources and observation points:

- pictures of fighter planes taking off from an aircraft carrier
- pictures taken by Al-Jazeera and of the Taliban, of US attacks and damage on the ground in Kabul
- pictures from Washington, from major press conferences and political statements from the Pentagon and the White House.

All pictures that NRK carried of the conduct of the war itself were the same as those used by CNN and BBC.<sup>128</sup> On NRK as well, visuals played a conspicuous role. There were occasions when it was the pictures and not the events that were central to the newscast. This was the situation on 11 October, when the second major news item was Al Jazeera for the first time revealing pictures of US aircraft carrying out daytime assaults; on 12 October, when item number three was ‘pictures have not appeared from Afghanistan that show civilian victims’; and on 14 October, when the main item was the Taliban for the first time showing damaged towns in Afghanistan (see Table 7.3).

The only real difference in picture use between NRK and CNN and BBC involved the location of correspondents. CNN and BBC had their own sizeable editorial team located in Pakistan. Since much of the coverage of the war in Afghanistan was provided by these teams in Islamabad, the focus was therefore frequently directed toward the developments as affecting Pakistan itself. NRK also had a correspondent in Pakistan,<sup>129</sup> but with no direct satellite link. The riots and demonstrations in Pakistan were a prominent news issue for many days on both CNN and BBC; they received only limited coverage from NRK. The immediate consequences of the war in Afghanistan were covered by focusing on developments in Pakistan and the Middle East. Conversely, NRK

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<sup>128</sup> Every single day the news channels used identical Al Jazeera pictures of the night-time aerial bombing that were clipped in right from the beginning of the Afghanistan coverage. Other examples are: on 11 October all three channels gave significant emphasis to the same 10-second clip from Al Jazeera of American aircraft that for the first time were bombing during daylight hours. On 13 October there was a picture of an identical crater from a bombing impact, filmed by the Taliban themselves, and on the next day there was a common news issue that for the first time the Taliban had taken Western journalists to towns destroyed by aerial bombardment.

<sup>129</sup> NRK’s correspondent in Pakistan was Jørn Hole Larsen.

carried reports on the situation in Tadjikistan and Central Asia because NRK had one of its most experienced war correspondents stationed there.<sup>130</sup> Camera placement also seems to have directed which aspects of reality would be treated as news.

**Table 7.3: NRK's priority of news and frames (8–14 October 2001)**

	Priority of news	News frames
Day 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continued Bombing of Afghanistan</li> <li>2. Afghanistan – the UN and Kofi Annan</li> <li>3. Afghanistan – Tadjikistan</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 'Four Afghan UN workers Killed in Attacks'</li> <li>– 'Annan Says he will send a representative to Kabul'</li> <li>– 'Tadjikistan considers accepting US bases'</li> </ul>
Day 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continued Bombing of Afghanistan</li> <li>2 Afghanistan – consequences</li> <li>3. US – Most wanted terrorists</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– '76 Civilians Killed in US Attacks, New Bombs Tonight'</li> <li>– 'Famine in Northern Afghanistan and Tadjikistan'</li> <li>– 'US Reveals a List of 22 Suspected Terrorists'</li> </ul>
Day 3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Afghanistan – civilians killed</li> <li>2. Continued bombing of Afghanistan</li> <li>3. US – One month after 9/11</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 'Taliban Says 140 Killed during US Bombing'</li> <li>– 'The US Conduct Bombing Raids in Daylight'</li> <li>– 'Can Bombing Prevent Terrorism'</li> </ul>
Day 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nobel Peace Prize</li> <li>2. Afghanistan – The Northern–Alliance</li> <li>3. Continued bombing of Afghanistan</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 'Kofi Annan Gets the Peace Prize'</li> <li>– 'Uncertain When the Battle of Kabul Begins'</li> <li>– 'New Pictures from Afghanistan Reveal Civilian Casualties'</li> </ul>
Day 5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continued bombing of Afghanistan</li> <li>2. Afghanistan – US drop food</li> <li>3. US –Anthrax</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 'US Bomb Hits Civilian in Afghanistan'</li> <li>– 'Desperate Fights over US Food in Refugee Camps'</li> <li>– 'US Vice President says bin Laden is Behind the Anthrax'</li> </ul>
Day 6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continued bombing of Afghanistan</li> <li>2. Afghanistan – refugees</li> <li>3. Demonstrations in Pakistan</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 'Taliban Show Western Journalist Destruction of Villages and Civilian Areas'</li> <li>– 'The UN Fears that Hundreds of Thousands Can Die'</li> <li>– 'Anti-US Protests and Demonstrations'</li> </ul>

As can be seen from Table 7.3 and comparisons with Table 7.2, the main focus of NRK's news broadcasts in the period between 8 and 14 October was identical to that of CNN and BBC. Not surprisingly, the focus was on the war in Afghanistan. Similar to BBC and CNN, images and visual sources seem to have been crucial for NRK's selection

<sup>130</sup> NRK veteran Hans Wilhelm Steinfeld covered the war in Afghanistan both from Tadjikistan and from inside northern Afghanistan.

of angle and priorities. Here too there was little emphasis on political processes or long-term development questions and comparisons, with priority going to dramatic individual events.<sup>131</sup> For example, CNN, BBC and NRK all applied a dramaturgy of escalation, emphasizing the steady escalation of war with more and more civilians killed and more goals being targeted. (See Table 7.2 and 7.3 above.)

On the other hand, there were also some differences between the CNN/BBC coverage and that of NRK. In the first place, NRK placed significantly more weight on humanitarian conditions, civilian suffering and the role of multilateral systems. While CNN and BBC together focused on humanitarian and civilian conditions only three times in the course of six days (see Table 7.1 and 7.2), nine of NRK's major items during this time period were devoted to humanitarian questions, and NRK's main news focus and news frame on five days in a row was on the humanitarian consequences of waging the war (see Table 7.3). In addition, NRK stressed the role of the international community, frequently focusing on the United Nations.

In the second place, both CNN and BBC placed great emphasis on the military campaign and the drama of waging war, in addition to the danger of instability in the Middle East as a consequence of the warfare. Whereas NRK's coverage was equally dramatic in the choice of material, use of language and headlines, the drama was not oriented toward the conduct of the war, but rather toward the humanitarian situation. Military strategic and tactical matters were touched upon only exceptionally.<sup>132</sup> In contrast, humanitarian issues were the top news item on four of the six days studied.

How can these differences be understood? The similarities between the three television news channels – photographability, event orientation, drama and change – seems to a significant degree to reflect definite structural communicative common features: 'communicative selectors'. The differences in coverage between CNN/BBC and NRK mainly have to do with choice of slant, and seem therefore to coincide with specific communitarian selectors. The coverage of international events and developments was to some extent interpreted and presented according to a particular national framework or

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<sup>131</sup> The exception was NRK's coverage of the day of remembrance three years and one month after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. On 11 October 2005, NRK framed the event by asking 'Can bombing prevent terrorism?' In this way it critically challenged the anti-terrorist policy of the USA.

<sup>132</sup> The only clear exception was Gunnar Myklebust reporting on 10. October 2001.

lens. Normative interpretation tended to reflect the dominant collective identity, specific national values or the particular national outlook of the core audience.

Consequently, NRK's coverage of the war in Afghanistan seems to support the importance of communitarian selectors – such as viewing Norway as a moving force in support of multilateral organizations and international cooperation, Norway as a humanitarian great power, and Norway as a small state and a peace-promoting nation – come to light very clearly in the NRK news coverage. This would seem to imply that while the main news event and the dominant news focus may be global and universal, the highlighting of individual sub-events and the overarching normative interpretation of the events are often domestic and communitarian. (For a further and substantial discussion of this see 'Background study', in Appendix 4.)

### **3. Is there significant variation between different types of news outlets?**

Let us now move from news coverage of dramatic episodes of war to some rather more peaceful events. The aim is twofold. First, to see how the similarities in TV news coverage found in relation to the war in Afghanistan compare with the coverage of a qualitatively different international event, namely the important and extensively covered first democratic elections in Iraq on 30 January 2005. Second, to compare television coverage (NRK, CNN and BBC)<sup>133</sup> with coverage of the same elections by five large newspapers. This should reveal any systematic variations between the way the TV and print media/press cover similar events.

The elections in Iraq were a media event of a completely different type from the bombing of Afghanistan. The event was announced beforehand, and even though the security situation was poor and working conditions were difficult, there were large numbers of international media people present in Iraq to cover the elections. Both CNN

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<sup>133</sup> This comparison is based on 120 minutes of recording taken from the continuing coverage of the Iraq elections on 31 January 2005, between 17:00 and 19:00 GMT by both CNN and BBC, and NRK's main news broadcast ('Dagsrevyen') between 18:00 and 18:30 GMT.

and BBC had their own editorial base in Baghdad with several dozen employees.<sup>134</sup> And a whole series of smaller television stations, among them Norway's NRK, had sent correspondents.<sup>135</sup> This should give the possibility for considerable variation with regard to news frames, focus and visual material. And we ask: to what degree did the coverage of the elections in Iraq deviate from the coverage of the warfare in Afghanistan?

**Table 7.4: Coverage of Iraq elections**

**CNN International**

Priority	News Focus	News Frame
Story 1	Iraq: Election turn-out	'Iraqis vote in the first democratic election in more than half a century'/ 'Hailed as a success – millions of Iraqis defy insurgents'
Story 2	Iraq – security	'Insurgents staged a dozen attack on Sunday'
Story 3	International reactions	'Bush calls the Iraqi election a 'resounding success''

**BBC World**

Priority	News Focus	News frame
Story 1	Iraq: Election turn-out	'Millions turn out in Iraq's first democratic election in half a century'
Story 2	Iraq – security	'Thirty people are killed, but the violence is not on the scale many had feared'
Story 3	US reactions	'President Bush says the election is a resounding success'

**NRK**

Priority	News Focus	News frame
Story 1	Iraq: Election turn-out	'Relatively high turn-out despite many suicide attacks'
Story	Iraq – Women's	'Thirty people are killed, but the violence is not on the scale many had feared'

<sup>134</sup> CNN's headquarters in Baghdad was located at the massively fortified Hotel Palestine, while BBC World rented a large villa in a street downtown in an area sealed off by security forces.

<sup>135</sup> NRK had one correspondent in Iraq at the time, Odd Karsten Tveit, who was stationed at a hotel inside the fortified area around the Hotel Palestine in Baghdad.

2	rights	
Story	Reactions	'The Kurds in Norway follow/celebrate the election'
3		

The content of the news coverage on CNN, BBC and NRK was almost close enough to be identical. The focus was the same for all, the framing was nearly the same, and even the priority of the news agenda was almost identical. These similarities also applied to the various channels' macro-narratives. Each of the three channels stressed that the election went better than expected and that it was a success. Both CNN and BBC introduced their coverage with reference to the historic nature of the election, respectively using the terms 'historic election' and 'historic day'. The readymade vignettes that CNN and BBC used in their continuous coverage stressed the same point. The CNN vignette was shaped like a photo album with historical photos of the Iraqi people. The BBC had the Iraqi flag blowing in the wind and alluded to freedom and historical change. These vignettes supported the American political pronouncements and expectations. Interestingly, these vignettes were in place already when the polls opened for voting, before anyone could have known whether the election would prove a success.

When it came to the use of pictures, considerable variation between the different channels might have been expected. There were many cameras in place, and many satellite connections. In addition to the large TV networks, all the major news agencies were present with cameras (AP Television, Reuters TV, etc.). There was thus a great potential supply of visual photo material. And yet, the visual representations offered were strikingly homogeneous, and were broadcast again and again by CNN and BBC, and by NRK as well.<sup>136</sup> Many of the pictures, camera frames and shots used for these visuals were the same. The major reporting by CNN and BBC was almost completely identical. CNN's Christiana Amanpour and BBC foreign editor John Simpson both began their reports with pictures of journalists walking in Baghdad streets that were empty of traffic, and both were filmed outside the same polling stations in a Shia area of Baghdad. NRK's

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<sup>136</sup> Two main scenes dominated the coverage of all three channels: cheering people queued up outside the polling station, and security forces patrolling the streets and protecting the polling stations.

main report used the same footage.<sup>137</sup> None of these news broadcasts showed pictures of or conducted interviews in the Sunni Muslim areas, whose inhabitants participated very little in the elections. Neither were there reports from areas in and around Baghdad or from the ‘Sunni Triangle’ west and north of the capital.<sup>138</sup> The ‘high turn-out’ was the main angle on CNN, BBC and NRK (Table 7.4). In reality, as much as 42% of those eligible to vote did not participate – especially in areas where the population was predominantly Sunni Arab.<sup>139</sup>

However, there is also an important difference between news coverage of the elections in Iraq and the conduct of the war in Afghanistan: coverage from Iraq was far more critical than the case of Afghanistan. This was expressed to a small degree in the actual journalistic coverage itself, but criticism was clearly voiced on both CNN and BBC in interviews with various commentators.<sup>140</sup> In interviews with external experts and internal commentators, significant weight was given to the view that the elections could hardly have any specific positive effect if the Sunni Arab portion of the population was not included in the political process. Thus, an interesting pattern emerges: the structural characteristics of the news coverage – the macro-narratives, the importance of dramatic images, and so on – seem largely to support and affirm the events in Iraq. Yet, these communicative selectors seem to contradict the editorial position of the media, and present a different view of the political reality in Iraq than that found in the more analytical portion of the coverage.

What about systematic variations between different types of news media (TV and newspaper) coverage of similar events? In Table 7.5 (underneath) compares the coverage of the election in Iraq by eight different major newspapers in North America, Europe, Africa and Asia, published the day after the actual election.

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<sup>137</sup> This report was made by NRK’s Eva Christine Hyge from the news-desk in Oslo.

<sup>138</sup> CNN had one correspondent stationed in Baquba, north of Baghdad. However, the journalist was inside the heavily guarded polling station and obtained contact only with the part of the minority of the electorate in that part of the country who did participate in the elections.

<sup>139</sup> Voter turn-out ranged from 89% in the Kurdish region of Dahuk, to 2% in the Sunni region of Anbar. These figures are based on the Iraqi Electoral Commission’s official figures.

<sup>140</sup> CNN’s interviews with its own analyst Ken Pollack and with Cato Preble from the Cato Institute were both highly critical to the long-term consequences of the elections. BBC World was less critical, and did not include critical questions related to the long-term impact of the elections in Ben Brown’s (BBC correspondent in Basra) interview with Brigadier Paul Gibson, or in comments by Caroline Hawley (one of BBC’s correspondents in Baghdad).

**Table 7.5: The elections in Iraq in eight newspapers worldwide<sup>141</sup>**

Newspapers	Focus	Frame	Macro-narrative	Visual image
<i>New York Times</i> (USA)	High turn-out	'Iraqis defying threat – Flock to polls'	Historic/success	Mass of Shia flocking To polling station
<i>El Universal</i> (Mexico)	High turn-out	'Iraqis go to the polls despite violence'	Historic/Success	Queue of Shia women outside a polling station
<i>Globe and Mail</i> (Canada)	High turn-out	'Iraqis defy insurgents'	Success/uncertain Future	Queue of Shia women outside a polling station
<i>Mail &amp; Guardian</i> (South Africa)	High turn-out	'Iraqi voters defy the bombers'	Historic	No picture
<i>South China Morning Post</i> (China/HK)	High turn-out	'Millions of Iraqis vote, defying the insurgents'	Success	Queue of Shia women outside a polling station
<i>Hindustan Times</i> (India)	High turn-out	'Iraq votes despite terror strikes'	Success	Queue of Shia women outside a polling station
<i>Aftenposten</i> (Norway)	High turn-out	'Iraqis defy the fear'	Historic/Success	Shia woman at the polling station
<i>Financial Times</i> (UK)	High turn-out	'Iraqis defy attacks to go to polls	Historic/Success	Queue of Shia women outside a polling station

As one can see the difference between print news coverage (Table 7.5) and television news coverage (Table 7.4) is rather insignificant. The angle and focus of the newspapers correspond to the live coverage of CNN and BBC, and NRK's news coverage. In addition, we find striking similarities in the news coverage across the various newspapers. The headlines are almost identical and the pictures that adorn the front pages are the same.<sup>142</sup> A newspaper reader in India, South Africa or Norway would have been presented with approximately the same experience of events in Iraq, despite all other political, ideological or cultural differences between the countries and news editors.

<sup>141</sup> All the papers had the elections in Iraq as the main story and on the front page. This comparison is based on the newspapers' first-page coverage, heading, lead-in and picture.

<sup>142</sup> Five of the eight papers used exactly the same picture of veiled Shia women waiting to cast their ballot behind a barbed wire fence. The still photo came from Reuters.



This brings us to a new and much larger question: whether a global news focus does exist, and is both universal and homogeneous.

#### **4. Is there a global news horizon?**

The central argument that I took as my starting point – that the international rendering of international political reality is significantly structured by definite communicative factors (news media selectors) that are already in place and exist independently of whoever produces the news – has at least two implications for the understanding of the global news picture. The first implication is that there is a relatively homogeneous way of presenting news, independent of geography, culture, religion or political and ideological differences: a unified global news horizon. The second implication, following from the first, is that this news horizon is dominated by the same news events, and principally those news events that are visual, dramatic and so on, rather than more sedate, stable, persistent and non-visual changes, developments, issues or threats.

The content analysis above has indicated important similarities between different types of news media and media coverage across different international events. However, the analysis does not answer whether there exists a global news horizon characterized by definite consistent patterns over time. Therefore, in addition to content analysis undertaken above, there is also a need for a broader and more global time-series analysis of a central empirical proposition underlying the main argument of this thesis, namely that there exists a foreign news focus that is both globalized and homogeneous.

This is admittedly a large question that presupposes extensive analysis. Here I shall limit myself to a simple empirical problem. The goal is first to clarify which types of issues are most pronounced on the global scale; and second, to find out the total extent of the international coverage of these issues.

To this end I present material from an investigation, which I call a *news moment analysis*, carried out during the autumn of 2004 and the winter of 2005. Searching for systematic features of the news picture on the global level, I went through 21 newspapers

<sup>143</sup>from around the whole world, on 20 days chosen randomly within the period between 6 October 2004 and 31 January 2005.<sup>144</sup> On each of these days I identified the top three news items in the various newspapers and systematized these with a view to news focus, priority or news and news frame, in addition to the type of issues and the level of drama and visibility. When it comes to the main question here – which type of issue holds global dominance – I operate with the following categories of coverage: armed conflicts; political conflicts (elections, etc.); terrorism and weapons of mass destruction (WMD); poverty; international economy; natural catastrophes; global environmental issues; international legal issues and governance; and Africa. I have also systematized worldwide coverage according to the dramaturgical quality of the issues and events covered in the news.

Concerning factual news coverage, we see that the global news horizon is characterized by the following division between various issues and events shown in Tables 7.6 and 7.7)

**Table 7.6 and 7.7: The global news horizon**

**Table 7.6: What do we see of the world?**

Type of news

Armed conflicts	32%
Political conflicts	24%
Terrorism and WMD	14.5%
Poverty	2.5%
International economy	3.5%

<sup>143</sup> The following newspapers were selected: USA: *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*; Canada: *The Globe and Mail*; Mexico: *El Universal*; Colombia: *La Republica*; France: *Le Monde*; Sweden: *Dagens Nyheter*; Germany: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*; UK: *The Daily Telegraph*; International/USA: *International Herald-Tribune*; Italy: *Corriere de la Serra*; Iran: *Iran Daily*; Israel: *Haaretz*; South Africa: *The Mail & Guardian*; India: *The Hindustan Times*; China/Hong Kong: *The South China Morning Post*; China: *The China Daily*; Australia: *The Sydney Morning Herald*; Argentina: *La Nacion*; and Norway: *Aftenposten*. Apart from *The China Daily*, these are all available in PDF format, which offers facsimile reproduction of the actual newspapers.

<sup>144</sup> Data collection was conducted between 09:00 and 11:00 GMT on each of the days examined. The days were (2004): September 6, 13, 16, 20, 27; October 13, 24, 28; November 4, 10, 17, 26; December 1, 8, 17, 22; and (2005): January 4, 17, 27, 31.

Natural catastrophes	9,5%
Environmental issues	0.5%
International governance	2.5%
Other	11%

**Table 7.7: Importance of drama**

<u>Dramatic</u> (acute issues and events)	76.5%
<u>Un-dramatic</u> (long-term social, economic and political processes)	1.5%

To a marked degree this global news horizon is distinguished by dramatic issues or events, with a clear over-representation of conflict material and events. Some of this might be because the news scene during the autumn of 2004 and the spring of 2005 continued to be marked by the invasion of Iraq that had taken place in spring 2003; in addition, there were elections in the USA in November 2004. Therefore it is not possible to be unambiguously conclusive, but the tendency seems clear: events and issue-related questions that do not feature disruptions and looming climaxes are much less prominent than acute and concrete occurrences. For example, environmental questions linked to catastrophes are far more prominent than environmental questions having to do with global political developments. Furthermore, international questions are presented as linked to social and economic processes, and general development is seldom among the top three issues in the news picture.

