



## **THE MEDIA, TECHNOLOGY AND UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY: A RE-EXAMINATION OF THE “CNN EFFECT”**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

With the explosive growth and deployment of an increasingly pervasive global mass media around the world today, television broadcasters and U.S. foreign policy makers have come to interact in a highly complex and synergetic way. Over the years, the global mass media's role in the United States has expanded and developed into a powerful force, one that arguably influences both the substance of American foreign policy and the process by which this policy is formulated. To this end, it has been said that the strength of this influence was powerful enough to have helped bring an end to American involvement in Vietnam, and was a significant factor in President Carter's failed bid for re-election by way of the November 1980 hostage crisis in Iran.<sup>1</sup>

Since that fateful day in 1980, the U.S. political system has undeniably seen a veritable “explosion” of news media technology. In this explosion, the world has witnessed the development of a 24-hours-a-day Cable News Network (CNN), and the deployment of communications satellites that can dispatch “real-time” news reports from anywhere on the planet. The term “CNN effect” has come to represent the influence that this new kind of “real-time” reporting can have – that dramatic images of starving masses, shelled populations, or dead American soldiers can induce public demands for action from elected officials. Whether or not these demands are ill considered is a matter of intense debate. But the general opinion among policy leaders is that “these temporary emotional responses may conflict with the more considered judgement of foreign policy officials, forcing them to take action that will soon have to be reversed or modified.”<sup>2</sup> This effectively means a loss of policy control and sovereignty on the part of government policymakers.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, George F. Kennan (writing as U.S. troops landed in Somalia to help deal with the imminent humanitarian disaster) was concerned that if foreign policy decisions are made by popular whim, “then there is no place, not only for myself, but for what have traditionally been regarded as the responsible deliberative organs of our government, in both executive and legislative branches.”<sup>4</sup> More recently, former Secretary General of the United Nations Boutros Boutros-Ghali said that, “for the past two centuries, it was

law that provided the source of authority for democracy. Today, law seems to be replaced by opinion as the source of authority, and the media serve as the arbiter of public opinion.”<sup>5</sup>

The global mass media has certainly become an increasingly powerful and independent actor on the U.S. political scene, but to what extent does this “CNN effect” actually play an active role in the categorical development and execution of U.S. foreign policy? Government officials, legislators, media professionals, and scholars have certainly voiced a strong and growing concern and anxiety that journalists are exercising an uncontrollable control over U.S. foreign policy.<sup>6</sup>

This paper argues that these concerns are unfounded and that, in most cases, the significance of the “CNN effect” is grossly overstated. The media does not *control* the direction of U.S. foreign policy – the media’s effect on U.S. foreign policy is far more complex than just a simple “cause-effect” attribution suggests and much more subservient to the policy actions of government officials themselves than the case commonly seems. Rather than having an overarching and controlling effect on the formulation and execution of U.S. foreign policy, the “CNN effect” wields its power in two very specific ways:

- 1) *As a catalyst.* The pervasiveness of “real-time” media reports often contracts the policymaking process, giving officials less time before they must respond publicly.
- 2) *As a watchdog.* If executive branch policy is in flux or is poorly articulated, media reports have a greater role in focusing U.S. public opinion in a given direction. This in turn leads to an impact on policy.

The media’s catalytic function has to do with the nature of technology and the ability of modern news media to transmit graphic images almost instantaneously. This speed overwhelms and overburdens the traditional policymaking structures, forcing decisions that might not otherwise be made, perhaps before all the facts are in. “Real-time” reports can also force government officials to spend far more time than they used to explaining and selling their policies to the public and worrying about how those policies will be received. The president and his staff may then try to “fine tune” the policy by making rhetorical adjustments. These adjustments, if left unabated, can potentially force a sharp, impulsive, and almost certainly an unexpected change in focus at the upper levels of government. In short, this catalytic function makes the conduct of foreign policy and the use of military force “more transparent, subjecting diplomats and military officers to a level of democratic review that has little, if any, historical precedent.”<sup>7</sup>