But we can also turn the question around. Instead of asking what we see of the world through news coverage, we may ask *how* we see. In the material there is a tendency linked not to the types of issues that dominate the news agenda, but rather to the number of different news issues that at any time characterize the international agenda. In nine of

the twenty days covered in the investigation, more than eighteen of the selected newspapers had the same foreign affairs issue as their leading news item. Three of these news items had to do with Iraq, but the remaining issues were different.<sup>145</sup> During the other eleven days of the study there were very few identical issues. It seems that either there is a nearly identical global news focus, or no dominant focus at all.

I describe the sum of these tendencies as the ‘monomaniacal news flow’. As explained earlier, this means a common global news focus which to a significant degree is characterized by abrupt shifts from one dramatic, information-saturated, filmable and highly exposed event or issue, to the next one. This series of dominating and often dramatic and visual snapshots will frequently displace other news issues. What we experience is a perpetual stream of disparate individual occurrences: one starvation catastrophe in, one civil war out, one new war popping up and one disappearing, and so on and on. When there is no individual issue compelling or dramatic enough to dominate the international news agenda, interest in foreign affairs questions, measured according to the media coverage, is relatively slight. Thus we see that the autumn of 2005 was characterized by the following focuses and shifts (the percentages of newspapers worldwide that took up these issues as their main feature are in parentheses) (see Table 7.8)

**Table 7.8: Global News Focuses Autumn 2004**

6 September 2004	Terrorist attack in Beslan (80%)
13 September 2004	Terrorist attack in Iraq (84%)
27 September 2004	Hurricane Jane (70%)
28 October 2004	Arafat's health (95%)
4 November 2004	US elections (100%)
17 November 2004	New US Secretary of State (75%)
22 December	Terrorist attack in Mosul (80%)

<sup>145</sup> These are as follows: 6 Sept.: terrorism in Beslan; 13 Sept.: terrorist attack in Iraq; 27 Sept.: Hurricane Jane; 28 Oct.: Arafat's ill-health; 4 Nov.: US elections; 17 Nov.: new US Secretary of State; 22 Dec.: terrorist attack on Mosul; 4 Jan.: S.E. Asian tsunami; 31 Jan.: Iraq elections.

## 5. Conclusion

What does the empirical content of this chapter suggest?

I have sought to evaluate the relevance of a general argument about media representation of foreign policy. The argument was that much of the formative power of the media in international politics lies in the medium itself: in other words, that the news media's representation of international affairs is systematically formed by structural factors grounded in the medium's own technological and communicative features – features that are significantly analogous, independent of cultural factors and political or national leaning that may affect the news coverage of various news outlets. Our experience of international politics via the news media is thus also an experience of the medium itself. Empirically, this means that different occurrences stand out prominently as identical because reality is filtered through communicative selectors that remain persistent and relatively constant over time.

What can we now say about this theoretical argument? The first to be noted is that important general tendencies have emerged from the empirical analysis. And the most important tendencies are the following five:

Firstly, *an uniform media format*: The general assumption that in news coverage of international politics, the news flow and narrative are shaped according to a few general communicative selectors – which to a limited degree vary from one news editorial board to the next – seems to be strengthened. We have found significant similarities with regard to both the media coverage of analogous issues and events (*news focus*) and how these issues and events are covered (*news frames*).

Secondly, *high degree of photogenic and dramatic representation*: Images are crucial to news coverage, and the news media favour visual parts of international political reality. Dramatic events dominate the daily news agenda and marginalize other long-term events, episodes and processes (consider the priority and framing given in the daily news agenda). The news focus and the news frames used in the coverage of the war in Afghanistan were to a conspicuous degree defined by visual materials; moreover, in a different event (the elections in Iraq), even though the media had broad access to alternative pictures and news, coverage significantly resembled that of Afghanistan in its

homogeneity. Moreover, there seems to be a shared global news focus dominated by conflict material and dramatic individual happenings.

Thirdly, *the media ignore process and extended timespans, and stimulate short-term policies and dramatic actions/behaviour*: News media coverage of international politics focuses on events and short-term developments rather than on processes, long-term developments and relations between events. To the extent that cause-and-effect relationships are involved, these are short-term and dramatic. In the news coverage itself, the media seldom pose questions about causal relations and assertions, or long-term consequences and implications. News coverage has a short time horizon and emphasizes immediate consequences and rapid changes. Also, wherever there are explicit analytical contributions, these stress short-term and dramatic cause-and-effect relationships. Similarly, the communicative selectors of the news media are in a structural sense supportive and confirmative of dramatic, massive and visual state actions on the international scene. The emphasis on the dramatic and the visual, the rare occurrence of explicit assessments of cause-and-effect relationships, and the use of one dominant macro-narrative all imply a relatively uncritical coverage of dramatic instruments and state actions in international affairs, even though commentary and editorial materials themselves may be critical (as during the elections in Iraq).

Fourthly, *there is little variation between different types of news outlets*: We found no systematic variations between different types of news media (TV and newspaper) coverage of similar events. The focus, angle, macro-narrative and visual portrayal of the 2005 election in Iraq by the newspapers was almost identical with television coverage.

And finally, *even though news focus and news frames are largely structured by uniform communicative selectors, the moral view is national and not global*: The analysis seems to underscore the importance of 'communitarian selectors'. Although the news focus (= the selection of events) and the framing of the news (= the highlighting of certain facets of events,) are largely homogeneous, the moral interpretations offered are to high degree defined by the national values and outlooks of the national audience. The empirical discussion suggests that communitarian selectors shape the narrative and normative interpretation of news events according to traditional and dominant national values and international outlooks.

What are the reasons for these similarities across different cases and different news? The general answer that I have suggested, inspired by various communication theorists (Bell 1991, Peltu 1985, Luhmann 2000), is that the similarities stem from a globalized communicative logic inherent in the modern media themselves – or formative technological and narrative features that determine the selection and framing of international news items. However, there are also other alternative explanations. One way of interpreting the similarities could be that they are the expression of the social environment within which foreign correspondents and journalists operate. In the cases of the war in Afghanistan and in Iraq, the security restrictions made it almost impossible for journalists to work independently of each other. In Iraq, for instance, most of the journalists covering the war (and the election in 2005) were stationed together within the same security zone in downtown Baghdad.<sup>146</sup> They travelled together and were given access to many of the same sites and sources, often surrounded (and restricted) by their own or American security personal. Another relevant type of social factor may be the professional training and the standard professional codes shared by the journalists, and the parallel textbooks and education of journalists in Norway, the USA or elsewhere – professional codes, training and books that either are the same, or communicate many of the same professional paradigms and principles for war reporting.

Alternatively, the similarities can also be interpreted as an expression of certain power interests and a rather hegemonic system of global war journalism. In an ambitious and wide study of media coverage of the main Western military involvements since the end of the Cold War, Stig A. Nohrstedt & Rune Ottosen (2001, 2005, 2008) find important evidence of what they call ‘media ownership dominated by US interests’. And in a recent preliminary study of the ‘global war on terror’ they observe ‘[...] there are shared interests between the hegemonic trans-national elites represented in the Bush administration and in the international media, such as CNN, BBC World, and so on’ (Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2008: 8).

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<sup>146</sup> In Iraq groups of journalists were stationed either at the Palestine Hotel or at the former Sheraton Hotel. These are located together and are surrounded by high concrete walls protected by the US Army.

All these explanations are relevant in order to account for the similarities in the news coverage in the cases presented in this chapter. However, the alternative explanations do not exclude each other. To the contrary: the existence of standardized codes and social practices of war journalism within a global hegemonic system may be viewed as additional supporting background theories to explain the main findings of the empirical analyses above. They do not necessarily contradict the more general claim that the media's mass-communication of international politics is significantly (but not exclusively) structured by communicative selectors. Power, media ownership, and socialization of professional codes may be the important reasons for the existence of the uniform communicative logic inherent in the modern and global media infrastructure.

At the end of the last chapter we asked: To what extent is our experience of international politics via the news media an experience of uniform communicative logic of the medium itself? After the empirical exploration in this chapter we can now suggest a general answer to this question. The world we see through the lens of the television camera or from the front page of newspapers is certainly defined by real-world events and occurrences. Nonetheless, the events and the information also carry significant traces of certain political interests and the communicative system of the media themselves, and these traces are systematic and do not depend on the national or political orientation of the media outlets. The media filter international politics according to certain communicative selectors that define both the focus and the framing of news coverage, and thus the wider popular daily experience and representation of international politics. And if popular sentiments and experiences matter – as they do in democracies – those selectors become politically potent and relevant. Or to put it in the language of C. Wright Mills (1970: 406): Our images of the world and most of what we call solid facts are given to us by 'a cultural apparatus [...] that stand between men and events'. In a democracy this mass media-relative image of the world is a real and significant arena or scene for experiencing, judging and conducting politics. For as the Hermes analogy indicates, Hermes is influential, just as the news media are, because his presentations to the other gods on Olympus constitute the principal scene on which Zeus's dealings in the world are recognized and judged, and then Zeus's actions become inscribed by the dramaturgic and narrative logic that defines that scene.



Leaving what I have called ‘communitarian selectors’ at the side,<sup>147</sup> we may now suggest – as a general empirical finding – in concluding this chapter that our experience and view of international politics to significant degree are structured and defined by the following communicative selectors:<sup>148</sup>

- Visibility/ Photographability: The news media favour visual elements of international political reality, both in the selection/prioritizing of events and issue-areas for coverage, and in the presentation and framing of the coverage.
- Event orientation: News media coverage focuses on events rather than long-term processes and developments.
- Drama and Change: Events and developments with elements of surprise, discontinuity and immediacy are prioritized, whereas non-dramatic, long-term, continuous parts of international politics and events are marginalized.
- Quantity: An abundant and continuous supply of information items and images are prerequisites for perpetual and massive news focus of events and issue-areas.
- Singularity: The news media tend to let one international event or issue dominate the foreign policy news agenda, instead of adopting a multiple news focus. The shift from one news ‘singularity’ to the next is generally both abrupt and uniform.

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<sup>147</sup> In addition to these indicators of the communicative selection of the media, I distinguish between two types of communitarian selectors: 1. National self-focusing: The media explicitly cast the normative coverage of far-away events and international issues in ways that are appealing and relevant to their national audience, making reference directly to the national society of the core audience. 2. National value frames: The media implicitly cast the coverage of far-away events and international issues in ways that are appealing and relevant to their national audience by invoking typical national values, outlooks and identity in their framing and focus of the news coverage. (The formulations used in this definition are inspired by Curran & Gurevitch (1991: 206).)

<sup>148</sup> The identifications of these ‘news media selectors’ have also been tested against data where the author has gone through and compared the coverage given to three similar cases of foreign-affairs events in four different Norwegian newspapers: specifically, the first-day coverage of Western military attacks on Iraq (2003), the first-day coverage of the US attacks in Afghanistan (2001), and the first-day coverage of NATO’s ‘Operation Allied Forces’ in Kosovo in 1999. (See Appendix.)

This has been a wide-ranging empirical examination. Let us now refine the focus. For even if a case can be made for the probable existence of structural communicative factors that define what we see and how we experience international relations, challenges and threats, this does not say very much about how decision-makers and politicians relate to the international realm. We now have to take the step into politics, in order to demonstrate the general proposition from an empirical perspective.

## **The Power of *Adaptation*: Media and Politicians**

Are the communicative selectors of the international news horizon reflected in the way the foreign policy elite understand and approach international politics? The link between the communicative structures of the news media (which we have just identified), and the actual conduct of foreign policy, is what I have called ‘the power of adaptation’. Based on a series of interviews with the Norwegian foreign policy decision-making elite, I suggested (in Chapter IV) that this is a type of influence where the subject (foreign policy decision-makers and the foreign policy decision-making apparatus) constantly performs an adjustment to the outside world, analogous to assumptions of an evolutionary process of change (Bourdieu 1993: 78). Foreign policy is embedded in the media field, and the power vested in the news media is reflected in a change over time, whereby the foreign policy focus, interests and operations of states perform a gradual adaptation to the communicative logic of the news media.

This argument involves two historical processes. The first one is, as I claimed in Chapter V, that the expanded role of the news media in covering international events has led to an increased differentiation (or ‘doubling’) of international political reality, systematically re-orienting the focal point of the foreign political elite towards reality as observed through the news media. The second condition is that the communicative qualities of the medium (defined as communicative selectors in Chapter VI) are reflected in the focus, interests and outlooks of decision-makers and politicians.

Both these processes are testable empirical propositions. This chapter presents a limited case study of the media/foreign policy nexus in Norway to substantiate and refine these propositions. The aim is to analyse how foreign affairs news events are reflected, and how they emerge in the official foreign policy debate within the legislative body of

the government. Are there identifiable differences over time? Here I am particularly interested in two points: First, in whether historical changes have occurred in the way dramatic international events appear and are communicated, especially in the medium of television. Second, in whether these changes in the mass communication of international events coincide with the perception and discussions of events within the state's foreign policy-making apparatus. Thus the focus will be on the communicative qualities of the news media, how these change over time and how they manifest themselves in political argument. I ask :

- (1) Are there significant historical changes in the way Norwegian politicians approach international affairs in the official political debates?
- (2) What are the differences in the way politicians approach comparable dramatic news events?
- (3) Do these historical changes in political perception and outlook correspond to transformations of the news media?

In order to answer these questions I compare NRK television news coverage of three analogous, dramatic events in three historical periods<sup>149</sup>: the US aerial bombing of Hanoi between 19 and 29 December 1972 ('Operation Linebacker II'), the aerial bombing of Iraq during the Gulf War on 17 January 1991 ('Operation Desert Storm'), and the aerial bombing of Iraq on 20 March 2003 ('Operation Iraqi Freedom'). The analyses are based upon the plenary debates in the Norwegian parliament (the Storting) on these three events.<sup>150</sup> Additionally, I have gone through the 'Foreign Minister's

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<sup>149</sup> The state-owned NRK is Norway's main TV channel. The data in this chapter are based on the channel's main news broadcast 'Dagsrevyn' [Day in Review]. During the periods of the Vietnam War and the Gulf War, NRK was in fact the only TV channel in Norway.

<sup>150</sup> These parliamentary debates are: *Vietnam War 1972/1973* 'Ad opptrapping av krigen i Vietnam' 9 May 1972, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 2907–09; 'Samarb. i Atlanterhavspaktens organisasjon i 1971' 11 December 1972, *Stortingstidene* 1972/1973: 1258–1337; 'Innstilling fra utenriks- og konstitusjonskomiteen om bevilgning av 15 mill. kroner i humanitær bistand til Vietnam' 22 February 1973, *Stortingstidene* 1972/1973: 1958–64; 'Forhandlinger i Stortinget nr. 242 14 February 1973, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 1901–03, 2086; *Gulf War 1991* 'Ad spørsmål om en kobling mellom Golf-krisen og andre Midtøsten-spørsmål' 16 January 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 2081–86; 'Redegjørelse vedrørende situasjonen i Golf-området' 17 January 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 2087–93; 'Innstilling fra utenriks- og konstitusjonskomiteen om humanitær bistand til Golf-området som følge av gjenopptatte krigshandlinger' 15 February 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 2423–30; 'Redegjørelsen av utenriksministeren om den

Foreign Policy Review' and the annual major debate on foreign policy for the years in which these three events occurred.<sup>151</sup>

## 1. How politicians debate foreign policy doctrines

Let us begin the analysis with two remarks or statements about relations between the Storting and the media. The first comes from Nils Morten Udgaard. He has for many years been foreign affairs editor of Norway's largest non-tabloid newspaper, *Aftenposten*, and has also served as top foreign policy advisor to former prime minister Kåre Willoch.<sup>152</sup> Udgaard maintains that important changes have occurred in the way Norwegian politicians evaluate the news media:<sup>153</sup>

I am often surprised about how sensitively politicians and, not least, Members of Parliament react toward the behaviour of the media [...] The whole society is moving in the direction of populism and this increases the influence of the media. I believe that politicians increasingly measure their policies against the press. They sell their policies through the press. This shifts the political debate out of the official organs and into the news media.

The other statement is made by former prime minister Kjell Magne Bondevik. On 21 March 2003, the day after the first US aerial bombing of Iraq as a precursor to a ground invasion of the country, the Norwegian MPs assembled for plenary debate about

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kurdiske flyktningkatastrofen i Midtøsten' 16 April 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 3012–17; *Iraq War 2003* 'Muntlig spørretime' 29 January 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 1684–98; 'Muntlig spørretime' 5 February 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 1723–28; 'Redegjørelsen av statsministeren om Irak-spørsmålet' 21 March 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 2296–2303; 'Muntlig spørretime' 26 March 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 2359–65; 'Muntlig spørretime' 9 April 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 2586–87.

<sup>151</sup> 'Utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse av utenriksministeren' 1 December 1972, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 990–95; 'Utenriksdebatten' 11 December 1972, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 1258–1337; 'Utenriksministerens utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse' 15 January 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 2037–45; 'Utenriksdebatten' 4 February 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 2112–45; 'Utenriksministerens utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse' 13 February 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 1890–94; 'Debatten om utenriksministerens utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse' 20 February 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 1970–2003.

<sup>152</sup> Udgaard was 'state secretary' (*statssekretær*) and foreign policy advisor at the Office of the Prime Minister between 1984 and 1986.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Nils Morten Udgaard, 4 April 2006.

the war in Iraq, and Prime Minister Bondevik led off with an account of the developments:

The war in Iraq is now in its second day. TV pictures are bringing glimpses of the military activities and fighting into all Norwegian homes. Norway is not in this war, but it affects us all.

Here we have two simple positions about the influence of the media. Udgaard's declaration is explicit and expresses the view that the news media are increasingly becoming the major arena of politicians, as well as acting as a reference point and measuring stick for acting and performing in politics. Bondevik's statement is an implicit inference about how politicians view the world toward which politics is oriented. Bondevik indicates that the war in Iraq has political relevance for Norway because, above all, television brings 'the military activities and fighting into all Norwegian homes'. It would seem that the political relevance of the events does not lie in the events themselves, but rather in that the events have been turned into a collective news experience. Thus we have two tentative assertions – one about the news media as a reference point for political actions and statements, and one about the media as constituting a form of popular political reality and thereby being central to the international focus and observations of politicians.

This of course is a speculative interpretation of two brief statements by Udgaard and Bondevik. It is not meant to represent their larger arguments. Nonetheless, the statements provide an opening for understanding the relationship between news and politics, or what I in Chapter V called 'media as a political field': that politics is increasingly related to events as observed (indirectly) through the news media rather than through media-independent events and facts, and that over time, foreign policy changes apace with changes in news media selectors (communicative selectors).

Let us compare the contents of official foreign policy debates and statements, by stepping into the plenary chambers of the Norwegian parliament (the Storting). There we will compare the official foreign policy debates in three different historical points in time which were all distinguished, as far as it is possible to determine, by similar dramatic events that have occurred over the course of four decades – the aerial bombings of Hanoi

(1972), Iraq (1991) and Iraq (2003). We begin by looking at the general picture, comparing how foreign policy more generally was introduced to and debated by the parliamentarians in the Storting in these three different years. Since these cases have been selected to be as similar as possible, the analysis naturally proceeds with a comparative method of difference (Knutson and Moses 2007).

‘The Foreign Minister’s Foreign Policy Review’ [*Utenriksministerens utenrikspolitiske redegjørelse, here: FPR*] is the Norwegian foreign minister’s annual presentation to the country’s legislative assembly of the government’s foreign policy actions. As such it is a Norwegian counterpart to the US presidential ‘State of the Union’ address, but is limited to the field of foreign affairs. The review is presented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and is followed a few weeks later by a general parliamentary debate. The three annual FPR presentations and their respective debates to be examined here occurred in December 1972, January 1991 and February 2003, thus in close relation to the three military actions.<sup>154</sup> We find interesting differences between the three reviews.

Let us begin with a simple quantitative content analysis. The first thing to evaluate is what proportion of each of the annual reviews was devoted to the three war situations: Vietnam (1972), Iraq (1991) and Iraq (2003). The differences are significant. In both January 1991 and February 2003 the international situation was extremely tense. The 1991 FPR was actually presented a mere two days before the Gulf War got underway. Nevertheless, only a little more than one-fifth (22%) of the text was devoted to the situation in the Middle East.<sup>155</sup> In the FPR presented on the eve of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, more than half (about 55%) was devoted to the immediate developments in relation to Iraq. By comparison, in 1972, Foreign Minister Dagfinn Vårvik, who presented his FPR to the Storting in the wake of the first phase of the bombing of Hanoi

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<sup>154</sup> ‘Operation Linebacker II’, 18–30 December 1972, included the heaviest bombing strikes of the whole war. The operation was ordered by President Nixon against targets in North Vietnam and was a resumption of what had been called the Linebacker I bombings conducted from May to October 1972 (Herring 2001). The Norwegian FPR was presented that year by Foreign Minister Dagfinn Vårvik on 1 December, and the Foreign Policy Debate was held on 11 December. ‘Operation Desert Storm’ began on 17 January 1991. The Foreign Minister’s FPR was presented on 15 January by Thorvald Stoltenberg, and the debate took place on 4 February 1991. ‘Operation Freedom Iraq’ started on 20 March 2003; the FPR was presented by Foreign Minister Jan Petersen on 13 February, and was followed by the parliamentary debate on 20 February.

<sup>155</sup> All these figures are based on a systematic analysis and identification of all paragraphs in the text. Out of a total of 117 paragraphs, 26 were devoted to discussion of the issue of Iraq.

(Linebacker I) and on the eve of Linebacker II, devoted less than one-tenth of his text to Vietnam.<sup>156</sup>

Much the same picture emerges with regard to how many different matters and themes are included in the reviews, and what types of issues dominate. The 1972 review is very extensive. The text/speech gives limited weight to individual events and current affairs. Instead, it quickly constructs a broad historical perspective on international developments and the role of Norway and Norwegian foreign policy. Foreign Minister Vårvik begins thus:

It is probably not an exaggeration to say that east/west relations, and what one might call the general pattern of foreign affairs, this year and in the course of the past two or three years, has been distinguished by a more positive movement than has been seen at any time in the post-war period.<sup>157</sup>

The contents of the text reflect a similar emphasis on long-term processes and developments, with a broad-spectrum focus. All in all, two or more paragraphs are devoted to as many as eleven different issues and themes. In addition to the war in Vietnam, the most important matters discussed in the presentation were political developments in the relationship between East and West Germany; the ongoing discussions about establishing a conference on security and cooperation in Europe (CSCE);<sup>158</sup> and the UN's financial problems. Moreover, a large proportion of the contents did not deal with individual events or actions. Out of 52 paragraphs there are only eight that deal with specific events; the rest take up questions linked to general international developments and political processes. This distanced analysis that emphasises trends and major constellations is typical of the era.

Moving a little more than thirty years forward in time, to Foreign Minister Jan Petersen's annual FPR to the Storting on 13 February 2003, five weeks before the US-led

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<sup>156</sup> The speech contained 52 paragraphs, only five of which related to the situation in Vietnam and Indo-China.

<sup>157</sup> 'Utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse av utenriksministeren', 1 December 1972, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 990.

<sup>158</sup> The CSCE (Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe) was established in 1973 after talks that began at Helsinki in November 1972.



invasion of Iraq, we see that the text of the review is dramatic and current in a completely different sense:

The international situation is more insecure than it has been for a long time. Many people are deeply worried. The UN has given Iraq a last chance to comply with the international community's demand for the abolition of weapons of mass destruction. The time for this last chance is not yet up, but the danger of war is definitely with us.<sup>159</sup>

This FPR positions itself right in the middle of the ongoing current of news and dramatic happenings. Of the report's 68 paragraphs, the first 43 can all be read as ongoing commentary on the news agenda of the previous two months. No explicit perspectives or arguments are formulated that move beyond the immediate and short-term developments. And in the FM's discussion of the government's own policy, the main emphasis is on defending viewpoints and separate statements linked to single and concrete events. Very little weight is given to the choice of a line or the general orientation of Norwegian foreign policy. The following excerpt is illustrative of the perspective:

After having seen today's media headlines I want again to bring to mind the fact that it was precisely along these lines that I expressed myself after the inspectors had delivered their first report on January 27<sup>th</sup> of this year [...] Tomorrow the weapons inspectors will report again to the Security Council. Without clear indications that Iraq will be willing to cooperate with the weapons inspectors and comply with the instructions of the Security Council fully and without delay, we are faced with an extremely serious situation. It would therefore not be correct for me to speculate in advance as to what the Security Council will conclude.<sup>160</sup>

Here it could be objected that this movement in the political discourse in the direction of immediate, individual events, the dramatic, and the news agenda cannot be generalized, since it reflects the fact that the Iraq war at this point in time was a completely dominant and unusually dramatic situation that naturally enough captured much attention. This is a reasonable objection, but in fact it carries little weight. To the

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<sup>159</sup> 'Utenriksministerens utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse', 13 February 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 1890.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*:1892.

contrary, the orientation of politics toward the immediate seems to be a broad feature of the general foreign policy discourse. The increased focus on dramatic events and the news agenda also applies to what we might call 'normal situations'.

The opening of the annual Foreign Policy Review of 2001 is a case in point. It was presented before the events of 9/11 that year and the drama that unfolded in international relations thereafter. Nevertheless, the orientation toward the current news agenda, and the photographic and eventful episodes and aspects of international politics, is prominent. Foreign Minister Thorbjørn Jagland, from another ideological camp than Mr. Petersen, began his Foreign Policy Review in March 2001 in the following manner:

It has been an extremely eventful and exciting year – in the field of foreign affairs as well. We have been witness to a democratic revolution in Yugoslavia, a Croatia that has taken steps into the ranks of the European democracies, while the remaining parts of the Balkans continue to be marked by ethnic contradictions and great insecurity. We have been witness to a Middle East that is stamped with violence, mistrust and broken promises, an Africa marked by conflict, natural catastrophes and AIDS – but also hope, an Asia marked by strong contrasts, political unrest and new economic growth. We have been witness to a presidential election in the USA and a new administration with new priorities, a more self-confident Russia, and not least, a Europe where the EU is preparing to expand and at the same time strengthen and deepen its internal cooperation.<sup>161</sup>

Here it is as if the politician is witnessing the world as a series of mainly dramatic and visual news occurrences. The political reality and the news media reality seem to have become more interwoven. There is little in the world order of the 1970s, 1990s and March 2001 that may explain the differences. The situation was, at the time of the Foreign Policy Reviews and debates, rather stable and calm. Nor do the ideological differences between the different ministers seem to matter much.

But what if now we turn from the texts of these annual foreign ministerial reviews and instead consider the ensuing foreign policy debates? Is it possible to find some of the same tendencies there?

Table 8.1 gives an overview of the issues and themes discussed in the official foreign affairs debates after the Foreign Minister's Review in 1972, 1991 and 2003. It

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<sup>161</sup> 'Utenriksministerens utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse', 20 March 2001.

also lists the types of issues and apportsions percentages indicating which ones dominated the debates. The figures show the time spent on the various issues.

**Table 8.1: Comparison of three parliamentary debates<sup>162</sup>**

	1972	1991	2003
Number of different issues discussed <sup>163</sup>	21 <sup>164</sup>	9 <sup>165</sup>	5 <sup>166</sup>
Issues discussed for more than ten minutes <sup>167</sup>	16	7	3
Top ten issues	1.NATO 2.European integration/'EF' 3.Norwegian foreign policy 4.East/West relations 5.Poverty 6.East and West Germany 7.CSCE 8.SALT II 9.Vietnam War 10.United Nations	1.Iraq 2.Baltic/Russia 3.EU/EEA 4.Israel/Palestine 5.Norwegian foreign policy 6.National defence 7.Arms control 8.Oil/gas policy 9.Poverty 10. –	1.Iraq 2.WTO 3.EU 4.Poverty 5.Norwegian foreign policy 6.Israel/Palestine 7.Civil Wars 8.Terrorism 9.Norwegian fishery 10. –
Time spent on top five issues (Percentage)	1.NATO: 18% 2.EEC/'EF' 10% 3.Norwegian foreign policy 10%	1.Iraq 58% 2.Baltic/Russia 10% 3.EU/EEA 10% 4.Israel/Palestine 9%	1.Iraq 79% 2.WTO 10% 3.EU 5% 4.Poverty 2%

<sup>162</sup> 'Utenriksdebatten', 11 December 1972, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 1258–1337. 'Utenriksdebatten', 4 February 1991. 'Debatten om utenriksministerens utenrikspolitiske redegjørelse', 20 February 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 1970–2003.

<sup>163</sup> This refers to issues not only mentioned in the debate but also discussed by one or more MPs in four or more paragraphs of speech, which constitutes approximately five minutes.

<sup>164</sup> These were (with the numbers of paragraphs): NATO (90), European integration/'EF' (50), Norwegian foreign policy strategies (48), General East/West relations (48), Poverty (42), Political process between East and West Germany (38), CSCE (Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe) (28), SALT II (20), Vietnam War (17), UN (16), National defence (15), Turkey (15), Israel/PLO (13), GATT (11), Portugal (10), Sudan (10), Greece (8), International deep sea regime (7), Environment (6), Nordic cooperation (5), OECD (4).

<sup>165</sup> These were (with the numbers of paragraphs): Iraq (170), Baltic/Russia (29), EU/EEC (29), Israel/Palestine (27), Norwegian foreign policy strategies (13), National defence (12), Arms control (11), Oil/gas policy (5), Poverty (5).

<sup>166</sup> These were (by computing the numbers of paragraphs of the transcript): Iraq (271), WTO (36), EU (16), Poverty (6), Norwegian foreign policy strategies (5). The other issues discussed were Israel/Palestine (3), Civil wars (3), Terrorism (3), Norwegian fishery (2).

<sup>167</sup> These figures are based on the total number of paragraphs divided by the number of paragraphs per issue.

	4.East/West relations 10% 5.Poverty 8% ...Vietnam 4%	5. Norwegian foreign policy 4%	5.Norwegian foreign policy 1%
Events as focus	18%	65%	80 %
Processes as focus	82%	35%	20 %

It should be borne in mind that the annual foreign affairs debate has changed in form in recent decades. One important change is the fact that the debate has been shortened, and today lasts about five hours, as opposed to almost ten hours in 1972. This itself is an oddity in an increasingly globalized world. Moreover, in the 1970s MPs were allocated more time for their main statement and interventions.<sup>168</sup> Nonetheless, the differences and tendencies shown in the Table are still clear.

*First*, the debate in 1972 covered many more issues than the debates of 1991 and 2003. Some of this can be ascribed to the fact that the timespan of the debate was roughly twice as long. But this does not explain the great difference in the number of issues that are subjected to relatively thorough discussion. In 1972 no fewer than sixteen items were accorded more than ten minutes, and the Storting devoted more than half an hour to discussing seven of the foreign policy issues.<sup>169</sup> In 1991, the number of items given roughly ten minutes had fallen to seven, while only four issues were thoroughly discussed, and only on one question did the assembly take more than half an hour.<sup>170</sup> In 2003 only three issues were discussed for more than ten minutes.

*Second*, unlike the case in 1972, the debates in 1991 and 2003 were essentially dominated by one specific issue – the escalation of war activity. Despite the dramatic situation in Vietnam and Indochina in 1972, there was during the debate that year no specific issue that took up more than 20% of the debate on foreign affairs. In 1991 and in 2003, by contrast, large portions of the debate were totally dominated by events in the

<sup>168</sup> To compare the formalities, see *Stortingstidende* 1973/1974: 627, ‘Sak nr. 1’, and *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 1970–1971, ‘Sak nr. 1’.

<sup>169</sup> These seven issues or themes were NATO (81 minutes), European integration/‘EF’ (45 minutes), Norwegian foreign policy strategies (43 minutes), general East/West relations (43 minutes), Poverty (38 minutes), Political process between East and West Germany (34 minutes) CSCE (26 minutes). These figures are based on the total time of debate, on the basis of the number of paragraphs of the transcripts of the debate on each issue.

<sup>170</sup> These four were Iraq (153 minutes) Baltic/Russia (26 minutes), EU/EEC (26 minutes), Israel/Palestine (23 minutes).

Middle East, and 58% and 80% respectively of the time was devoted to discussing current developments. Moreover, as in the Foreign Minister's Reviews, the foreign policy debates also showed an increasing orientation toward the immediate news picture, with noticeable emphasis and focus on current developments and the recent news agenda.

*Third*, the 1972 official foreign policy debate was dominated by other types of issues than were the debates of 1991 and 2003. In 1972 the debate in all the major issues focused on political processes and general foreign policy orientation, and much less on specific developments and concrete events. In addition, in 1972 the MPs showed much more interest in questions linked to broad foreign policy assessments, such as Norwegian interests, Norway's place in the world, and the contours of global development. No less than a tenth of the interventions and debate explicitly began with the question of the main strategy in Norwegian foreign policy. Labour MP Guttorm Hansen summed up the tendency as follows:

More clearly than ever before we see how Norway's relations with the world around us play an increasingly significant role for our own development and for our own future as a nation. The foreign affairs debate in Stortinget must therefore be used more to define our own situation in the coming years, to help us find our way to our own place in the picture and make us aware as a people of the significance of international questions for us ourselves.<sup>171</sup>

Two decades later, in 1991, Norway's MPs also spent some time on debating general questions of foreign policy. But the time devoted to this was significantly shorter, the content much more limited, and the debate was more grounded in the current situation and not in overarching principles. In a formal twenty-minute exchange between four MPs about 'the main orientation of the foreign policy' Reiulf Steen (Labour) expressed the essence of the debate as follows:

Like Inger Lise Gjørsv I too want to say how happy I am that in this situation the Christian People's Party has placed considerable weight on maintaining what has been a main orientation for the vast majority of parties in Stortinget, throughout the period since 1949, namely that one

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<sup>171</sup> 'Utenriksdebatten', 11 December 1972, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 1269.

ought to try to build the greatest possible unity in Norway around the defining orientation and course in Norwegian foreign policy.<sup>172</sup>

The debate in 2003 contains little in the way of similar discussions of general foreign policy orientation. In 2003 altogether less than five minutes were devoted to discussing comprehensive questions, and there, for the most part, the debate took the form of polemics about how the war in Iraq either invalidated or corroborated the need for Norway to join the European Union.

*Fourth*, if we compare the foreign policy debates in 1991 and 2003 it seems possible to speak about another development or tendency. The Iraq War and the Gulf War were almost identical events. They involved roughly equivalent elements of drama, the news coverage was rather similar (see below), and many of the actors were the same. Nevertheless the debates differed on other important points. Comparing the debates we can see a clear tendency in the direction of orientation toward ‘events’ and a movement away from political processes and long-term developments, together with a constriction of the political agenda. The changes between 1991 and 2003 are not particularly distinctive. But if we also draw in the foreign policy debate of 1972 it is possible to identify a relatively significant trend with regard to how the Norwegian Storting and its members generally discuss the world, which allows a considerable emphasis on many of the relations that I have described as communicative selectors – factors like ‘visibility’, ‘drama’, ‘events’, ‘immediacy’, ‘quantity’ and ‘news singularity’.

## **2. How politicians debate spectacular news events**

Leaving aside the big picture, let us now ask whether we might find a similar development in how dramatic, single-event foreign policy issues are debated in the Storting over time. We will examine three military events – the bombing of Hanoi in 1972 and of Iraq in 1991 and 2003.

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<sup>172</sup> ‘Utenriksdebatten’, 4 February 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 2136–39.

The first thing to note about the debate concerning the war in Vietnam and the two debates on the wars in the Gulf is that there are several similarities. To a considerable degree the focus was the same: the debates dealt mainly with Norway's reaction and Norwegian politics in relation to the dramatic acts perpetrated by Norway's main ally. Regarding the escalation of the war in Vietnam, two controversies predominated. The first concerned the allocation of humanitarian aid between North Vietnam and South Vietnam in light of the massive destruction in Hanoi, among other places.<sup>173</sup> The other concerned the protection of prisoners of war in South Vietnamese prisons.<sup>174</sup> There was also a shorter debate on international law in relation to the recognition of South Vietnam's government of the day.<sup>175</sup>

In relation to the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1991, the debates were not strikingly different. On 17 January, the day after the first aerial attacks, the Storting spent half an hour discussing the government's decision to take part on the allied side.<sup>176</sup> However, beyond this, the debates all focused on Norway and its role with regard to the conduct of the war. First of all there was a debate about humanitarian aid to the Gulf region, and to which part of the state budget the costs should be charged.<sup>177</sup> Then there was a debate about the Kurdish refugee catastrophe in northern Iraq and Norwegian relief efforts.<sup>178</sup>

Twelve years later, in March 2003, in relation to 'Operation Freedom Iraq', the Storting followed almost precisely the same procedure. First, the FM presented a review on behalf of the government about the outbreak of war itself, whereupon the assembly held a plenary debate marked by limited disagreement over the government's conclusion not to take part on the side of the USA.<sup>179</sup> Then, as the war was being waged, two additional debates took place; as in 1991, they had to do with Norway's economic

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<sup>173</sup> 'Innstilling fra utenriks- og konstitusjonskomiteen om bevilging av 15 mill. kroner i humanitær bistand til Vietnam', 22 February 1972, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 1958–64.

<sup>174</sup> 'Forhandlinger i Stortinget nr. 242', 14 February 1973, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 1901–03.

<sup>175</sup> See debate between Arne Kielland and Dagfinn Vårvik, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 1959–61.

<sup>176</sup> 'Redegjørelse vedrørende situasjonen i Golf-området', 17 January 1991, *Stortingstidende*, 1990/1991: 2087–93.

<sup>177</sup> 'Innstilling fra utenriks- og konstitusjonskomiteen om humanitær bistand til Golf-området som følge av gjenopptatte krigshandlinger', 15 February 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 2423–30.

<sup>178</sup> 'Redegjørelse av utenriksministeren om den kurdiske flyktningkatastrophen i Midtøsten', 16 April 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 3012–17.

<sup>179</sup> 'Redegjørelse av statsministeren om Irak-spørsmålet', 21 March 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003:2296–2303.

contributions to redressing the humanitarian consequences of the war and the post-war reconstruction of Iraq.<sup>180</sup>

All in all, the three debates were what one would expect of a small, well-constituted country. Moreover, they reflect the fact that Norway is a parliamentary system, where the role of the national assembly in foreign policy is consultative, and that there is a relatively strong tradition of consensus across political parties in the country's foreign policy and a corresponding common understanding that Norway has a special role to play as a contributor of humanitarian aid (Thune & Nustad 2003).

There are, however, two important differences between the Vietnam debates and the later debates on the wars in the Middle East. We have already gone into one of the differences in relation to then-Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik's introductory review of developments in the Middle East the day after the invasion of Iraq on 21 March 2003. 'Norway is not in this war but it affects us all', is how Bondevik led off on that occasion. How should we take this?

One possible interpretation is that the events in the Gulf have a political relevance not *qua* the event, but because the event is experienced as a visual and emotional news event by the Norwegian people. We might say that waging war in Iraq has become democratized and made politically relevant for Norway and its politicians because the war is an overriding media event and therefore a collective experience. The political relevance of the event, thus, lies not in the war's factual material, strategic or international significance for Norway and Norwegian citizens, but rather in its existence as a news event that claims our attention and affects our emotions. In other words, massive, dramatic and total media events imply a democratizing of news experience and the politicizing of private emotions.

Within the framework of such a reading of foreign policy it is not only the events as such, but also our own emotions and reactions as consumers of news, that serve as the reference point of politics. In relation to both the Gulf War in 1991 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the debates among Norwegian politicians seemed to have been based on this premise. For example: in April 1991 Thorvald Stoltenberg, who was Foreign Minister at

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<sup>180</sup> 'Muntlig spørretime'[Question period], 26 March 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 2359–65, 'Muntlig spørretime', 9 April 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 2586–87.



the time, reported on the refugee catastrophe in the north of Iraq following the Gulf War.<sup>181</sup> Television coverage of the flight of refugees out of Iraq had been extensive and dramatic (Shaw 1996: 79–119). In the debate following the Foreign Minister’s review, four of the six MPs who spoke based their contributions about the distress of the refugees on what they had seen on the television news.<sup>182</sup> They formulated their remarks in the following manner:

Johan J. Jakobsen (Centre Party):

*There are scarcely words to describe the boundless tragedy we are witness to on a daily basis via the television screen and the instantaneous descriptions in other media.*

Kåre Gjønnes (Chr. Dem.):

*We have all seen the pictures of the consequences of this brutality being sent into our homes.*

Jan Petersen (Conservative):

*The Kurdish refugee catastrophe is one of the most dramatic we have been faced with, and I feel that all of us together are in agreement in our reaction to the challenge facing us, and the desire we have to contribute to the alleviation of the distress that has followed this conflict.*

Bjørn Tore Godal (Labour):

*It is difficult to find words strong enough to describe what we are now witnessing – the persecution and suffering of hundreds of thousands of Kurdish people in Iraq and in the border regions to Iraq.*

In the closing phase of the invasion of Iraq twelve years later, in 2003, we find a correspondingly illustrative example of ‘politicizing’ and ‘democratizing’ of the shared emotional experience of reality via the mass media. In relation to an exchange between MPs Gunhild Øyangen, Åslaug Haga and Norway’s then Minister of International

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<sup>181</sup> ‘Redgjørelse av utenriksministeren om den kurdiske flyktningkatastrophen i Midtøsten’, 16 April 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991:3012–17.