This first function of media as catalyst certainly has a great deal to do with the media’s second function, of watchdog. No one can deny the fact that the speed at which the global mass media is able to report on events today has thrown open U.S. government policies and actions to more unrestricted public review than at any other point in U.S. history.<sup>8</sup> As a result, government officials cannot afford to conduct modern foreign policy without explaining it to, and building support among, the American public.<sup>9</sup> They can do this through the news media and with the emergence of “real-time” reporting. This gives policymakers a corresponding increase in their ability to frame events and solicit public support, but they must do so responsibly and diligently. If government officials and policymakers are clear, organized and relatively straightforward about their policy, the media can be a powerful tool for garnering public support. However, if

government officials and policymakers fail to put forth concrete and well-defined policies, the news media will fill this “policy void” by focusing on the criticisms or the policy preferences of the government’s opponents. Also, if policymakers wander from their societal mandate, the news media will “sooner or later make this fact transparent, and those officials will find public opinion in open revolt, demanding, usually without great specificity, a change of policy.”<sup>10</sup> In this, they may discover what has been called the “dark side” of the “CNN effect,” a force – “as sudden, immediate and powerful as an avenging angel” – that can sweep them along in its path.<sup>11</sup>

The following analysis focuses on the “CNN effect’s” first role – that of a catalyst. Many in government continue to view the media with contempt, and resent deeply the erosion of their power to control the “real-time” information flow to journalists. Furthermore, most still expect to manipulate the media with the three C’s – control, confidentiality, and coolness. To this end, they would prefer that “real-time” television went away. It will not. “Real-time” television will therefore have to be understood, accepted, and factored into policymaking. Sir David Hannay, British ambassador to the United Nations, has expressed publicly what may officials in government, both U.S. and foreign, confirm in private. “It is no good trying to abolish this factor: it is with us for the foreseeable future. It is no good deploring it in a rather elitist way.”<sup>12</sup>

This paper is built upon a single crisis which has almost singlehandedly destroyed all the naïve, premature post Cold-War hopes of a New World Order: the Sarajevo “Marketplace Massacre” in 1994. It makes no claim to an exhaustive contemporary history of the crisis, but rather it draws upon specific events to illustrate and test the relationship between the catalytic significance of the “CNN effect” and its implications for U.S. foreign policy. The theory is based heavily on three studies conducted by distinguished and acknowledged experts in the field: Patrick O’Heffernan’s *Mass Media and American Foreign Policy*; Warren P. Strobel’s *Late-Breaking Foreign Policy*; and Nik Gowing’s “Real-time” *Television Coverage of Armed Conflicts and Diplomatic Crises*. O’Heffernan’s volume provides the empirical data for this paper, and stems from an interview study that he conducted between 1989 and 1991 in conjunction with Lincoln Bloomfield and Russell Neuman of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Martin Linsky at the Shorenstein Center for Press, Politics, and Public Policy at Harvard University. Nik Gowing, Diplomatic Editor for International Television Network and anchor for British Broadcasting Corporation’s international TV news service (BBC World), challenges conventional wisdom of an automatic cause-effect relationship between “real-time” television coverage of conflicts and the making of foreign policy. Warren Strobel, the White House and former State Department correspondent for the *Washington Times*, conducted an exhaustive study of the “Sarajevo Marketplace Massacre” at the request of the United States Institute of Peace.

## **THE DECADE OF THE DISH**

We are in the “Decade of the Dish” – while the military arsenal contains the latest stealth and smart technology, the television journalist’s arsenal contains a lap-top computer, a Marisat telephone, and a portable “up-link” satellite the size of a large umbrella.<sup>13</sup> By definition, “real-time” images are those television pictures beamed back live by satellite from a location. Alternatively, they may have been taped a few minutes earlier, or possibly an hour or two before. These images are transmitted out of a war or conflict zone virtually instantaneously without the dangerous challenge of dispatching videocassettes by road, air, or sea to the distant

television station. Consequently, the absence of a satellite dish in a conflict zone usually translates into a significantly lessened amount of coverage or none at all. Often, however, the presence of a dish creates news coverage because the TV station has to justify the cost of developing and owning the equipment. “Sometimes live ‘two-way’ interviews on location with correspondents or key news figures help to generate news or keep up the profile and/or momentum of a story, even though there is no particular news development to warrant them. Without “real-time” satellite ‘up-links,’ such an editorial momentum cannot be maintained.”<sup>14</sup> The presence of this kind of technology in a conflict zone therefore creates a completely different dynamic and pressure in television journalism itself. Ted Koppel of ABC News comments:

*You write differently when you know your piece won't make air for another day or two. You function differently... you have time to think. You have some time to report... the capacity to go live creates its own terrible dynamic. Putting someone on the air while an event is unfolding is clearly a technological tour de force, but it is an impediment, not an aid, to good journalism.*<sup>15</sup>

This is an impediment that is now fully understood by policymakers and a major reason why they have very little trust in television reporting. As one senior U.S. official put it: “Television is often wrong. We have to make sure we are right.”<sup>16</sup> Another policy official states that, “television is a joke, and it is scary to think that this is the way many Americans get their news.”<sup>17</sup> In Britain, Edward Bickham, former Special Advisor to the British Foreign Secretary, has expressed publicly what many government officials, both U.S. and British, are generally reluctant to say:

*The power of television in foreign policy is a mixed blessing. As a medium it plays too much to the heart, and too little to the head. It presents powerful, emotive images, which conjure strong reactions. Anecdotes about individual suffering make compelling television, but they rarely form a good basis to make policy. Foreign policy should be made by democratic governments, accountable to Parliament [Congress in the U.S.], not in reaction to which trouble spots the news gathering organizations can afford to cover from time to time. Reactions to the priorities of the newsroom are unlikely to yield a coherent or a sustainable foreign policy.*<sup>18</sup>

Such official suspicion and mistrust of the skewed, unfinished picture provided by “real-time” television coverage is one key reason why, in general, “real-time” television and reporting has less impact on foreign policy formulation than many assume.<sup>19</sup> But many times the television reporting is correct and reports events before policymakers even know about them. This is the point where the impact of “real-time” television reporting can be penetrating and profound. Unfortunately for policy officials, this facet also brings with it the necessity for a quick official response to the question flashing across the TV screen – a pressure that has generally not been congruent with the U.S. foreign policy process.

## **RUSH TO DECISION – THE MASS MEDIA’S ROLE AS A CATALYST**

*On August 13, 1961, communist East Germany sprang a surprise in the middle of the night – it closed the border between East and West Berlin, preliminary to building a wall. My cameraman and I were able to cover the story and ship the film to New York just in time to make the 11 PM news. This was the first time a story filmed in Europe had gotten on the air on the same calendar day. President Kennedy told associates he wished he’d had more time for policy formulation before having to react to Americans seeing Berliners’ despairing faces.<sup>20</sup>*

As television has replaced print and wire services as the major conductor of national news, it has profoundly changed the political impact of information around the world. Furthermore, the emergence of global satellite delivery systems has enabled “real-time” reporting – the ability of television to flash news of events and the statements of national leaders immediately to media outlets around the world.<sup>21</sup> In a survey of U.S. foreign policy officials conducted in 1988 by Patrick O’Heffernan, 76 percent of the foreign policy officials surveyed responded positively to the question “Is there evidence that the mass media [both positive and negative media coverage] accelerate foreign policy making?” Results from the interviews corroborate the survey findings that policy officials perceive that the media accelerate policy decisions; 91 percent agreed that it does. Of those interviewed, 14 percent responded that it depends on the event and 77 percent agreed without qualification. Respondents were not unanimous in their opinion of the impact of this speed-up on foreign policy, however; 43 percent felt it was an unqualified negative; 22 percents said there were some benefits; 13 percent felt it was positive; and the remainder did not know.

### **TEMPORAL PRESSURE**

There is little doubt that “real-time” television images of dramatic foreign policy developments greatly increase temporal pressure on policy makers to come up with some sort of a response to the events depicted in the news. This kind of pressure is not irresistible, but it is endured at the risk of media commentary and political criticism and, fundamentally, even one’s own political well-being.<sup>22</sup> “One of the downsides of that kind of instant coverage, it does put a lot of pressure on decision makers. It forces decision makers to move more quickly than is prudent,” according to former White House spokesperson Dee Dee Myers. She continues that during the Somalia crisis in October 1993, “every single day we were forced to respond to developments and do so within the same news cycle.”<sup>23</sup>

General Brent Scowcroft, President Bush’s national security advisor, also commented that CNN “routinely became the first way we found out about crises,” often long before the U.S. embassy or the CIA had given their briefings. “Five minutes after that, the press would want to have a U.S. policy response on it.” While it was possible to endure the pressure, “you could only do that [delay a response] for so long” before the news media began to accuse the administration of being unprepared, dumbfounded, and disorganized, Scowcroft said.<sup>24</sup>

The trepidation found in this is that the decision-making levels of the U.S. government will respond to instant television images that later turn out to be inaccurate, incomplete, or

misshapen. The official's nightmare is that a war might be started, relations with another country ruined, or the U.S. government embarrassed because of policy responses to eye-popping television reports that were later found to be exaggerated, sensationalized, or otherwise unfounded. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy, Secretary of Defense McNamara, and the rest of the president's key advisors (the "Ex Comm") had six days in October 1962 to formulate, free of concerns about the media, a U.S. response to the Soviet Union's placement of missiles in Cuba. Before going public with their policy, they were able to consider a multitude of policy alternatives – free of demands for instant action and response.<sup>25</sup> But years later, Secretary of Defense McNamara asked rhetorically:

*Would the actions in the Cuban Missile Crisis have been different had there not been time to consider this thoughtfully in secret? Well, I think probably they would have been different. I fear that some of our initial judgements [in favor of an air strike], later changed, would have had greater influence.<sup>26</sup>*

Chris Van Hollen, former U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Chief of Staff, also comments on the impact of modern-day effects of real-time reporting:

*It means more distractions, which take people's eyes off a long-term goal. People end up spending a lot of time fire-fighting on issues that probably wouldn't have been raised to a high level in earlier days because there wasn't that much information about it that quickly.<sup>27</sup>*

Other senior policy officials and government media representatives have voiced similar concerns. Phyllis Oakley, former Deputy Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State:

*The tendency would be [to say] that it harms foreign policy because it doesn't allow for enough time to think things through and to consult.<sup>28</sup>*

Robert Beckel, former Assistant Secretary of State, Special Assistant to President Carter:

*I think it probably exposes problems more quickly that if left to fester would probably get worse, so I think there are some advantages there; but I think it tends to accentuate a dangerous situation that might otherwise not be as volatile it causes response that may not be as well thought out as it should be.<sup>29</sup>*

Hodding Carter, former Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State:

*Television has, because of the impact of the fast arriving picture, has forced or driven governments to respond more quickly to events than its own information would have deemed prudent, to say something to counter these images. These images thus effect posturing.<sup>30</sup>*

William Ingle, former Minority Counsel, House Foreign Affairs Committee:

*It's a major problem. It's very common. They [Members of Congress involved in foreign policy] have very little time to respond because it will be literally within an hour, a half-hour of an event, in some cases. It is difficult for anyone to get information at that point. So what you are responding to are very superficial facts of an event. Unfortunately, most people share their view of the situation at that point in time when they have to say 'I think this is good, I think this is bad.' And then it's difficult to change that view even six hours later when more information can come in.*<sup>31</sup>

## **THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD**

Thus far, this discussion has focused on the negative aspects of “real-time” coverage. But “CNN and its brethren are less like a blunt instrument than like a double-edged sword.”<sup>32</sup> In fact, CNN’s effects are not all negative from a policymaker’s standpoint – if they know how to use it, CNN’s “real-time” news facet can be an immense benefit to them. “Real-time” television allows government officials to disseminate their policies and assertions almost instantaneously; to send signals to both opponents and allies; and to view and analyze the impact of their actions, adjusting and correcting when and where necessary. Also, because CNN is by nature “real-time” and immediate, its reports are more like the old news wires, which typically distribute the first written, factual accounts of news events. This means that there is less judgmental bias inserted into the anchor or reporter’s story.<sup>33</sup>

Arguably the greatest service to policymakers that CNN’s “real-time” reporting provides is its ability to reach a large audience quickly. This allows policymakers to make their positions known clearly and efficiently if done correctly. For instance, the Federal News Service is a non-governmental firm that provides journalists, policymakers, and others with an electronic transcript of press conferences, speeches, and other events soon after they occur. In an interview immediately before a news conference on U.S. Policy toward Bosnia, Department of Defense spokesman Kenneth Bacon noted that every word of the conference would soon be in the hands of those the department was trying to reach. “This is something you couldn’t do five years ago. This is a huge leap, a powerful and useful tool,” he said. CNN, the Federal News Service, C-SPAN, and the like are “a powerful extension of the briefing podium.”<sup>34</sup> A former Defense Department spokesperson, Margaret Tutwiler, expressed the same sentiment. While giving a briefing, she often spoke not only to the room of reporters but also to the group of TV cameras in the back of the room. She knew that she had “a much larger audience than the men or women in the room.” She also knew that if the reporters were giving her a particularly tough time, “TV-land was basically going to be on my side.”<sup>35</sup>

Another positive aspect of “real-time” television lies in an official’s ability to correct (or at least attempt to correct) what they see as inaccurate or misshapen reporting. Bacon related that both he and Defense Secretary William Perry held CNN Pentagon correspondent Jamie McIntyre in high regard, but if they felt that one of McIntyre’s reports was in error or incomplete, Perry would call him and try to “spin” the story a different way.<sup>36</sup> With the major broadcasters (ABC, CBS, NBC), “you get one shot – the evening news,” says Bacon. With CNN, “You get twelve, sometimes twenty-four times a day to make the changes.”<sup>37</sup> A senior White House official was less than enamored with this aspect of CNN, observing that it is errors proliferated by CNN

in the first place that officials usually find themselves trying to correct.<sup>38</sup>