<sup>182</sup> These were Johan J. Jakobsen (‘There are scarcely words to describe the boundless tragedy we are witness to on a daily basis via the television screen and the instantaneous descriptions in other media.’), Kåre Gjønnes (‘We have all seen the pictures of the consequences of this brutality being sent into our homes.’), Jan Petersen (‘The Kurdish refugee catastrophe is one of the most dramatic we have been faced with, and I feel that all of us together are in agreement in our reaction to the challenge facing us, and the desire we have to contribute to the alleviation of the distress that has followed this conflict.’), Bjørn Tore Godal (‘It is difficult to find words strong enough to describe what we are now witnessing – the persecution and suffering of hundreds of thousands of Kurdish people in Iraq and in the border regions to Iraq.’)

Development, Hilde Frafjord Johnsen, it seems that the whole reality of foreign policy is identical with the experience of the world as conveyed by television.<sup>183</sup> The media's version has assumed the role of a collective empirical truth, completely independent of the factual humanitarian situation that at this point was far from being as dramatic as the debate indicated.<sup>184</sup> The empirical assumptions of the debate are established by the three politicians in the following manner:

Gunhild Øyangen (Labour):

*I have a question for the Minister of International Development. The war in Iraq has led to incomprehensible human suffering. We get daily reports through the media about the killed and seriously wounded civilians. Women, children and elderly people are affected. We hear about hospitals that in the process of running out of medicine and equipment. We hear about amputations that have to be carried out without anaesthetics...*

Hilde Frafjord Johnsen (Minister, Chr. Dem):

*I completely share MP Øyangen's description of this situation on the ground in Iraq...*

Åslaug Haga (Centre Party):

*As we all know, there is a very serious humanitarian situation in Iraq.*

One of the differences between the political debate in the wake of the aerial bombing of Iraq in 1991 and 2003, and the Christmas bombing of Hanoi in 1972, thus concerns what makes an event politically relevant and what gives it meaning as a central collective political event. But there is also another difference between Vietnam and the two Iraq wars – not about how events as such affect politicians and Norwegian political

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<sup>183</sup> 'Muntlig spørretime' April 9, 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 2586–87.

<sup>184</sup> This assessment is based on interviews with all the main parties in Baghdad in February 2004. The interviews were conducted by the author together with Henrik Hovland and translator Rewend Bedhi. See also Iraq Index <http://www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/iraq/index.htm>.

society, but rather what the politicians' main sources of information and references are in their debates about the world.

### 2.1 *The new importance of the media*

As seen above, the political content of the debate about the Vietnam War and the wars in Iraq were relatively similar. The debates focused mainly on Norwegian involvement and values, especially Norway's humanitarian assistance and economic support to ameliorate the consequences of warfare. However, substantial changes are found with regard to what the parliamentarians used as their sources and major references. In the debates before and after the Christmas bombing of Hanoi, we find no explicit references to the news media being a major source. When it comes to the humanitarian consequences, the sources were either NGOs, international institutions or the parties to the conflict.<sup>185</sup> With only two exceptions – one reference to an article in the *The Washington Post* and one to the Norwegian daily *Dagbladet*<sup>186</sup> – the MPs during more than ten hours of foreign policy debate in the Storting in autumn/winter 1972/1973 made no reference to the media. As an explicit reference point, the news media played a completely peripheral role.

During the Gulf War of 1991 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the media's presence in the debates was something else entirely. In the debates that were carried out while the military actions were still ongoing – altogether about four hours of debate – references to the warfare as a media event were made a full seventeen times.<sup>187</sup> And more importantly, in many of the policy debates the media were not only regarded as an important source of the parliamentarians' contributions and questions: the media constituted the actual object and explicit focus of the debates.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Three different NGOs and institutions are referred to: the Red Cross, Amnesty International and the Asian Development Bank. See 'Innstilling fra utenriks- og konstitusjonskomiteen om bevilgning av 15 mill. kroner i humanitær bistand til Vietnam', 22 February 1973, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 1958–64, 'Forhandlinger i Stortinget nr. 242', 14 February 1973, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 1901–03.

<sup>186</sup> See 'Utenriksdebatten', 11 December 1972, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 1313, 1314.

<sup>187</sup> For the 1991 Gulf War, see *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 2089, 2092, 2093, 2427, 2428, 2429, 3012, 3013, 3014, 3016. For the invasion of Iraq, see *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 2361, 2586, 2295.

<sup>188</sup> See *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 3012–17 and *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 2586–88.

In these debates the parliamentarians related to the realities of the media as an unproblematic fact, and as ‘the truth’, in the sense that none of the debaters at any point confronted the media’s representation of events with concurrent or alternative facts from sources other than the media. There was no disagreement among MPs from different political parties about what constituted the real situation. The reality that dominated the news media coverage seems to have been taken as given. In this way, disagreement about ‘facts’ and opposing interpretations of reality – always an important part of both argument and political disagreement – were removed or reduced.

To a significant degree, this differs from analogous debates on humanitarian aid to Vietnam in the wake of the bombing of Hanoi in 1973. In the most extensive of these debates, a dispute over the apportioning of fifteen million Norwegian kroner in humanitarian aid to North and South Vietnam,<sup>189</sup> the political disagreement about whether Norway should give aid primarily to South Vietnam or to North Vietnam was converted into a disagreement about the facts. The MPs discussed where the destruction had been greatest, and which sources one ought to rely upon. The major disagreement was between Kåre Willoch of the Conservative Party (*Høyre*), which supported South Vietnam, and Arne Kielland from the Socialist Left Party (*Sosialistisk Folkeparti*) which was far more positive toward the communists of North Vietnam. Two other MPs also took part in the debate, Tor Oftedal of the Norwegian Labour Party (*Arbeiderpartiet*) and Otto Lyng from the Conservative Party. And the debate proceeded in the following way:<sup>190</sup>

Kåre Willoch (Conservative):

*As I assess the situation, the criteria for allocating Norwegian aid between the two parts of Vietnam can either be an equal division or a division based upon proportionate damage. If we are to work on the basis of proportionate damage, there is a lot to indicate that a significantly greater portion of the aid should go to South Vietnam [...] It is quite clear that the bomb attacks have led to terrible and extensive damage, but there is much to indicate that the hundreds of*

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<sup>189</sup> ‘Innstilling fra utenriks- og konstitusjonskomiteen om bevilgning av 15 mill. kroner i humanitær bistand til Vietnam’, 22 February 1973, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 1958–65.

<sup>190</sup> *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 1962–64.

*thousands of North Vietnamese soldiers who have assaulted massively, wave after wave, and with the bellicose support of Soviet and Chinese-delivered artillery, have caused even more terrible destruction in the south.*

Arne Kielland (Socialist Left):

*I am somewhat astonished by Mr. Willoch's contribution here. Perhaps the reason is that we have extremely different access to information, and this can play out in both directions. But I believe that there is a common understanding among those who in particular are engaged in what has happened in Vietnam over the last two years that the devastation is considerably greater in the north than in the south.*

Otto Lyng (Conservative):

*Let me just add a couple of sentences about the need for aid assistance in South Vietnam and North Vietnam. It is presumably correct, as Representative Willoch maintained, that the destruction in all probability is greater in the south than in the north.*

Tor Oftedal (Labour):

*I absolutely do not feel called upon to be a judge in the dispute between Mr. Willoch and Mr. Kielland as to where the greatest destruction has occurred in the unfortunate drama in Vietnam, North or South.*

If we compare this excerpt from the debate on Vietnam in 1973 with the excerpt from the debate on humanitarian aid to Iraq in 2003 above, the difference is glaring. In 2003 it seems that the media's representation of the situation formed the basis for political consensus on the factual relations between government and opposition. In 1973 on the other hand, disagreement about the facts is used as the basis for different political stances toward the US waging of war in Vietnam.

What does this tell us? With extensive television coverage of conflicts it seems that there is no longer as much room for factual disagreement: disagreements about factual conditions are displaced by uniform, collective news experiences. The media

become the major source in foreign policy arguments. And the role of the media shifts, from being news informants to being political facts. And these are facts that are difficult to challenge within the framework of a democracy where the constituency is made up precisely of daily consumers of news.

### **3. How TV news covers wars**

Up to this point we have confined ourselves to the debates about foreign policy that have raged inside the Norwegian parliament, the Storting. There we found that the direction taken by official political argumentation in relation to relatively similar events is what we can characterize as a tendency noted earlier in this chapter: there are fewer items on the agenda, increasing focus on individual events and the spontaneous, and less focus on either processes or broader political change and development, and an over-focusing on the issues chosen. We have also seen that to some degree this political debate is characterized by a politicizing of the actual momentary news segments whereby news events can be understood as collective foreign political experience, and therefore, to some degree, as democratic events. We find less diversity in the debates, and more orientation toward the media picture, and toward visual and dramatic actions on the international scene.

But what about the news coverage itself? What is the difference between the coverage of the aerial bombing of Hanoi in December 1973 and similar actions in Iraq in January 1991 and March 2003?

To compare changes in TV news coverage over time is no simple matter. Factors such as the increased number of channels and international news bureaus, and new information technology, have led to considerable changes. We therefore have to seek out broadcasts that have remained relatively constant over time. In Norway there has been only one such broadcast: NRK's daily television news programme 'Dagsrevyen' ['the Day in Review'].<sup>191</sup> The comparison below is based on Dagsrevyen's coverage of the

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<sup>191</sup> Today this programme is broadcast daily at 19:00 hours, local time; in 1991, at 19:30 hours, and in 1972 at 20:00 hours. The original recordings of 'Dagsrevyen' from the 1970s are no longer in existence. The

first two days of ‘Operation Linebacker II’ in Vietnam, the aerial bombing of Iraq during the Gulf War and ‘Operation Freedom Iraq’ in 2003.<sup>192</sup>

I have set out two tables below (8.2 and 8.3). The first, similar to the examination of news coverage in earlier chapters, is a comparison of news focus and news frames for the different news events. The second table presents an overview of the structure and time priorities of the news broadcasts themselves.

**Table 8.2: Coverage of three aerial campaigns, NRK<sup>193</sup>**

	<b>Vietnam (20–21 December 1972)</b>	<b>Gulf War (16–17 Jan. 1991)</b>	<b>Iraq War (19–20 March 03)</b>
Day 1	1.Vietnam – ‘U.S. air bombing starts’ 2.Vietnam – ‘Int. political reactions’ 3.Vietnam/Norway – ‘Reactions’ 4.Soviet – ‘Political visit to Moscow’ 5.EEC – ‘European integration’ 6.Norway – ‘Air service to Ålesund’	1.Iraq – ‘Ready for war’ 2.Iraq – ‘Reactions in M-E’ 3.Iraq – ‘Reaction UN/DC’ 4.Iraq/Norway – ‘Increased security’ 5.Baltics – Lithuania 6.Norway – ‘PM J. P. Syse steps down’	1.Iraq – ‘Forces enter Iraq’ 2.Iraq – ‘Military preparation’ 3.Iraq/Norway – ‘Reaction’ 4.Iraq – ‘Humanitarian consequences.’ 5.Iraq/Norway – ‘Aid workers’ 6.Norway: ‘Storm in Finnmark County’
Day 2	1.Vietnam – ‘Bombing continues’ 2.Vietnam – ‘Press conference in US’ 3.Vietnam – ‘Disagreement Nixon/Kissinger’ 4.Soviet – ‘Soviet anniversary’ 5.Germany – ‘Agreement East/West’ 6.UK – ‘Five killed in Londonderry’	1.Iraq – ‘Bombing continues’ 2.Iraq – ‘Saddam defies’ 3. Iraq – ‘Int. reactions’ 4.Iraq/Norway – ‘Fear of terror’ 5.Iraq – ‘Consequences for Baltics’ 6.Iraq/Norway – ‘High oil prices’	1.Iraq – ‘New massive attacks’ 2.Iraq – ‘Little resistance’ 3.Iraq – ‘600,000 may flee’ 4.Iraq – ‘Int. reactions’ 5.Iraq/Norway – ‘PM’s view’ 6.Iraq/Norway – ‘Oil prices’

films and interviews used in the programmes are kept at the National Library of Norway, while the schedule and manuscript for each of the programmes are kept in the television archives at the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation. The study is thus based on a reconstruction of the ‘Dagsrevyen’ coverage of the Vietnam War.

<sup>192</sup> The period covered in this analysis is the final two days of ‘Operation Linebacker II’ (28 and 29 December 1972), the first two days during the aerial campaign of the First Gulf War (16 and 17 January 1991) and the first two days of the Iraq War (19 and 20 March 2003). The reason for not studying the opening days of the aerial campaign against Hanoi in December 1972 is quite obvious. Due to a different and much slower global news media infrastructure, footage of the first two days of ‘Operation Linebacker II’ was not instantly available for the news programmes.

<sup>193</sup> The US aerial bombing of Hanoi between 19 and 29 December 1972 (‘Operation Linebacker II’). *TV coverage*: NRK, ‘Operation Linebacker II’ (28 and 29 December 1972). The aerial bombing of Iraq during the Gulf War from 17 January 1991 (‘Operation Desert Storm’). *TV coverage*: NRK, Gulf War (16 and 17 January 1991). The aerial bombing of Iraq from 20 March 2003 (‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’). *TV coverage*: NRK, the Iraq War (19 and 20 March 2003).

**Table 8.3: Structure of the news programme (first day, coverage of the war outbreak), NRK<sup>194</sup>**

<b>Vietnam, 20 Dec 1972</b>	<b>Gulf War, 17 Jan. 1991</b>	<b>Iraq War, 20 March 03</b>
1.Studio	1.Studio	1.Studio
2.Studio: Telephone/Vietnam	2.Video: Bombing/development	2.Video: Bombing/invasion
3.Studio	3.Live interview: Telephone/Saudi	3.Video: Kuwait
4.Video: Kennedy on the bombing	4.Studio	4.Video: Press conference US
5.Studio	5.Video: Situation in Jordan	5.Studio
6.Video: Int. Reactions	6.Studio	6.Live interview: Satellite/US
7.Studio: Telephone/US	7.Live interview: Telephone/Israel	7.Studio
8.Video: Norwegian reactions	8.Studio	8.Live interview: Telephone/Iraq
9. Studio: <i>other stories</i>	9.Live interview: Telephone/US	9.Studio
	10.Studio	10.Video: Turkey/air attacks
	11.Video:Press conference/bombing	11.Studio
	12... <i>more Iraq</i>	12... <i>more Iraq</i>
Total time of news: 19 minutes Vietnam coverage: 6 ½ minutes	Total time of news: 60 minutes Iraq coverage: 55 minutes	Total time of news: 51 minutes Iraq coverage: 51 minutes

The comparison of Dagsrevyen's coverage of current events in Vietnam and the Middle East substantiates several of the general patterns noted earlier. During all three episodes the news coverage was dominated by individual events, and even though the tempo and communication of news were much higher and more intensive in 1991 and 2003 than back in 1972, also then the news focus and the news frames were characterized by drama, conflict and events. Thus it seems that during the war in Vietnam, just as today, the television news tended to give priority to changing, dramatic and event-filled news coverage, thereby, in a communicative sense, supporting state actions and policy marked by these communicative qualities.<sup>195</sup>

<sup>194</sup> See previous note for sources.

<sup>195</sup> Perhaps only with the exception of the interview with the Swedish and Norwegian Prime Ministers (28 and 29 December 1972), all the 36 top news stories included in the table above are oriented towards single



Yet, there is a relatively widespread feeling that television coverage of war, beginning with the Gulf War of 1991, has brought war much closer to us (Thune 2002). That we can now participate in the war as consumers of news and TV voyeurs, at home in our own living rooms. In the wake of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in the winter of 1999, Michael Ignatieff (2000) published a book titled *Virtual War*. It deals precisely with how war has become composed of visual sensations and experiences acquired in front of the television:

The presence of cameras in the field of operations does more than exert a constraint on military actions. It changes the focus of hostilities from the enemy's fielded forces to the civilian opinion at home [...] This aspect of war is historically new: there were no Allied reporters in Berlin, Hamburg or Dresden when they were bombed, there were no German journalists covering the Allied side of the trenches in World War I. The conduct of war has become more transparent in the past 75 years, and the distance between home and battlefield has diminished (Ignatieff 2000: 192–93).

'The conduct of war has become more transparent' and 'the distance between home and battlefield has diminished', writes Ignatieff. Hereby he indicates that information technology and satellite communications affords us as television viewers an almost optical participation in warfare. We are dealing with something reminiscent of a realization of Marshall McLuhan's (1964) classic formula that 'new technology extends one or more of our senses outside us into the social world' – in this case, new TV technology gives us visual contact with distant acts of war.

This is somewhat of a truism. It is quite obvious that information technology has radically changed our access to television images from far-off places, and, no less, the tempo of transferring pictures such as footage of the surprise bombing attacks on Baghdad in 1991 and 2003, which was sent out within three seconds.<sup>196</sup> Nonetheless, the difference between the visual material used to cover the war in Vietnam in 1972 and that used in the two wars in Iraq is much less conspicuous than what the great new technological developments might suggest. Moreover, Ignatieff's contention that 'the

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events and episodes. The Swedish Prime Minister at the time was Olof Palme, the Norwegian Prime Minister was Trygve Brattli.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with the technical department and Bjørn Hansen at NRK, June 2005.

distance between home and battlefield has diminished' seems to be a rather loose speculation not necessarily borne out by empirical evidence.

First, much of the visual material that was available for covering the bombing of Hanoi in 1972 was almost identical to the coverage of Iraq in 1991 and 2003.<sup>197</sup> The coverage was dominated by pictures of US planes and helicopters taking off from military bases; by ground pictures of the damage from the bombing; pictures of press conferences in Washington and pictures of bombs exploding. Even the most familiar visual icon of the Gulf War of 1991, the arcing lights from anti-aircraft tracer-fire over Baghdad, had its parallel in Vietnam. On 30 December 1972, NRK received a television clip of 22 minutes that showed the bombing attacks themselves and the battles over North Vietnam, by night and by day.<sup>198</sup>

Second, the coverage of the aerial bombing of Vietnam was not, as Ignatieff maintains, more distanced than the coverage of the bombing of Iraq. To the contrary, in relation to the warfare in Vietnam, the coverage was far more searching. As a television viewer, one was a more searching witness to the conduct of the war. The war covered by NRK's Dagsrevyen was much more 'a living room war' in 1972 than those of 1991 and 2003 (Ang 1995).<sup>199</sup> Take for example 28 December 1972. On that day NRK showed footage in which the TV camera was placed inside an American helicopter, behind the shoulder of a soldier operating a machine gun. Helicopters are flying in low over the rice paddies and Vietnamese towns and one can feel the effect of the tracer bullets on the huts and houses on the ground below, see rockets exploding in villages and American helicopters being shot down. Such aggressive pictures were not forthcoming in the coverage of Iraq in either 1991 or 2003. The coverage of the aerial bombing during the two Gulf Wars was spectacular, but it was also distanced. In the course of the two first days there were no pictures of the dead or wounded. Photographic material consisted mainly of pictures of planes in the air, anti-aircraft fire at night, and missiles and planes

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<sup>197</sup> The visual material covering the period between 29 and 30 December available to Dagsrevyen consisted of nine different films, lasting altogether 32 minutes 30 seconds.

<sup>198</sup> These films are from NRK's archives and are (wrongly) labelled 'North Vietnam: Visit from American Delegation'. The film is from the North Vietnamese national press agency and covers destruction occurring after 22 December.

<sup>199</sup> And there is little reason here to believe that the coverage of the Vietnam War at NRK was atypical or significantly different from other TV coverage in the West. In fact, all the pictures used came from either US or Vietnamese sources, and were widely distributed.

taking off from aircraft carriers. There were pictures that could have been taken from any war situation anywhere in the world during recent decades. Philip M. Taylor (1992) in a comprehensive analysis of the media coverage of the Gulf War in 1991, makes the same point:

Television is often regarded as a window on the world and in some respects it is. But, in wartime, its potential to become a window onto the actual battle front is limited, not just by the nature of the medium itself but also by the curtain of darkness which military censorship attempts to draw over it. The window thus becomes a mirror of the images generated by those controlling the information (Taylor 1992: 9).

To sum up: We can see a long series of similarities between the news coverage of the Vietnam War and the Gulf War and the invasion of Iraq. In terms of the use of photos and news focus, the 1972 coverage projects international politics of the 1970s just as urgently and dramatically as is the case in the satellite era following 1990. This supports the core proposition from earlier chapters: our experience of international politics is in part a result of structural communicative factors that to a limited extent vary from one news editorial board to the next, but over time remain relatively constant, defined by the technological and communicative format.

However, this does not mean that there are no important differences between the communication of aerial bombing of Vietnam in 1972 and corresponding actions in the Middle East in 1991 and 2003. Clearly, there has been a quantum leap when it comes to television technology and information technology, and this also affects the communication of the news. The greatest difference and the most important change over time seems to be the amount of news information that is passed on and the speed in the transfer of pictures. Coverage of the Gulf War and the Iraq War was far more massive than the coverage of Vietnam.

For example: During the two first days of the aerial bombing in Vietnam in 1972, NRK devoted altogether about 11 minutes to coverage of Vietnam. During the aerial bombings of Iraq in 1991 and 2003, Dagsrevyen's coverage of the military actions was respectively 77 minutes and 70 minutes. In addition, the events were much more dominant and absolute. In 1972, 30% of the total news coverage was devoted to Vietnam,

while the remaining 70% dealt with other news issues, a series of other foreign policy events. In 1991 and 2003, the figures were much higher. As much as 97% of the news concerned the situation in the Middle East on those days in 2003, while the figure in 1991 was well over 80%. In addition, the coverage of the Vietnam War was a far less excluding affair than was the coverage in 1991 or 2003. 'Operation Linebacker II' in Vietnam did not shove aside all other foreign policy issues and questions. On the contrary, NRK gave space to five other foreign policy issues in the course of the first two days of the bombing in Vietnam in 1972.<sup>200</sup> During the aerial attacks on Baghdad in 1991 and 2003, however, the gaze of the news was nearly monolithic and one-eyed. With only one exception, all the foreign news during the first days dealt with the conduct of the war (See Table 8.3) The only concurrent news consisted of purely national items, but even these were severely limited in the first days of the two wars in the Gulf.<sup>201</sup>

How do we sum this up? News coverage seems to have moved in the direction of the type of communicative selector that I have called news 'singularity'. Increasingly, news coverage is characterized by the tendency to over-focus and inflate one dominant event at a time. Single events exclude other parallel occurrences and issues, and create news singularities.

The bombing of Hanoi was a prominent event of its day, remembered for generations. But still, as a news event it was far from being treated as the dominant and most dramatic point in the Vietnam War. The situation was certainly different during the Gulf War and the Iraq War. These events indicate overriding actions that cast their shadows over all or almost all foreign policy questions and occurrences. Due to the new information technology, the two Iraq wars were also visually much more strongly present. The pictures and the films did not bring the television viewer any closer into the war than in the case of Vietnam. Quite the reverse. But there were so infinitely many

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<sup>200</sup> These were the state visit to the Soviet Union (20 Dec. 1972), European integration (20 Dec. 1972), talks between East and West Germany (21 Dec. 1972), events in Londonderry (21 Dec. 1972), and the Soviet anniversary (21 Dec. 1972). At the height of the air attacks against Vietnam on 28 Dec., the main news story was that the Israeli embassy in Bangkok had been occupied by terrorists. Between 22 and 30 December, NRK also ran a long story daily on the earthquake in Managua, which for a time was also the top story of the day. See the printed schedule for Dagsrevyen (*kjøreplan fjernsynet*) for 13–30 December 1972, NRK.

<sup>201</sup> These figures are based on a comparison of the Dagsrevyen schedule for the periods 16–21 January 1991 and 19–24 March 2003. These schedules contain the content and the time frames of the news programme.

more pictures. In visual and temporal terms, the Gulf War and the war in Iraq were thus far more strongly present than was Vietnam.

#### **4. Conclusion: 'Our media-driven view of reality'**

In the opening of this chapter I indicated that the political influence vested in the news media is a gradual development over time where the foreign policy focus, interests and operations of democratic states perform an adaptation to the communicative logic of the news media. I also suggested that this 'power of adaptation' rests on two historical developments: the first, that the increased role of the news media in covering international politics has led to a reorientation by politicians towards reality as it is observed through the news media and has become pivotal source/channel for information/communication; and second, that the communicative structures of today's news media infrastructure are reflected in the focus and outlook of the foreign policy elite.

In order to demonstrate these developments we have compared Norway's official political debate and news coverage of three military operations over a timespan of thirty years. The following historical tendencies have been confirmed: The parliamentary foreign policy debates have become narrowed down to fewer items and questions. The debates are also characterized by an increasing emphasis on dramatic events; politics seems to have moved away from political processes and long-term developments, and relates increasingly directly to the current news agenda. Communicative selectors like drama and single events have for a long time been components of news coverage of international politics. The old axiom about the interrelationship between communication and political attention – that those elements of international politics that unfold over lengthy timespans are likely to receive much less attention from the media than are more restless and rapidly changing events and developments – held true during the Vietnam War as it did in the First and Second Gulf Wars (see Galtung & Ruge 1965).

Even so there have been important changes in news coverage. Today's news treatment of international politics is more compact, less diverse and more one-sidedly

focused on individual news items. Moreover the news information is more visual and less text-based.<sup>202</sup> During the Vietnam War, access to pictures was limited and the news was substantially conveyed in words. By 1991, and even more forcefully in 2003, the narrative had become visual, and the text supplementary.<sup>203</sup>

To conclude: we have identified two tendencies or developments pointing in the same direction – one linked to the media, and one to the official foreign policy debates. But what does this imply for the relationship between the news media and foreign policy? The first and obvious conclusion is that both news coverage of international politics and the foreign policy debates have changed over time, and that these changes are somewhat parallel. The public presentation of the world via the news media and official parliamentary debates on foreign policy have moved in the same direction: toward a more absorbing and singular focus, at the expense of diversity and political issues that are not visual, dramatic or rapidly unfolding.

The changes in the media and the changes in political debate are more than disparate parallel developments. There are clear indications that the foreign policy debate, and the outlook of individual actors, over time have performed an adaptation to the evolving predominant communicative structure of the news media. With a view to the official foreign policy debate in the Norwegian parliament, the communicative selectors of the news medium and the foreign policy views of politicians seem increasingly to be equivalent. Not only have the news media become a dominant source of knowledge and an empirical reference in the debates: news events are also increasingly the politicians' main collective visual and emotional experiences of international events and developments.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> This is often considered to be a general tendency and has recently been labelled by among others, Jürgen Habermas, as *the iconic turn*. See Hubert Burda Stiftung <http://www.iconic-turn.de>.

<sup>203</sup> This is quite clear from the opening minutes of the three military operations. In 1972 all live reporting was on the telephone accompanied by a still photograph of the journalist presented on the TV screen (see NRK 'kjøreplan', 20 Dec. 1972). In 1991 NRK's first coverage of the war was a two-minute series of film clips from the US attack, accompanied by text read by the anchor person from the studio; however most of the live reports were still given over the telephone, only now the voice of the journalist was joined to the film clips, still photos and illustrations sent to the viewers (see NRK recording of Dagsrevyen, 17 and 18 Jan. 1991). In 2003 all the live reports were standups. Telephone reports were used only when satellite connection was not available (see recording of Dagsrevyen, 20 and 21 March 2003).

<sup>204</sup> This is not the same as saying that information technology and the media are the sole reasons for such a development. The monomaniacal turn of both political debates and international news coverage may also be understood in relation to more general ideological and political changes. For example, we might speak

Former leader of the parliamentary standing committee on foreign policy, Bjørn Tore Godal, critically reflected on his own and other MPs' new relationship to the media during his opening statement of the annual foreign policy debate in the midst of the Gulf War of 1991: 'Our media-driven picture of reality often leads to us to see other dimensions of reality than are actually adequate. We consider it less important and dramatic that 20 million people are now threatened with famine in Africa.'<sup>205</sup>

Perhaps Godal was right, in a strictly political sense: what passes through the filter of the news media is seen as being more important. And these filters or selectors have a structure that favours drama, single events and change. A former Norwegian foreign minister, with experience from the 'war against terrorism', concluded his description of the media/foreign policy relation based on his own experience – and what seems to be a view shared by most other representatives of the political elite – in a manner suggesting that the news media possess a power of adaptation:

[P]olicy, both domestic and foreign policy, gets very events-oriented. You seize an event, and then you get driven onwards, and you draw up a strategy on the basis of a single event, [...] And that means that policy gets to be highly events-oriented. We jump from event to event. For example, with all the resources that went into this war against terrorism, at least in the early days, all the other crises in the world were forgotten. Simply because there weren't any TV cameras covering those other crises.

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about a general 'de-ideologizing' that serves to push aside the long-term and the systematic in favour of what is momentary and falls within the approved agenda. The American sociologist Daniel Bell's classic analysis of the fall of political ideologies, *The End of Ideology* (1961) can be read in such a manner. Communications theorist Robert Entman (2000, 2004) for his part offers a contextualized explanation of this development. According to Entman, the change in political debate and news coverage can be seen as a result of systematic changes of international relations – that, in the '[a]bsence of an overarching theory of the sort provided by the Cold War, the media seem driven to fill the vacuum' (Entman 2000: 14–15).

<sup>205</sup> 'Utenriksdebatten', 4 February 1991; *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 2113.

## **Part Four**

### **Summary & Conclusion**



## **Introduction to Part Four**

This final part highlights and summarizes the main arguments and findings from the sections above, as well as offering some concrete suggestion for wider empirical research drawn from the Norwegian case. In addition to this, one more task remains: Throughout this thesis, I have described an increasingly symbiotic relationship between the news media and foreign policy, characterized by greater political orientation towards reality as observed through the media, and a parallel political adaptation to the communicative logic of the media. But here we must ask: What are the broader historical reasons for this political re-orientation and the increased centrality of the news media? Moreover: what is the relevance of the central argument to the current study of International Relations?

## Summary & Conclusion

Let us again return to our original question: What kind of political effect do the news media have on how democratic states operate and conduct their affairs in international politics?

According to the overarching argument developed in this thesis, I have suggested that finding the answer to this general question of the relationship between the news media and foreign policy, within the academic discipline of IR, has to begin by distinguishing between two essentially different concepts of the news media. Either the media can be studied as an independent variable and *actor* that may or may not affect politics, or, alternatively, the media can be viewed as an arena or *field* on which politics is played out.

These two concepts, I have argued, open for two very different ways of approaching the effect and influence of the media within the realm of foreign policy. If we approach the news media as an actor and independent variable, the model is a typically causal one. And the critical scientific test of the existence of media power would be to decide whether the news media have the ability, through critical coverage and framing, to directly affect decisions and the conduct of foreign policy related to specific events and issue areas. If the media, on the other hand, are viewed not as separate media institutions, but as a communicative arena and field in which political behaviour and utterances are embedded, the model is a very different one. The media/foreign policy relationship becomes a symbiotic one. Consequently, the power and influence of the news media can be studied as a constitutive effect. And, according to the argument of this thesis, that means understanding the news media as a uniform communicative structure, to which the behaviour of politicians and operation of states constantly perform adaptations over time.

Now, this is certainly a distinction of a highly conceptual nature. And it is only one of several possible ways in which we can perceive and conceptualize the news media. However, I have argued throughout the thesis that the conceptual division is closely related to a significant empirical inconsistency concerning today's knowledge about the influence of the news media on the conduct of foreign policy. As we observed in Chapters II and IV, comparing the current academic media/foreign policy debate with the self-description by the foreign policy decision-making elite in Norway, this inconsistency is quite striking. According to leading scholars and many journalists and editors, the actual influence of the media on the field of foreign policy is modest. The real political actors, on the other hand, clearly see an important political influence vested in the news media institutions. A long list of international leaders, from Richard Nixon to Tony Blair and Boutros Boutros-Ghali are unanimous,<sup>206</sup> and as many as nine of Norway's thirteen most influential foreign politicians between 2000 and 2008 are of the same opinion.

Generally, such an empirical discrepancy would suggest that one of the two positions must be wrong. Yet, in this case both conclusions are most likely accurate. The findings of recent scholarship are well-founded, and it is probably correct to downplay the influence of the news media. And still there is little ground to doubt the practical experiences that lead decision-makers to conclude that the news media play a significant role in their conduct of foreign policy.

The reason for this, I have argued, is precisely the conceptual distinction between the two concepts of the news media mentioned above: the distinction between viewing the news media as a foreign policy actor, or as an arena on which foreign politics is played out. The scholars and the actors are answering two different questions. While scholars (and foreign policy editors and journalists) perceive the potential effect of the news media in terms of a traditional causal concept of influence and power (see Chapter III), many of the decision-makers seems to view the media/foreign policy relation in terms of a constitutive and interwoven relationship, whereby the news media possess power by having the capacity to define the representation of the very reality confronting foreign politicians, and thereby force decision-makers to adapt to the basic communicative signature of the news media.

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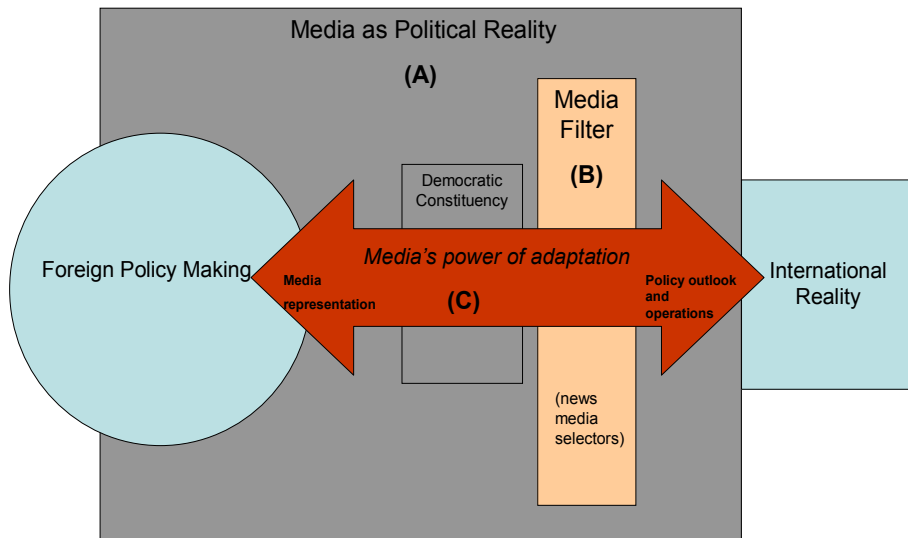
<sup>206</sup> See note 17 in Chapter I, for quotation by Boutros Boutros-Ghali and other international leaders.

In short: This thesis has been a systematic attempt at formulating a theoretical model that can capture and refine the views of the news media expressed by the foreign policy elite, and by so doing, to underscore the relevance of incorporating studies of the news media into the discipline of international relations and foreign policy. The model does not contradict the ‘indexing hypothesis’ or other well-established approaches to the media/foreign policy nexus presented in Chapter II. Rather, it seeks to expand the debate and to incorporate well-known concepts and theoretical positions within political science and media sociology. And as I pointed out in the Preface, the main methodological guide for achieving this has been inductive theory-building: to identify empirical gaps and limits in existing theory and develop a different theoretical model to fill the gap. In simpler terms, therefore, it would be accurate to consider the model as a refinement and expansion of a proto-theory of media power already enclosed in the foreign policy decision-making elite’s description of their own practical experience with the news media.

### **A constitutive theory of media power in IR**

Below is an attempt to visualize some of the central elements of this theoretical model, developed in the second part of the thesis. (See Model 9.1.) What has been proposed is a ‘constitutive understanding of media power in international politics’, in which the mass mediation of news media functions as an overriding political reality and a prime focal point for decision-makers’ foreign policy actions and utterances (A), and where foreign policy decision-making over time performs an adaptation of a particularly uniform communicative logic of the media.

**Model 9.1: constitutive understanding of media power in international politics**



In short, the theoretical model indicates that the news media represent and filter events, developments and occurrences in international politics according to a structural pattern (B). This structure is not a mental formation. Nor are these structures reducible to the individual views and journalistic choices of news journalists. The structures are defined by systematic technological and dramaturgical constraints of the media and by developments in information technology, which only to a small degree vary between different news organizations and journalists. I have labelled this type of purely structural communicative qualities that filter our common perception of international politics as ‘communicative selectors’, distinguishing them from another (and more contextual) type

of news media selectors called ‘communitarian selectors’. The empirical case studies indicate that the global transmission of news is defined by at least five important *communicative selectors* of this kind (see Chapter VII):

- High level of visibility/ *photographability*
- High level of *event-orientation*
- High level of focus on *drama* and *change*
- High level of *news quantity/supply*
- High level of *news singularity and abrupt shifts*

According to the general model, these communicative patterns or qualities of the news media are, over time, to some degree reproduced and reflected in the states’ conduct of foreign policy. I have called this process of gradual adjustment the news media’s *power of adaptation* (C). This is an understanding of historical and social change by which the news media are to some extent conceived of analogous to an environmental condition (Bourdieu 1993: 78). The news media’s power of adaptation is a type of influence where political actors and decision-making systems constantly and reflexively perform an adjustment to the media’s communicative logic. I have also suggested that this process of adaptation is strengthened by a higher level of ‘differentiation’ (or doubling) within the realm of foreign policy, whereby the foreign policy apparatus and decision-makers become increasingly oriented towards the international reality as observed through the news media, and thereby less focused on media-independent elements of international reality. Hence, the power of the news media is to tilt the political *modus operandi* of foreign policy from a media-independent towards more media-dependent form of actions and problem-solving policies. As a result, the making of foreign policy – in highly mass-mediated and opinion-sensitive societies – becomes an uneasy balance act between what I have called instrumental and symbolic problem-solving approaches.

Although they are not conclusive, the case studies of Norwegian parliamentary debates over a timespan of thirty years nonetheless underscore this notion of an increased ‘differentiation’ of the conduct of foreign policy. They also exemplify an historical process of adaptation of communicative selectors to the political world – the focus,

perception and interest of the foreign policy elite. First, the foreign policy debate has become narrowed down to fewer items and questions, and is characterized by more emphasis on dramatic, visual and events, with less focus on long-term developments. Second, these changes in the official political foreign policy debates and reviews are parallel to the structural changes in the news coverage during the same time, indicating a degree of correlation between the historical transformation of the communicative system of the news media and the field of foreign policy.

### **Five empirical hypotheses of media power and foreign policy**

What are the implications of these general propositions for the actual political conduct of states on the international stage? To be sure, the methodological limitation of this thesis should be quite clear. The aim has been to develop a general theoretical model, and to refine and illustrate the general argument through a study (admittedly incomplete) of the role of the media in the case of Norwegian foreign policy. The object of the empirical explorations has not been to test or falsify, but to develop and clarify the argument. Thus, it is still an open question if, or to what extent, the communicative selectors that define and filter much of the representation of international politics, and which we have found traces of in the Norwegian cases, have an impact on how states define their interests, apply their resources and capabilities and prioritizes between different issues in international affairs. I have offered some bolts and nuts for a model which points in this direction, but I have offered no empirical assurance.

This said, however, the general theoretical model, as well as the empirical illustrations, do indeed establish the ground for future research. And it also suggests the main task and point of departure of such empirical exploration. On the backdrop of the discussion in the previous sections I shall draw five conclusions. These have all been substantiated and adjusted through the plausibility probe conducted in part III of the thesis. Yet, besides being empirical results based on the Norwegian case, these may also be considered as generic empirical hypotheses of the specific impact of the media on the operations of states in international politics, opening up the possibility for future

empirical research and testing of the news media's power of adaptation within the study of foreign policy.

A high degree of news mediation of international politics, and a high level of opinion-sensitivity among policy decision-makers, will increase the likelihood of the following tendencies for how statesmen and decision-makers set their priorities and behave on the international scene:

*i) The media downplay non-photogenic sides of politics.*

A high degree of news mediation of international politics leads to increased political and public attention and interest in concrete events, incidents and visual elements of international reality, and an equivalent decrease in non-visual facts and connections.

*ii) The media activate short-term problem-solving policy strategies.*

A high degree of news mediation of international politics activates foreign political behaviour with a focus on short-term developments and rapid real-world effects, rather than on long-term processes and consequences.

*iii) The media sensationalize the conduct of foreign policies.*

A high degree of news mediation of international politics rationalizes an increase in the use of dramatic and visual tools and instruments in the conduct of foreign policy, and for the management of international crises and threats.

*iv) The media accentuate a singular and rapidly shifting political focus.*

A high degree of news mediation of international politics increases the 'singularization' of foreign policy management, in the sense that the political and public agenda, outlook and interest are dominated by few rather than multiple events and political issues at a time, and that the political agenda and interest are marked by abrupt shifts of political attention.



v) *The media nationalize the domestic foreign policy agenda and international perception.*

The global news focus and the framing of the news are largely internationalized and homogeneous. Yet, a high degree of news mediation of international politics may still nationalize the conduct of foreign policy and preserve traditional foreign policy orientations and outlooks. The reason for this is that the normative and moral narratives and perceptions in the media reflect fixed and pre-established national values and identities, and international viewpoints.

These five conclusions on how the news media affect the operation of states in international politics are all empirical hypotheses, and may all be operationalized and addressed either through specific case studies, or, as I suggested in Chapter VIII, to conduct empirical analyses of wider historical changes and tendencies. For the purpose of this concluding chapter, however, let me round off the argument with a pure conjecture: what would the international political arena look like in a world where these five hypotheses were empirically significant? Presumably, such a world would seem relatively over-focused on single dramatic and visual events, with rather abrupt shifts from one dominant event to the next. As members of the public we would experience the world as a long series of disconnected events.

The Norwegian political theorist, Trond Berg Eriksen (1987), has written a historical ideographical analysis of 'the messenger' and the role of the media in the development of European society. His analysis coincides to a great degree with what I am examining here. Berg Eriksen places considerable weight on what he calls the establishment of a 'serial' political reality. By this he means that the media steer and direct our attention, provide our daily topics of conversation, provoke our horror, pity and indignation, and in this way can determine our mental inventory from day to day. We live in an eternal 'snapshot' series of absolute moments, where history loses its depth, where memory is constrained, and where international events are placed in a broader historical framework only on exceptional occasions. Historical perspectives and understanding of political processes therefore demand that we disengage from the media's trajectory of

news events – otherwise we lose part of the ability to take a standpoint toward the reality that we are constantly consuming.

What Berg Eriksen describes as the establishment of a collective, serial point of view of reality is reminiscent of the psychologically subjective condition known in medical terminology as monomania: ‘excessive concentration on a single object or idea’. I have previously used this notion – not in the psychological sense, but to denote a form of news coverage that to an appreciable degree is characteristic of the tendencies of foreign policy described above. Is there a general tendency toward such a monomaniacal turn of foreign policy? And if so, does that affect political practice and the orientation taken by politicians regarding international issues?

The conclusions of this thesis suggest that there is such a tendency. And many observers have, in a broad context, indicated much of the same. Among them is the German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, with his idea of what has been called ‘the iconic turn’.<sup>207</sup> ‘One has to show in pictures what one wants to say, because political attention and visibility presuppose visibility’. Politics must be compatible with the visual requirements of the media if they are to be recognized. But perhaps the media’s constitutive power of reality penetrates more deeply than simply the making of pictures of reality and the political scene. The interviews conducted with the Norwegian foreign policy elite presented in Chapter IV point in that direction. The same seems to be true for the shifts in the way foreign policy is presented and discussed in the Norwegian parliament. It is probable this is only one of several possible empirical indicators of a much broader trend. The practical experience and self-understanding of many of those who stand at the intersection between political actions and mass communication seems to be quite unambiguous.

There are thus good reasons for searching for a general theoretical model that may make sense of the type of media influence they seem to articulate. And there is little to indicate that this theoretical model is geographically limited to the case of Norway. Before leaving office as the UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair in June 2007, gave a long self-reflective speech on what he called ‘the challenge of the changing nature of

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<sup>207</sup> See Jürgen Habermas’ (2006) essay ‘Die Intellektuellen und Der Iconic Turn’, [/www.iconicturn.de/iconicturn/home/](http://www.iconicturn.de/iconicturn/home/). See also Hubert Burda Stiftung’s *Iconic Turn – die neue Macht der Bilder*, [www.iconicturn.de](http://www.iconicturn.de)

communication on politics'.<sup>208</sup> The speech summarizes quite well some of the basic tenets of what I have called a constitutive understanding of media power in IR. Blair said:

My principal reflection is not about 'blaming' anyone. It is that the relationship between politics, public life and the media is changing as a result of the changing context of communication in which we all operate; no-one is at fault – it is a fact; but it is my view that the effect of this change is seriously adverse to the way public life is conducted [...]

I am going to say something that few people in public life will say, but most know is absolutely true: a vast aspect of our jobs today – outside of the really major decisions, as big as anything else – is coping with the media, its sheer scale, weight and constant hyperactivity.

At points, it literally overwhelms. Talk to senior people in virtually any walk of life today – business, military, public services, sport, even charities and voluntary organisations and they will tell you the same. People don't speak about it because, in the main, they are afraid to.

But it is true, nonetheless, and those who have been around long enough, will also say it has changed significantly in the past years. The danger is, however, that we then commit the same mistake as the media do with us: it's the fault of bad people.

My point is: it is not the people who have changed; it is the context within which they work [...]

There is now, again, a debate about why Parliament is not considered more important and as ever, the Government is held to blame. But we haven't altered any of the lines of accountability between Parliament and the Executive.

What has changed is the way Parliament is reported or rather not reported. Tell me how many maiden speeches are listened to; how many excellent second reading speeches or committee speeches are covered. Except when they generate major controversy, they aren't.

If you are a backbench MP today, you learn to give a press release first and a good Parliamentary speech second. My case, however is: there's no point either in blaming the media. We are both handling the changing nature of communication [...]

It is sometimes said that the media is accountable daily through the choice of readers and viewers. That is true up to a point. But the reality is that the viewers or readers have no objective yardstick to measure what they are being told. In every other walk of life in our society that exercises power, there are external forms of accountability, not least through the media itself.

So it is true politicians are accountable through the ballot box every few years. But they are also profoundly accountable, daily, through the media, which is why a free press is so important.

I am not in a position to determine this one way or another. But a way needs to be found. I do believe this relationship between public life and media is now damaged in a manner that requires repair. The damage saps the country's confidence and self-belief; it undermines its assessment of itself, its institutions; and above all, it reduces our capacity to take the right decisions, in the right spirit for our future.

I've made this speech after much hesitation. I know it will be rubbished in certain quarters. But I also know this has needed to be said.

Tony Blair's speech is a rather clear-cut description of a monomaniacal turn in the relationship between the news media and political management. It also substantiates

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<sup>208</sup> The speech was given at Reuters headquarters in London, 12 July 2007. See 'Full text: Blair on the media', [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/6744581.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/6744581.stm).

important elements of my argument. Blair confirms the notion of political life as being marked by a *modus operandi* increasingly tilted from a media-independent towards a more media-dependent form of action and problem-solving policies, and that a vast aspect of the political job today ‘outside of the really major decisions, as big as anything else – is coping with the media, its sheer scale, weight and constant hyperactivity’. Blair also gives a rather precise digest of the media’s ‘power of adaptation’, referring to the influence of the media to an adjustment of ‘public life [to] the changing context of communication in which we all operate’.

In this sense, and recalling the conversation between Prime Minister Blair and President Bush on the morning after the ‘9/11’ terrorist attacks against the USA (Chapter V), we should not find it surprising that they both viewed the question of a military response as an uneasy balance of manoeuvring politically in a media-independent or a media-dependent reality, responding to the terrorist attacks ‘effectively’ or ‘rapidly’. Nor should there be much reason to suspect that the representatives of the Norwegian foreign policy quoted earlier in the thesis give voice to an exceptional view of the relationship between foreign policy and the media.

### **The historical conditions of media power in IR**

An important question remains. Even though we may have theorized an increasingly more symbiotic relationship between the news media and foreign policy and a greater political orientation towards what Blair calls the ‘context of communication’, we have still not discussed the possible historical reasons for these changes. As we put the question in the introduction to the conclusion – What are the broader historical conditions for the increased centrality of the news media?

I hold that there are three basic political and technological historical conditions of media influence in international politics. And I shall make this argument by conducting a short evaluation of two very different concrete experiences from the history of international relations. On the one hand a historical situation where there was little

likelihood of any relationship between news dissemination and foreign policy relationship, and, on the other, a situation where the relationship was close and direct.

After all, it is certainly not difficult to imagine situations where it is not likely that there exists any relationship whatsoever between news and foreign policy, and where any and every attempt to analyse media power in relation to policy becomes irrelevant. Take, for example as an illustration, the final phase of the Napoleonic Wars, the Battle of Waterloo during the summer of 1815. There were no news correspondents in attendance at this battle (Hohenberg 1996).<sup>209</sup> But even if there had been, it is doubtful whether the propagation of the news could have played any role. The media version of the battle would have affected general assessments of the event in London or Paris after it had occurred, but hardly the event itself.

The reason can be found in at least two obvious conditions. The first has to do with the information technology of the day. Completely apart from what any possible news correspondents at Waterloo might have communicated from the battlefield during the summer of 1815, the dissemination of news was so slow that the events would have been over or at least extremely far advanced before any news of the battle could be communicated. The second reason has to do with the fact that the possible influence of the news media would have been limited by the process of political resolution in 1815: in all essential respects, important events and occurrences were geographically located at the same place as the object at which the decision was aimed. The main decision-makers (here: Napoleon, Wellington and Blücher), themselves took part in the battle, so there was no place for newspapers and correspondents of the day to affect the decision-makers' ideas directly.

This simple description can be made more general. The foreign policy decision-making context during the Napoleon wars was the *nomadic* foreign policy of royal power (Neumann 2002, Briggs & Burke 2002). Nomadic foreign policy is distinguished by having a form of policy and leadership in inter-state relations that is linked to personal participation, and where foreign-affairs politicians – whether kings, emperors or lords – must themselves go out and travel in order to fulfil their political roles. The abdication

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<sup>209</sup> There were, however, private news agents. The House of Rothschild had one such informant who, it has been determined, was the first person to come back to London with the news that France had suffered defeat (Hohenberg 1996).

speech of the Hapsburg emperor Charles V in 1556 is illustrative. In this speech, the emperor applauded himself as a sovereign with an extraordinary overview of the Europe of his day. Charles V maintained that he owed his leadership abilities to his energetic travel agenda, and boasted of having undertaken forty long journeys in the course of his reign. Nineteen of these had been to Germany and the Netherlands, six to Spain and four to France. He had also visited Britain and North America twice (Briggs & Burke 2002: 25).

But it was also during the reign of Charles V that there began to develop what was later called the European ‘paper kingdom’. This paper kingdom involves an early ‘de-territorialization’ of the system of decision-making and practice in the field of foreign policy. In contrast to the travelling or nomadic monarchy, foreign policy here developed in the direction of a formal system of taking and disseminating decisions based on the delivery of letters and instructions. This practice was referred to as a ‘post system’ as it relied upon established ‘posts’ or ‘stations’ for horses and messengers along a set route. These official post routes linked the central administrations of several different state powers to their more peripheral outposts. By forming a communications network between the various royal houses of Europe, the post routes also instituted an administration of foreign policy that was contingent upon a medium of communication. Nevertheless, on the whole, in order to talk about a relationship between news and politics under modern conditions it is not enough just to have a formalized network for communicating information. News information must also in some ways be public – available to a general public. As Habermas (1971) has argued, this development can be seen as a stepwise movement toward the emergence of a new type of actor in political life – the bourgeois general public assuming the role of an anonymous political public. ‘In the same manner that one [...] cannot talk about “post” before the regular facility of letter transport was commonly available to the general public – one similarly finds in the strict sense no pressure for regular reports to be made public before, to reiterate, the public had the possibility of gaining general access’ (Habermas 1971: 15).

To be sure, it is also certainly possible to think of situations in which no relations are to be found between the media and foreign policy – due, not to the means of communication or geographical conditions between the subject and object of decision-

making, but to purely political considerations. News significance and the media's potential influence on policy can be viewed as linked to definite types of political regime, and to systems of leadership. Purely totalitarian or autocratic regimes can be seen as leadership systems where the propagation of news is not of political significance, either because state power has full control over the media (so there will never be any distance between official policy and news dissemination), or because state power is so total and all-encompassing that the influence of the media via public opinion is without relevance and is dismissed as unproblematic. The first is the well-known situation in many historical and current dictatorships. The latter may be less common, but it is not unknown.<sup>210</sup>

Moving to the opposite end on the scale: It is not difficult to imagine specific situations characterized by a very close and direct relationship between news dissemination and foreign policy, and where analyses of the news media appear highly relevant to the understanding of foreign policy. (See Briggs & Burke 2002, Scannell & Cardiff 1991, Hohenberg 1996: Chap. 1, Emery & Smith 1954: 96–98.) One example of this, relevant in the context of this thesis, is from Norway in the final period leading up to the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. In relation to the important live, televised broadcasts of the speeches given to the UN Security Council by the head of the UN weapons inspection (UNSCOM), Hans Blix, and the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, Norway's then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jan Petersen, and Prime Minister, Kjell Magne Bondevik, sat together in the office of the latter and watched the broadcast.<sup>211</sup> The reason given was that 'the Prime Minister wanted the government to stand as one, and comprehension of this type of news event is completely decisive for forming opinions about the situation.'<sup>212</sup> With such close interweaving, on the one side, between forming and communicating foreign policy, and on the other, news dissemination, it is obvious that the media have an influence on policy. At the very least we can conclude that how the news channels 'frame', analyse, or use pictures has a direct effect on how decision-

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<sup>210</sup> The role of the media in several of the Gulf states can exemplify this. Both in Qatar and in the United Arab Emirates the media are relatively free and at times take a critical stance, without the authorities fearing that this might undermine their position.

<sup>211</sup> Interview with communications directors, *Statsministerens kontor* (Office of the Prime Minister), Oslo, October 2005.

<sup>212</sup> Interview with communications directors, *Statsministerens kontor* (Office of the Prime Minister), Oslo, October 2005.

makers interpret and understand such specific events (McCombs & Bell 1996). But it is also possible to conceive of a more indirect political effect – for example, that the spreading of the news forms opinion, and this opinion in turn affects the politicians' choice of action, or that to some degree the decision-makers see the media's points of view and news coverage as an expression of the broader general public opinion (Entman 2004: 134–44).

These anecdotal descriptions of the relationship between news and foreign policy can be made more general. The speed at which today's news is disseminated is such that there is a disconnection from geographical distance. In theory, every international event could be handled as news material whose age is only the two or three seconds needed to transfer images via satellite or by fibre-optic landline from anywhere in the world.<sup>213</sup> In this way we may speak of a factual muting of the traditional advance time of foreign policy *vis-à-vis* the spread of news. The relevance of time and territory has gradually been weakened by an increasing degree of *simultaneity* of foreign policy incidents viewed as factual events and as considered and mitigated events. NATO's 44-day air war against Yugoslavia in 1999, 'Operation Allied Forces', is illustrative of this development. For a long time, the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers, Europe (SHAPE) in Belgium, which commanded NATO's forces, revealed the progress of the war to the responsible politicians and to the European general news public roughly at the same time (Ignatieff 2000: 93).

Equally illustrative are investigations into the global spread of news about terrorist attacks against the USA on 11 September 2001.<sup>214</sup> In the course of the first hour, over 60% of the world's population had been informed about the terror attacks in New York. Within three hours, this figure was over 80%. In several parts of the world the population learned of these events sooner than did people within the USA. Two hours after the first aircraft hit the World Trade Center, for example, an equally high percentage of the populations of India and of the USA were aware of what had occurred – in both places, approximately 80% of the population.

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<sup>213</sup> The speed will vary somewhat depending on whether the information is sent by landline or satellite, and how many satellites the information must be beamed through. Interview, Bjørn Hansen, NRK, 22 November 2005.

<sup>214</sup> These figures refer to a poll conducted by Gallup International in 30 countries during the days that followed the events of 9/11. See <http://www.gallup-international.com>.



In sum, we are thus faced with two simplified situations. First, there is the type of historical situation, illustrated here by Napoleonic Wars, in which there is no possible relation between news dissemination and foreign policy. The second is a situation where the connection could be considered as strong and extremely direct. What distinguishes the two from one another? There seem to be three crucial historical factors.

The *first* has to do with *speed* – the news is disseminated more or less simultaneously with the development of a given event or situation.<sup>215</sup>

The *second* has to do with *the location of decision-making* in foreign policy – whether the practice of decision-making is based on immediate access to the reality that the decision is directed towards, or whether it presupposes the existence of an information medium.

The *third* relationship has to do with *type of states* – different forms of political regime and the legitimizing of state power.

In other words: the increased role of the news media in focus in this thesis seems to have been brought about by at least two grand historical developments. On the one hand, the gradual innovations of information technology that have shrunk the distance between factual international events and the communication of these events, and also define the representation of these events to a great general news public. And on the other hand, democratization and the step-by-step inclusion of an anonymous public as the political basis of state legitimacy. Therefore, and to end the discussion on a normative

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<sup>215</sup> Historically, ‘news simultaneity’ developed over a long period of time. The degree of news simultaneity has also varied from country to country within the same period (Taylor 1997). The same thing obviously applies to ‘policy legitimization’, which is linked to the historical growth of new forms of state constitutionality, the relationship between citizen and state, and the dominance of various political ideologies in different places in the world at different points in time. Nevertheless there is an unacknowledged view among many communications researchers that in the course of the 1980s something like a paradigm shift occurred in relation to global news communication (see Briggs & Burke 2002: Chap. 7, MacGregor 1997, Weimann 2000: 3–15, Volkmer 1999). To a substantial degree this change has been technologically based. It involves the direct transmission of pictures and sound, computers and satellite communication that give the impression that it is possible to participate constantly in international events without, so to speak, any geographical time-lag. The first time a global mass public could experience such simultaneous participation in an international political event were the satellite transmissions of student demonstrations in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square during the autumn of 1989. CNN’s coverage of the Gulf War in 1991 was the first time this form of news consumption was established as a practice taken up by a greater group of people as part of their everyday affairs.

note, we could say that the new form of the relationship between public life and media that Tony Blair believes ‘undermines [the country’s] assessment of itself, its institutions; and reduces the capacity to take the right decisions, in the right spirit for our future’ stems from the merger of at least two long-term historical trends – an increasingly opinion-sensitive political system of public governance mixed with a global news media infrastructure defined by a uniform digital information technology. As a result, those elements of global reality that do not harmonize with the communicative logic of this infrastructure – regardless of real significance and consequence – are much less likely to get political attention, arouse public emotions, or activate a response. Political life has fallen victim to the news media’s ‘power of adaptation’. It has gradually adjusted itself to the values and requirements of a ‘good news story’ and the superiority of the omnipresent media reality.

### **Relevance for the study of IR**

In the opening chapter of this thesis I made the somewhat bombastic claim that the news media are a ‘missing link’ within the study of International Relations Theory (IR). This claim is not mine alone, but has been variously expressed by IR scholars working at the intersection between IR and media studies (see Shaw 2000, Gilboa 2005a, Robinson 2002). Few have been more unambiguous on this matter than Martin Shaw. For him, the news media are not simply one of several pivotal ingredients of the empirical universe the discipline of IR is committed to make sense of: the media are an indispensable ingredient in any academic exploration of current world politics. ‘[S]o far as international relations fails to understand the media, it also fails to grasp the new shape of world politics’, Shaw (2000: 27–8) stated some ten years ago.

One may concur with or oppose such sweeping statements. Many scholars from the structural realist (neorealist) or historical materialist academic IR camp, for instance, would perhaps be sceptical. And so would many traditional realists, on the basis that national interests of states are considered as permanent and natural, with the media being simply an instrument that might affect *how* foreign policy decision-makers seek to secure

the state's interests – not *what* they do. However, Shaw's basic observation expresses a central point. Even though many academics agree on the importance of the news media, and, as we have established in this thesis, also the fact that foreign policy practitioners and decision-makers in general consider the news media as essential in their own political work, the role of the news media has remained peripheral to the production of knowledge within IR. Before concluding this thesis, let us return to a question raised in the first chapter: the relationship between the news media and the discipline of IR. What is the relevance of the theoretical argument and the empirical findings that I have sought to formulate and substantiate to the wider academic discipline of IR?

It is my hope that the first and best answer to this question is the content of this thesis itself. At the very core of my argument lies the conviction that the foreign policy conduct of opinion-sensitive political regimes cannot be understood independent of the dominant practice of mass-communicating international events and issue-areas. Such an argument does not necessarily contradict a historical materialistic understanding of history, nor does it presuppose a strong constructivist position. Rather, it indicates a connection between dominant historical forms of information technology and foreign policy.

Further, the argument of the role of the news media developed through out this thesis is directly relevant to long lasting mainstream IR debates. It is for example directly relevant to the political realists concern with the capabilities and the national interests of states. The last decade's inflated focus on the 'war against terrorism', for instance, which consumed vast amounts of the power capabilities of the USA, does not make much sense on the basis of a classic realist notion of national interests. As a threat to Western lives or the actual material fabric of societies, the challenge of terrorism is, after all, limited. But when the news media's dramatic and expressive representations of terrorism are added, with the attendant economic and social effects, the calculus looks quite different. The same could be said about a series of other events, incidents and issue-areas, from swine influenza to North Korea's nuclear diplomacy and even the global consequences of the financial crises during the autumn of 2008. Not only do the news media change how statesmen approach certain problems, they also affect what are seen as the state's rational interests, and how these are confronted, prioritized and instrumentalized.

That said, I believe that this thesis underscores at least four further reasons for why Shaw's views should be taken seriously, and why the gap between media studies and IR needs to be bridged:

1. *Taking the decision-makers' perceptions in IR seriously*: The role of the news media may have been neglected within the discipline of IR. However, there is a parallel development within IR theory that seems to indicate a research interest moving in the opposite direction. After years of systemic and structural approaches to world politics, and a series of meta-theoretical debates on the structure/agency problem in IR, calls are now being heard to 'bring the actor back in' to the field, and to develop research strategies focusing more closely on the practice of international politics.<sup>216</sup> Such approaches cannot be fully developed without taking the role of the news media seriously. There are at least two important reasons for this: First, as documented in this thesis, the actors of international politics themselves are aware of the importance of the news media for their own political practice. Second, the thesis has also shown that the study of the news media requires a research design that can integrate material and immaterial structures with an agency-oriented approach and thus, work on both sides of the structure/agency divide concurrently.

2. *The need for integrated methodology*: This plays directly into a second point, namely the methodological (and sometimes ontological) dispute between 'positivist' or 'causal' approaches and various versions of a 'constructivist' position examining how world politics is socially 'constituted' (Kurki 2008). When the news media is brought into the centre of this dispute, some of the relevance of the methodological antagonism seems to vanish. As demonstrated in Part II of this thesis the relationship between the news media and foreign policy may be a constitutive one (as my main argument suggests) as well as a causal one (in accordance with the indexing theory).

3. *News is the dominant source of information also for IR scholars*. A third reason for taking the media seriously is directly related to the source of data that inform much of the current IR debate, directly or indirectly. As noted in Chapter V, Wright Mills pointed out that a 'rule for understanding the human condition is that men live in second-hand

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<sup>216</sup> For the turn towards 'practice' see Neumann 2002 and Bauer & Brighi (2008). See also Byman and Pollack (2001) article in *International Security*, about 'Bringing the statesman back in'.

worlds', their images of the world '[...] are given to them by crowds of witnesses they have never met'. This thesis suggests that these images of the world (broadcast by the media) are largely defined by certain structural news media selectors that are reflected in the actual conduct of foreign policy. However, scholars of IR are not immune to these systematic communicative patterns. On the contrary, the structures of news communication may be built into the data, sources, outlook and intuitions that define and influence part of the interdisciplinary IR debate. If so, the media indirectly affect the very production of knowledge within the discipline, and can be neutralized only through greater critical awareness of the workings of the news media. That is to say, the media sit on two sides of the discipline's field of inquiry: theory as well as praxis.

4. *The media as a potent form of Great Power capability.* And finally, inclusion of the news media and studies of the global media infrastructure is directly relevant to one of the main substantial debates within the IR discipline: What defines the power capability of Great Powers? What is the degree of hegemony in world politics? The relevance of bringing the news media into the study of these questions is implicitly evident in much of the previous discussion: What I have called the news media's power of adaptation is not defined primarily by national news outlets. It is defined by a globalized communicative logic and a global news media infrastructure beyond the reach of most national governments or national news organizations. However, as the empirical findings here seem to underscore, the global communicative logic and news focus are not only relatively homogeneous, they are also clearly tilted towards US actions and involvement in the world, and they seem defined largely by the format and communicative practices typical of dominant US news organizations. Now, if that is the case, one significant implication would be that global mass communication of news information has to be taken seriously as a systemic power resource – in terms of defining the common political outlook and agenda of international society, and of defining the degree of hegemony in international politics. But, as the Iraq War and the Abu Grahیب revelation have clearly shown, such a news-information hegemony is by its very nature

an ambivalent resource of power, working as much against as in favour of the US government's own interests.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> See Ottosen & Nohrstedt (2001 and 2005) for an important contributions to the study of the global news agenda.

## Appendixes

## Appendix 1

### List of interviews with *foreign policy elite* and *foreign affairs editors*

Between February and September 2006, and in December 2008 I carried out semi-structured qualitative individual interviews with the entire top decision-making body of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry of three consecutive governments, including the ministers and the deputy ministers, in addition to the official spokespersons and principal communication advisers at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister's Office. The interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes. Six of the interviewees responded in writing. The other interviews were transcribed by Anja Bakken at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. All interviewees were promised anonymity in the text to prevent identification of views and quotations. I also conducted a hand full of background interviews during the same period.

Øystein Bogen, Editor, TV2

Ole Berthelsen, Editor, Nettavisen

Jan Bøhler, Deputy Minister

Espen Barth Eide, Deputy Minister

Halvor Elvik, Editor, Dagbladet

Bjørn Hansen, Editor, NRK

Vidar Helgesen, Deputy Minister

Gro Holm, Editor, TV2

Frode Holst, Editor, VG

Thorbjørn Jagland, Foreign Minister

Bjørn Jahnsen, spokesperson of the Foreign Minister

Jan Otto Johansen, Editor, NRK/Dagbladet

Peter M. Johansen, Editor, Klassekampen

Raymond Johansen, Deputy Minister



Karsten Klepsvik, spokesperson of the Foreign Minister

Torgeir Larsen, Editor, Dagbladet

Gunnar Myklebust, Editor, NRK

Jan Petersen, Foreign Minister

Erik Sagflaat, Editor, Dagsavisen

Anne Lene Standsten, spokesperson of the Foreign Minister

Kjetil Skogrand, Deputy Minister

Harald Stanghelle, Editor, Aftenposten

Jonas Gahr Støre, Foreign Minister

Carsten Thomassen, Senior correspondent, Dagbladet

Kim Traavik, Deputy Minister

Nils Morten Udgaard, Editor, Aftenposten

### Background interviews

Interview with 'Offenlighetskoordinator' Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006

Interview with operators of 'Elektronisk postjournal', Ergo Ephorma, 2005

Interview with 'Media contact' The Prime Minister's Office, 2005

Interview with 'Technical staff', Norwegian Broadcasting Cooperation, 2007

Interview with Chief of Staff, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008

## Appendix 2

### Primary sources

#### 1. Interview (see Appendix 1)

**2. Summary of standard proceedings and daily usual morning schedule produced exclusively for the author by the Foreign Minister's chief of staff, Mr. Torgeir Larsen June 2008.**

#### **3. Coverage of the first week of the US bombing of Afghanistan ('Operation Enduring Freedom') between 9 and 14 October 2001**

- *NRK* (Daily recordings of 'Dagsrevyen' ['The Day in Review'])
- *BBC World* daily (30-minute recordings of the networks' continuous evening news coverage from the top of the hour)
- *CNN International* (daily 30-minute recordings of the networks' continuous evening news coverage from the top of the hour)

#### **4. Coverage of the first post-invasion (30. January 2005) elections in Iraq after the US-led invasion of the country**

##### *Newspapers/internet:*

- *The New York Times* (USA)
- *El Universal* (Mexico)
- *The Globe and Mail* (Canada)
- *The Mail & Guardian* (South Africa)
- *The South China Morning Post* (China/Hong Kong)
- *The Hindustan Times* (India)
- *Aftenposten* (Norway)
- *The Financial Times* (UK)

##### *TV:*

- *BBC World*, 1 hour coverage of the elections

- NRK, 'Dagsrevyen' ['The Day in Review']
- CNN *International*, 1 hour coverage of the elections

**4. The foreign policy news section in 21 of the world largest national newspapers worldwide (including internet editions), carried out on 20 randomly selected days between 6 October 2004 and 31 January 2005.**

Data collection was conducted between 09:00 and 11:00 GMT on each of the days examined. The days were (2004): September 6, 13, 16, 20, 27; October 13, 24, 28; November 4, 10, 17, 26; December 1, 8, 17, 22; and (2005): January 4, 17, 27, 31.

- *The Los Angeles Times* (Us.)
- *The Chicago Tribune* (Us.)
- *The New York Times* (Us.)
- *The Washington Post* (Us.)
- *The Globe and Mail* (Can.)
- *El Universal* (Mex.)
- *La Republica* (Col.)
- *Le Monde* (Fr.)
- *Dagens Nyheter* (Swe.)
- *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Ger.)
- *The Daily Telegraph* (Uk.)
- *International Herald-Tribune* (Int.)
- *Corriere de la Serra* (It.)
- *Iran Daily* (Iran)
- *Haaretz* (Isr.)
- *The Mail & Guardian* (S.Afr.)
- *The Hindustan Times* (India)
- *The South China Morning Post* (Hk.)
- *The China Daily* (Chi.)
- *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Aus.)
- *La Nacion* (Arg.)
- *Aftenposten* (No.)

**6. The US aerial bombing of Hanoi between 19 and 29 December 1972 ('Operation Linebacker II')**

***Parliamentary debates:***

- 'Ad opptrapping av krigen i Vietnam' 9 May 1972, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 2907-09

- ‘Samarb. i Atlanterhavspaktens organisasjon i 1971’ 11 December 1972, *Stortingstidene* 1972/1973: 1258–1337
- ‘Innstilling fra utenriks- og konstitusjonskomiteen om bevilgning av 15 mill. kroner i humanitær bistand til Vietnam’ 22 February 1973, *Stortingstidene* 1972/1973: 1958–64;
- Forhandlinger i Stortinget nr. 242 14 February 1973, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 1901–03, 2086

***TV-coverage:***

- NRK, ‘Operation Linebacker II’ (28 and 29 December 1972)  
(The films and interviews used in the programmes are kept at the National Library of Norway, while the schedule and manuscript for each of the programmes are kept in the television archives at the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation. The study is based on a reconstruction of the ‘Dagsrevyen’ coverage of the Vietnam War based on both of these two sources.)

**7. The aerial bombing of Iraq during the Gulf War from 17 January 1991  
(‘Operation Desert Storm’)**

***Parliamentary debates:***

- ‘Ad spørsmål om en kobling mellom Golf-krisen og andre Midtøsten-spørsmål’ 16 January 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 2081–86
- ‘Redegjørelse vedrørende situasjonen i Golf-området’ 17 January 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 2087–93
- ‘Innstilling fra utenriks- og konstitusjonskomiteen om humanitær bistand til Golf-området som følge av gjenopptatte krigshandlinger’ 15 February 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 2423–30
- ‘Redegjørelsen av utenriksministeren om den kurdiske flyktningkatastrofen i Midtøsten’ 16 April 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 3012–17

***TV-coverage:***

- NRK, Gulf War (16 and 17 January 1991), Extended edition of ‘Dagsrevyen’ [‘The Day in Review’].

**8. The aerial bombing of Iraq from 20 March 2003 (‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’)**

***Parliamentary debates:***

- ‘Muntlig spørretime’ 29 January 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 1684–98
- ‘Muntlig spørretime’ 5 February 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 1723–28
- ‘Redegjørelsen av statsministeren om Irak-spørsmålet’ 21 March 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 2296–2303
- ‘Muntlig spørretime’ 26 March 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 2359–65
- ‘Muntlig spørretime’ 9 April 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 2586–87.

**TV-coverage:**

- NRK, The Iraq War (19 and 20 March 2003), Extended edition of ‘Dagsrevyen’ [‘The Day in Review’]).
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**9. The ‘Foreign Minister’s Foreign Policy Review’ and the annual foreign policy debate, 1972, 1991, 2003.**

**1972:**

- ‘Utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse av utenriksministeren’ 1 December 1972, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 990–95
- ‘Utenriksdebatten’ 11 December 1972, *Stortingstidende* 1972/1973: 1258–1337

**1991:**

- ‘Utenriksministerens utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse’ 15 January 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 2037–45
- ‘Utenriksdebatten’ 4 February 1991, *Stortingstidende* 1990/1991: 2112–45

**2003:**

- ‘Utenriksministerens utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse’ 13 February 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 1890–94
- ‘Debatten om utenriksministerens utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse’ 20 February 2003, *Stortingstidende* 2002/2003: 1970–2003.

**10. International coverage of ‘Operation Infinite Reach’ against targets in Sudan and Afghanistan, August 1998.**

- Taped ‘top-of-the-hour’ CNN International news coverage, 30 min., 20 and 21 August 1998.

- Taped 'top-of-the-hour' coverage on BBC World, 30 min., 20 August 1998.

**11. National coverage of first day of the military attacks on Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) on the days 25.03.99, 08.10.01, and 20.03.03 (second edition). (See appendix 3).**

- *Aftenposten*
- *Dagsavisen*
- *Dagbladet*
- *VG*

**12. Norway's role in the Iraq war**

***Radio/TV:***

- Scanning coverage by NRK involved all the radio's major broadcasts every day (Dagsnytt 07:30, 12:30, 17:30), the news magazines 'Her og Nå' [Here and Now] and 'Dagsnytt 18' [Six o'clock News], and the weekend broadcasts 'Verden på lørdag' [The World on Saturday], 'Ukeslutt' [The Week's End], 'Søndagsavisen' [The Sunday Paper] and 'Dagsnytt 1630' [The 4:30 News]. Going through the television coverage I included 'Dagsrevyen' [The Day in Review], 'Kveldsnytt' [Evening News] and 'Helgerevyen' [Weekend Review]. Each of these broadcasts was monitored fully from 1 April to 30 July 2003.

***Newspapers:***

- The empirical material is based on coverage in four major newspapers (*Dagbladet*, *VG*, *Aftenposten*, *Bergens Tidende*) in the period between April 2003 and the end of June 2004. In addition, a full analysis of NRK's news coverage was undertaken from the beginning of the political process in April 2003 and through the four months that followed. In the period under examination NRK broadcast altogether 66 different features on radio and television that directly touched on Norway's military presence in Iraq. *Dagbladet*, *VG*, *Aftenposten* and *Bergens Tidende* ran a total of 61 articles in the corresponding period and 210 articles in the period between 1 April 2003 and 1 July 2004.

## Appendix 3

### Background study: Priority and news frames, three military attacks

	Iraq	Afghanistan	Kosovo
<i>Aftenposten</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Iraq/war: 'Raketregn over Bagdad' ['Rain of Rockets over Bagdad']</li> <li>2. Iraq/war: 'Bakkekrigen i gang' ['Ground War Underway']</li> <li>3. Iraq/war: 'Frykt og fortvilelse i Bagdad' ['Fear and Despair in Bagdad']</li> <li>4. Norway/Iraq: 'Mullah Krekar arrestert' ['Mullah Krekar Arrested']</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Afghan./war: 'Motangrepet i gang' ['Counterattack Underway']</li> <li>2. Afghan./war: 'Dette er bare begynnelsen' ['This Is Only the Beginning']</li> <li>3. Afghan./war: 'Nye trusler fra Osama bin Laden' ['New Threats from Osama bin Laden']</li> <li>4. Norway/Afghan.: 'Oslo kjøpte beredskap...' ['Oslo Buys Preparedness']</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kosovo/war: 'Massive rakettangrep i natt' ['Massive Rocket Attack Last Night']</li> <li>2. Kosovo/war: 'Panikken brer seg' ['Panic Spreads']</li> <li>3. Norway/Kosovo: 'Krigen splitter også i Norge' ['The War Divides Norway Too']</li> <li>4. Norway/Kosovo: 'Norge jager-flygere på vingene' ['Norway's Fighter Planes Take Wing']</li> </ol>
<i>Dagsavisen</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Iraq/war: 'Bagdad i brann' ['Bagdad on Fire']</li> <li>2. Iraq/war: 'Venter på bakkekrig' ['Waiting for Ground War']</li> <li>3. Iraq/war: 'Gatekamper kan lamme USA' ['Street Fights Can Cripple USA']</li> <li>4. Norway/Iraq: 'Norges to tunger' ['Norway's Forked Tongue']</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Afghan./war: 'bin Laden med ny trusler' ['New Threats from bin Laden']</li> <li>2. Afghan./war: 'Raketregn over Kabul' ['Rain of Rockets Over Kabul']</li> <li>3. Norway/Afghan.: 'Økt fare for terrorangrep i Norge' [Increased Danger of Terror Attack in Norway]</li> <li>4. Norway/Afghan.: 'Norge støtter angrepet' ['Norway Supports the Assault']</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kosovo/krig: 'Nato er i krig' ['NATO is at War']</li> <li>2. Kosovo/krig: 'Panikk i Prishtina' ['Panic in Prishtina']</li> <li>3. Norge/Kosovo: 'Norske soldater frykter hevn' ['Norwegian Soldiers Fear Revenge']</li> <li>4. Norge/Kosovo: 'Kosovo-albanere og serbere i Norge' ['Kosovan Albanians and Serbs in Norway']</li> </ol>
<i>Dagbladet</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Iraq/war: 'Saddam bombet' ['Saddam Bombed']</li> <li>2. Iraq/war: 'Raketter mot Saddam' ['Rockets Against Saddam']</li> <li>3. -</li> <li>4. -</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Afghan./war: 'Bombed til sammenbrudd' ['Bombed to Bits']</li> <li>2. Afghan./war: 'Bombet i hele natt' ['All-Night Bombing']</li> <li>3. Afghan./war: 'bin Laden oppfordrer til hellig krig' ['Bin Laden Pledges Holy War']</li> <li>4. Norway/Afghan.: 'Økt terrorfare i Norge' [Increased Danger of Terror in Norway]</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kosovo/war: 'Bomberegner, barn drept' ['Rain of Bombs, Children Killed']</li> <li>2. Norway/Kosovo: 'Norge er i krig' ['Norway is at War']</li> <li>3. Kosovo/war: 'Slo til med jern hånd' ['Hit with an Iron Fist']</li> <li>3. Norway/Kosovo: 'Norske piloter i krigen' ['Norwegian Pilots at War']</li> </ol>
VG	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Iraq/war: 'Bagdad bombet i natt' ['Bagdad Bombed Last Night']</li> <li>2. Iraq/war: 'Skulle drepe Saddam' ['To Kill Saddam']</li> <li>3. Iraq/war: 'Nytt Vietnam' ['The New Vietnam']</li> <li>4. Iraq/war: 'USAs nye våpen' ['USA's New Weapon']</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Afghan./war: 'Bin Laden varsler hevn' ['Bin Laden Vows Revenge']</li> <li>2. Afghan./war: 'Massive bombing'</li> <li>3. Afghan./war: 'krigen kan bli langvarig' ['Lengthy War Possible']</li> <li>4. Norway/Afghan.: 'Økt terrorfare i Norge' [Increased Danger of Terror in Norway]</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Norway/Kosovo: 'Norske flygere i krig' ['Norwegian Flyers Join War']</li> <li>2. Kosovo/war: 'Traff 20 mål' ['20 Targets Hit']</li> <li>3. Kosovo/war: 'Jeltsin truer med hevn' ['Yeltsin Threatens Revenge']</li> <li>4. Norway/Kosovo: 'Norske fly får bare fly over havet' ['Norwegian Planes Only Allowed to Fly over Sea']</li> </ol>

## Appendix 4

### Background study: The existence of communitarian news media selectors in Norwegian foreign policy

In chapter VI I suggested that there are different types of communitarian dimension when it comes to covering distant events and foreign policy. In brief, I argued that communitarian selectors are the systematic practice of the news media of casting distant events in frameworks that can render these events more readily comprehensible and relevant to domestic audiences.<sup>218</sup> The general argument is based on a background study that the author conducted in 2005. According to the findings of this study the Norwegian news media tend to emphasize the traditional and established understanding of the country's security needs, the importance of multilateral cooperation and the United Nations, Norway's commitment to international rule of law and humanitarian values, and other factors that are either seen as expression of national identity or the traditional foreign policy culture. Thus, the news media are likely to function as a critical voice in opposition to the official position in cases where that official foreign policy position and the *doxa* are incongruent. In effect, this means that the news media may function as a *structural* obstacle to rapid foreign policy reorientation and the change of mindsets, and a conservator of the dominant self-understanding as a political subject in international politics – thereby conserving traditional and well-established foreign policy practices and positions, and inhibiting political change.

The findings of this study are reproduced in two subsequent sections:

#### Case 1: Norway and Palestine

In the Norwegian context there is a relatively weak tradition of foreign policy journalism. Norway is a small country with a limited global role, and its media institutions are relatively modest in scale. Yet size alone cannot explain the weak tradition of foreign policy journalism in Norway. Interviews with those responsible for the press in the Foreign Ministry and the Office of the Prime Minister<sup>219</sup> estimate that there are barely ten Norwegian journalists who systematically engage in investigative foreign policy journalism.<sup>220</sup> In total, only 14% of all queries from news editing bodies in Norway about access to the

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<sup>218</sup> The formulations used in these definitions are inspired by Gurevitch et al.. 1991: 206.

<sup>219</sup> Interview, Foreign Ministry (UD), October 2005. Interview with press contacts, Prime Minister's Office and at UD, 3 October 2005.

<sup>220</sup> However, the majority of these are not investigative journalists, but rather commentary journalists with a foreign affairs focus, and much of their work is oriented toward daily news of current affairs. Enquiries of



country's official state administrative bodies have to do with the foreign policy field.<sup>221</sup> Moreover, in various ways the news media are party to the institutionalized consensus production that is characteristic of Norwegian foreign policy. The media have been made responsible by processes of social and institutional inclusiveness, and access to confidential information. The most frequently mentioned practice in this regard is a basic six-month course offered at the College of Defence, organized by the Norwegian Ministry of Defence intended 'to give key personnel in the military and civil sector of society knowledge about, and insights into, Norwegian defence and security policy and the factors that have a bearing on this.'<sup>222</sup> Examination of a whole generation of central foreign policy journalists reveals that many of them have attended this. During the Cold War many Norwegian foreign affairs journalists in this way became an informal part of the country's total defence, just as the television and radio monopoly of the day – NRK – was a formal and important part of Norwegian defence mobilization.

Since the end of the Cold War, the inclusion of journalists at the College of Defence has not been as controversial as earlier.<sup>223</sup> The practice of inclusion has been a contributing factor in the nurture of a definite Norwegian foreign policy culture. Accordingly, foreign policy journalism tends to function as a communicative extension of the *doxa* of foreign policy, by being traditionally managed and informed with regard to dominant views and assessments. Among other things, this finds expression in the fact that Norwegian media have a tendency to defend the tradition against changes of political stance. In relation to the change of government in October 2005, and the entry of the Socialist Left Party (SV) as one of the three governing parties in a new red/green coalition, SV was warned, with varying degrees of intensity, in

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the Norwegian news media requesting access to Norwegian foreign policy decision-taking documents, letters and notes underscores this. These enquiries are today by means of what is called the Electronic Post Journal (currently run by Ergo Ephorma). In the period from 1999 to 2005 there were, on average, 3,300 such enquiries made by Norwegian media a year to the Foreign Ministry (UD). This would appear to be a relatively high number of requests for information and could indicate significant journalistic activity *vis-à-vis* UD. But this figure is a bit misleading. First, the number of enquiries refers not only to access to single cases, but to the total number of letters and documents requested. (Discussion with an operator of the Electronic Post Journal at Ergo Ephorma on 21 October 2005.) Second, most enquiries have to do with access to identical documents, and are mainly associated with questions about current issues. (Interview with the public coordinator, Foreign Ministry, 18 October 2005.) 'Very few requests go back in time, and with very few exceptions enquiries are governed by questions arising from the day's current events,' said a UD representative. (Interview, UD, 3 October 2005.) Third, enquiries come from many different media, in total between 90 and 100 different news media a year between 1999 and 2005. However, many of the requests come from marginal Norwegian media, or from media with a special interest focus. (The left-radical Norwegian newspaper *Klassekampen* [Class Struggle] is especially active in its requests for access. The same is true of the pro-agrarian newspaper *Nationen* [The Nation] and a whole series of newspapers with special regional fields of interest.)

<sup>221</sup> Elektronisk Postjournal, 2004. In addition to UD, the numbers include the Ministry of Defence, the Trade Ministry and parts of the Oil and Energy Ministry. See *Praktisering av offentlighetsloven i Utenriksdepartementet* [Practice of the Public Disclosure Law in the Foreign Ministry], UD (2003, 2004), and also an examination by the press's professional committee.

<sup>222</sup> From the official 'Letter of Introduction by the College of Defence', by *Generalmajor*.

<sup>223</sup> Based on interviews with heads of the foreign desks at *Aftenposten*, *VG*, *Klassekampen*, *Dagsavisen*, *Dagbladet*, and *Nettavisen*, March–June 2006.

editorial columns in Norwegian newspapers from *VG* to *Aftenposten* to *Dagbladet*, against changing the traditions and consensus of the nation's foreign policy.

As we saw in earlier chapters, Norwegian news coverage of international relations carries within itself relatively explicit references to what I have here called *doxa*. These are communitarian selectors that we found clearly expressed in NRK's news coverage of the war in Afghanistan in 2001 (see Thesis above) and in four Norwegian newspapers' coverage of the air attacks in reference to Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). The references to the national community and national characteristics in foreign policy do more than give form to news coverage. Defence of the *doxa* by the media also opens up a space for critical coverage of Norwegian foreign policy in competition with political elites, even when there is a high degree of political agreement within these elites.

Let me illustrate this point further by turning to the media coverage of what has been perhaps the most central single question in the country's foreign policy in recent decades: by this I mean Norway's policy toward Israel and the self-governing Palestinian regions of West Bank and Gaza. In the winter of 2006, the Islamic party Hamas won the Palestinian elections. In the period that followed there was internal discussion in both the European Union and the USA as to whether to stop direct economic support to the newly-elected Palestinian government. The declared goal was to pressure Hamas to abstain from future terrorist actions against Israel, and also get Hamas to recognize Israel's pre-1967 borders. The USA was first out with a proposal to cut financial support to the Palestinian self-governing authority. On 7 April 2006, the foreign policy coordinator of the EU, Javier Solana, made it clear that the European Union would follow suit (*Dagbladet* 9 April 2006). Meanwhile, Norway's Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, in a newspaper interview on 20 March that year, had already indicated that he was sceptical about international society cutting out the transfer of funds to the Palestinian authorities.<sup>224</sup> Two days after the EU had made it clear that they would stop their disbursements, Støre suddenly made an about-face, announcing that Norway too would freeze its financial support. However, the question of Hamas involved a certain amount of dissent between two of the governing coalition parties, Labour represented by Foreign Minister Støre, and the Socialist Left Party represented by the Minister of International Development, Erik Solheim. Two days after Støre announced that development aid would be stopped, Solheim made a correction through the Norwegian media (NRK Dagsnytt, 11 April 2006), stressing that the government had not taken any decision to stop the transfer of financial support since in any case such support was not currently being practised. Norway would not support Hamas financially until the latter complied with the political demands set by the EU and the USA. And thus the Norwegian government's policy received broad support in the Storting.<sup>225</sup>

The general picture, in accordance with 'indexing hypothesis' based on findings by empirical research in the USA and elsewhere, is that news coverage tends to reflect and correlate quite closely with the political environment (Hallin 1986, Bennett 1990, Nacos et al. 2000, Robinson 1999). But that was not

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<sup>224</sup> The main interview was printed in *Dagbladet*, 20 March 2006.

<sup>225</sup> See statement by leader of the Norwegian Christian Democratic Party (KFP), Dagfinn Høybråten, *Aftenposten*, 24 April 2006.

the case with the Hamas situation. Each and every major Norwegian newspaper across the political spectrum came out strongly against the government's decision to stop the transfer of funds to the Palestinian self-government authorities.<sup>226</sup> The following formulations were used by three of the most important newspapers:

[Y]esterday Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre followed up and announced a freeze of the funds intended for the Palestinian government. This is the way Norway demonstrates that it does not have an independent policy in this difficult field [...] But in contrast to the Foreign Minister we have no faith that there is any acceptable way to strangle the Palestinians economically. (*Aftenposten*, 4 April 2006)

Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre has demonstrated remarkably poor judgement in his policy concerning the newly elected Palestinian authorities, a judgement that could have extremely negative consequences for Norwegian foreign policy and contribute to dangerous developments in the Middle East. (*Dagbladet*, 12 April 2006)

The government will certainly agree with itself in the end, both on this and that. For our part, we can only repeat the conviction that a massive western boycott would only make the pain worse in the Palestinian areas, where anarchy and full breakdown now threaten. (*Verdens Gang*, 19 April 2006)

How should we interpret this? One way of understanding the agreement amongst the media could certainly be to maintain that the various newspapers have identical views about the conflict between Israel and the Middle East, and that this point of view often diverges from that of government and the political elite. But this is not the case. Views towards Hamas and the conflict in the Middle East vary in the different editorial boards, and traditionally there has been a certain amount of media/political elite concerning Norway's Middle East policy. What then can explain the united opposition to the government on this issue? The collective reaction of the Norwegian media to the government's policy concerning Hamas in April 2006 can be seen as illustrating the fact that the media constitute one of the conservers and defenders of the foreign policy *doxa*. Right from the beginning of Norway's active engagement in the Middle East peace process in the early 1990s, the region has played a special role in Norwegian foreign policy. The Middle East has defined Norway's major role in international politics ever since the end of the Cold War: as third party and neutral organizer of peace and reconciliation processes.

In addition, Norway's policy in the Middle East has been an important diagnostic marker for its self-image as a humanitarian actor, defender of human rights and impartiality (Dale et al., 2000, Thune &

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<sup>226</sup> This refers to five Norwegian newspapers that ran main editorials arguing against the government decision: *Aftenposten* (10 April 2006), *Dagsavisen* (11 April 2006), *Dagbladet* (12 April 2006), *Verdens Gang* (19 April 2006), and *Dagens Næringsliv* (21 April 2006).

Larsen 2000). The Middle East has been and continues to be a kind of manifestation of parts of the *doxa* of Norwegian foreign policy. And it is in this light that we can interpret the media's collective criticism. The policy of FM Støre and the government had been in keeping with the prevailing political consensus. The government had the backing of the Norwegian parliament. But despite this, Støre broke with tradition and the long-established foreign policy and national identity. He made a break with the Norwegian self-image of Norway as a non-partisan third party, and with the national self-understanding of Norway's role in the Middle East. The media instinctively reacted by standing up in defence of tradition and national identity, and reiterated the long-standing and traditional consensus on foreign policy.

Norway's media often act in keeping with the most important finding in recent decades by political-communications research: that media content over time reflects and tracks changes in official positions (Page 2000: 85). Nevertheless, when breaks occur in official positions and these positions diverge from established tradition, the media tend to reflect the established foreign policy line – even when this represents a departure from the current official policy position and the political elite's unity of views. Norway's policy towards Iraq and the US after the Bush administration invasion of Iraq in March 2003 offers an interesting case, to which we now turn.

## **Case 2: Norway in Iraq**

As noted in Chapter II, the general major finding in recent international research is that the news media, in their coverage and analysis of international events, will 'index the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic' (Bennett 1990: 106). Thus, in a manner different from other branches of political journalism, foreign policy journalism imposes a type of self-regulation over the coverage of its own country's foreign policy. To a conspicuous degree, news coverage of foreign policy reflects the interests and perspectives of the decision-takers and the political fronts of the political establishment. The simple reason for this is that on major issues, journalists base their work on official state sources, and therefore will frequently wait to cover a question critically before it has been added to the politicians' or other foreign policy figures' lists of issues; that is, until criticism has been voiced by legitimate political voices or relevant practitioners of foreign policy (civil servants, the military, relevant NGOs). Situations coloured by domestic political consensus will therefore result in a rather monotonous and one-sided news coverage, where the media operate within relatively strict boundaries as to what constitutes acceptable criticism (Hallin 1986).

Is this applicable to the media in Norwegian foreign policy? Let us test the general argument on an important and much discussed case in recent foreign policy discourse, Norway's engagement in Iraq from June 2003.

The background for Norwegian participation in Iraq is as follows. The government at the time, under the leadership of Kjell Magne Bondevik, was opposed to the invasion itself of Iraq in March 2003. In the week following the invasion, the government made it clear that Norway still wanted to participate in the rebuilding and stabilization of Iraq – the condition being that such a contribution could be justified by international law.<sup>227</sup> Meanwhile on 22 May 2003, the UN Security Council ratified Resolution 1484, requesting UN member countries to ‘contribute to stability and security in Iraq by contributing personnel, equipment and other resources.’ Resolution 1484 became the formal basis for the Norwegian government’s sending of soldiers to Iraq, starting in late June that year.

There are two circumstances that make this episode particularly well-suited to an evaluation of the thesis about ‘the self-regulation of foreign policy journalism’. First, participation in Iraq was a completely all-consuming question in Norwegian foreign policy debates for a long time, and a dominant topic of argument in foreign policy in the run-up to the national elections of September 2005. Norway’s military contribution was certainly modest, consisting of not more than a single company with 85 soldiers (engineers and mine-clearance specialists). All the same, this military contribution touched on central questions in the country’s foreign policy. The participation concerned both Norway’s bilateral relations with the USA and at the same time Norway’s long tradition of a strong interest in multilateral arrangements and international rule of law, and was thus seen as a core issue in Norwegian security policy.<sup>228</sup>

Second, political support for participation in Iraq varied as time passed. When the first contingent of Norwegian soldiers was sent to Iraq in the summer of 2003, only the Socialist Left Party opposed the government’s policy. In relation to a re-adjustment to the engagement a year later, in June 2004, the nature of the party-political cabal had changed. Both Labour and the Centre Party had now become opposed to continued Norwegian military presence in Iraq. The Centre/Right Bondevik government for its part wanted to continue parts of the engagement and decided to maintain a presence of just twenty Norwegian staff officers in Iraq. Such a split among central parties in relation to a core question of Norwegian security was unusual, so the dissent in relation to Iraq represents a unique case for illuminating the relationship between critical news coverage and the degree of political agreement. To what extent did the critical media coverage of Norway’s participation in Iraq between June 2003 and June 2004 reflect the change of course in party politics?

The following empirical investigation is based on coverage in four major newspapers (*Dagbladet*, *VG*, *Aftenposten*, *Bergens Tidende*) in the period between April 2003 and the end of June 2004.<sup>229</sup> In

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<sup>227</sup> The question of Norwegian participation in Iraq was first raised officially on 16 April 2003, after Denmark’s Prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen made it clear he would ask several countries to participate in the international stabilization force in relation to a US request (NRK Dagsnytt, 16 Apr. 2003).

<sup>228</sup> This becomes clear not least both in relation to the fact that Bondevik in his triple tour to visit Bush/Blair/Chirac made it clear to President Bush that Norway wanted to participate *after* the invasion was over, and that the legal division of the Foreign Ministry put forward a particularly Norwegian interpretation of international law that was the basis for a Norwegian participation even without a direct mandate from the UN Security Council. See Berthelsen (2005).

<sup>229</sup> The investigation is based on searches in Atekst, using the search codes ‘Iraq + norske soldater’ [Iraq + Norwegian soldiers], ‘Iraq + norske styrker’ [Iraq + Norwegian forces], ‘Iraq + norske militær’ [Iraq +

addition, a full analysis of NRK's news coverage was undertaken from the beginning of the political process in April 2003 and through the four months that followed.<sup>230</sup> In the period under examination NRK broadcast altogether 66 different features on radio and television that directly touched on Norway's military presence in Iraq. *Dagbladet*, *VG*, *Aftenposten* and *Bergens Tidende* ran a total of 61 articles in the corresponding period and 210 articles in the period between 1 April 2003 and 1 July 2004.

For the period from April 2003 to July 2004 taken as a whole, news coverage was dominated by three disputed questions. The first question had to do with the basis in international law for a possible Norwegian contribution. The second question had to do with what tasks the Norwegian soldiers should take up in Iraq, and whether the Norwegian contribution should be viewed as humanitarian assistance or as part of the US–British occupation force in Iraq. The third disputed point concerned whether Norway should have soldiers in Iraq at all – the question which in the end, during the spring of 2004, came to split the government and the opposition in the Storting.

The main finding is relatively unambiguous. The critical coverage of the media followed the political discussion and was initiated mainly by official sources, and only to a small degree by the media themselves. The critical coverage for all the media investigated was also strikingly uniform. The disputed questions dominated the news coverage in three phases. The first, the actual decision-taking in April and May 2003 and the question of the mandate in terms of international law. Second, the coverage of the deployment of the Norwegian contingent at the end of June and the question about the soldiers' tasks and the participation in the occupation of Iraq. And the third, between March and June 2004, was dominated by the question of whether Norway should be participating militarily in Iraq in any capacity at all.

What is interesting here is not that the media's critical angle was identical, or that the number of issues and features can be lumped together around definite events. Rather, it is that the disputed questions – the critical questions posed by the media – followed the political debate. The question of the UN mandate was raised only when explicit disagreement arose between the government and the Labour Party and in relation to concrete political initiatives.<sup>231</sup> Correspondingly, the question about the Norwegian soldiers' work tasks and formal position in relation to the occupation powers did not gain strength in the media coverage until the end of June 2003, and did not come to the fore until the issue had already been posed by

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Norwegian military], 'Iraq + stabiliseringsstyrke' [Iraq + stabilization forces], and 'Iraq + fredsbevarende styrker' [Iraq + peace-keeping forces].

<sup>230</sup> Scanning coverage by NRK involved all the radio's major broadcasts every day (Dagsnytt 07:30, 12:30, 17:30), the news magazines 'Her og Nå' [Here and Now] and 'Dagsnytt 18' [Six o'clock News], and the weekend broadcasts 'Verden på lørdag' [The World on Saturday], 'Ukeslutt' [The Week's End], 'Søndagsavisen' [The Sunday Paper] and 'Dagsnytt 1630' [The 4:30 News]. Going through the television coverage I included 'Dagsrevyen' [The Day in Review], 'Kveldsnytt' [Evening News] and 'Helgerevyen' [Weekend Review]. Each of these broadcasts was monitored fully from 1 April to 30 July 2003.

<sup>231</sup> The critical coverage appears in the period: i.) between 23 and 30 April, after the initiative by the government that maintained an explicit mandate from the UN was not needed; ii.) the day after the Labour Party leader, Jens Stoltenberg, on 9 April demanded a UN mandate in order to support the dispatch of Norwegian soldiers; and iii.) in relation to the adoption of UN Resolution 1484 on 22 May 2003.

official representatives of the Norwegian soldiers in Iraq.<sup>232</sup> When it comes to the third and comprehensively disputed question – whether Norway should have soldiers in Iraq at all – this was not touched by either NRK or any of the four newspapers in relation to the decision about Norwegian participation in Iraq and the actual sending of soldiers at the end of June the same year; it did not appear until disagreement had reared its head in the Storting during the spring of 2004.<sup>233</sup>

The same pattern came to light as well in the editorial standpoints of the various news media. Norway's leading daily, *Verdens Gang* ['The World in Passing' is one translation of the title] was consistent in its support for Norwegian engagement in Iraq throughout the whole period. *Bergens Tidende*, *Aftenposten* and *Dagbladet* were more ambivalent, but nevertheless not opposed to participation.<sup>234</sup> All three in their editorials maintained that they were not criticizing participation as such, but were pointing out the confusion and inadequate political craftsmanship in the management of Norway's engagement in Iraq.<sup>235</sup> Words such as 'withdrawal', 'sending home', 'presence in Iraq' did not occur in any of the newspapers' lead articles, the single exception being one lead article in *Dagbladet*.<sup>236</sup> In the first round, editorial critique of the government was limited to the government's attempts to formulate an authorization on the basis of international law for Norwegian participation without an explicit UN resolution; thereafter the criticism was directed at the lack of clarity in the formal status of the Norwegian soldiers in relationship to the US and British occupation forces in Iraq.<sup>237</sup> In other words, the criticism took place within the framework of existing Norwegian policy and did not challenge the policy as such. Or, as *Dagbladet* and *Aftenposten* summed up their respective criticism in headlines about the confusion regarding the role of the Norwegian soldiers in Iraq, or about the fact that the main contingent was back in Norway in July 2004:<sup>238</sup> 'Frustrated Soldiers' and 'Frustrated Iraq Soldiers Home'. None of the editorials expressed opposition to participation in Iraq until much later when, during the spring of 2004 both Labour and the Centre Party withdrew their support for further Norwegian engagement in Iraq.

As political actors, the Norwegian media appeared more as a channelling medium rather than as an independent producer of political influence. The news focus followed the political debate and the media's

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<sup>232</sup> The issue of the Norwegian soldiers' mandate in Iraq was touched on for the first time by NRK and the Norwegian newspapers on 26 and 27 June, after the question had been raised by the leader of the Officers Joint Organization, Didrik Coucheron, on 26 June 2003.

<sup>233</sup> The Labour Party shifted its standpoint on Norwegian participation at the beginning of April 2004. The Labour Party's foreign policy spokesperson and leader of the Stortinget's Foreign Affairs Committee, Torbjørn Jagland, publicly announced this on 18 April. He declared among other things: 'Norway should pull its forces out of Iraq and the money allocated to this engagement should be used to support the moderate forces on the Palestinian side' (*Aftenposten*, 18 April 2004).

<sup>234</sup> See, for example, *VG* 9 May 2004, *Bergens Tidende* 28 June 28, *Aftenposten* 24 May 2003 and *Dagbladet* 24 May and 30 June 2003.

<sup>235</sup> *Bergens Tidende* (28 June 2003, 27 January 2004), *Aftenposten* (9 July 2003, 30 March 2004, 27 May 2004, 8 July 2004), and *Dagbladet* (22 and 24 May 2003, 30 June 2003, 9 July 2003, 18 November 2003 and 6 July 2004).

<sup>236</sup> *Dagbladet*, 18 November 2003.

<sup>237</sup> *Bergens Tidende* 28 June 2003, *Aftenposten* 9 July 2003, *Dagbladet* 9 July 2003.

<sup>238</sup> *Dagbladet* 6 July 2004 and *Aftenposten* 8 July 2004.

critical angles were moored within the initiatives taken by official political actors. This impression is corroborated as well by those who in that period dealt with enquiries from the media to the Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister's Office.<sup>239</sup> None of the respondents assigned to the media any significant influence in the formation of the country's Iraq policy. Conversely, weight was clearly laid on the fact that the media coverage reflected the prevailing political climate of the moment in which the item was being reported. As one central press contact expressed it:

The interest of the media and their critical coverage disappeared the moment there was no critical opposition. Of course it is the media who decide what is covered by the media. But it is not the media who set the political agenda of the day, and the media do not determine the field of issues. This has only happened in minor issues where political disagreement exists in Stortinget, and it is not a question that affects the broad lines of foreign policy.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Semi-structured interviews carried out in October 2005 with Karsten Klepsvik (UD), Anne Lene Sandsten (UD), Øivind Østang (SMK/PMO), and in 2006 with former Foreign Ministers Jan Petersen and Torbjørn Jagland.

<sup>240</sup> Interview, UD, October 2005, anonymous.



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