Another aspect of the “CNN effect” is the way that it can instantly inform the U.S. public of foreign crises that raise questions of U.S. involvement or even intervention. Simply put, television images help build a public constituency for U.S. involvement abroad, and CNN might be one of the last lines of defense against a traditionally isolationist U.S. public. Even presidents will actively use such images to build the case for American action. President Bush used this in 1992 as he explained to the American people why the U.S. should send troops to Somalia to stop mass starvation. President Clinton did the same in November 1995 when he had to convince Congress and the American public to support the deployment of 20,000 U.S. troops on a peace operation in Bosnia – he frequently referred to images of horror from the region as a basis for building public support.<sup>39</sup>

### **REAL-TIME INTERVENTION – SARAJEVO 1994**

A prime example of the role of “real-time” media reports on U.S. foreign policy decisions is the gruesome footage of the February 5, 1994, “marketplace massacre” in Sarajevo. As recounted by Warren Strobel (White House and former State Department correspondent for *The Washington Times*):

*Just after noon local time on Saturday, February 5, 1994, a 120-millimeter mortar shell was fired into the central market in Sarajevo’s old city. The shell tore through the corrugated tin roof of a stall and slammed into a table, exploding before it hit the ground. This happenstance had two important consequences: it made it impossible to tell who had fired the shell, and because it exploded at waist level the destruction was all the more gruesome. The shell turned the crowded marketplace into a charnel house, dismembering and decapitating bodies with its powerful explosion. Sixty-eight people were killed and nearly two hundred wounded in the deadliest single attack in Sarajevo’s twenty-two-month siege. Within minutes, television cameras caught the horrible carnage and broadcast the scene around the world. At the Wehrkunde security conference in Munich, attended by recently appointed U.S. defense secretary William Perry, along with European defense ministers and parliamentarians, the images came in on the hotel television system’s CNN channel. The impact was immediate.<sup>40</sup>*

The mortar shell, almost certainly fired by Bosnian Serbs, landed in a crowded marketplace in Sarajevo on the busiest shopping day of the week – CNN reported the event, replete with pictures, for almost three days. In New York, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Madeline Albright, was in a meeting with her staff when the telephone rang with the news. She “did what anyone would do. I turned on CNN.”<sup>41</sup>

In the aftermath of the attack and the public outcry, the United States abandoned its hands-off policy toward the Balkan conflict. It let NATO in issuing an ultimatum to the Bosnian Serbs to remove their heavy weapons from around Bosnia’s capital (an extension of this threat would lead to NATO’s first use of offensive force in Europe in its history). The United States also



established the five-nation "Contact Group," giving new momentum to the search for a diplomatic solution to the conflict.<sup>42</sup>

This would clearly seem to be a case where CNN's reports directly led the United States towards action. But while the images did have an undeniable impact, it was not a simple cause-effect one that this quick glance at events would suggest. At the time of the mortar attack, the United States was already moving toward a more active role in the Balkans. The evidence for this comes from many sources, including the fact that Secretary of State Warren Christopher met with French foreign minister Alain Juppé on January 24, 1994. Juppé argued on the basis of the damage being done by U.S. policy and urged the United States to help seek a solution to the worsening conflict.<sup>43</sup> A week later, British foreign secretary Douglas Hurd reiterated the same sentiments, adding that the U.S.'s inability to affect the conflict was eroding the Atlantic alliance and American leadership.<sup>44</sup> On February 4, 1994 (the day *before* the attack), Secretary of State Warren Christopher therefore proposed that the United States lead a new diplomatic effort, combined with the threat of using force.<sup>45</sup> In a long position paper that he sent to National Security Advisor Anthony Lake and Secretary of Defense Perry, he wrote, "I am acutely uncomfortable with the passive position we are now in and believe that now is the time to undertake a new initiative."<sup>46</sup> As stated before, Christopher's proposal was for a renewed diplomatic effort, combined with the threat of force.<sup>47</sup> "We had a real sense that we didn't have a Bosnia policy that was going anywhere," said a senior State Department official. "We had already made the psychological determination [about] the direction we wanted to go."<sup>48</sup> This official was in a series of meetings on revamping the Bosnia policy around the time the mortar attack occurred and recalled worrying that the new policy would be seen, incorrectly, as an instant response to the massacre.<sup>49</sup>

## **THE PRESIDENT**

The first reports of the Sarajevo market massacre "incensed" President Clinton. "They pushed him and some (though not all) of his advisors into the Oval Office on a Saturday afternoon."<sup>50</sup> The television pictures made their own silent plea – the carnage did not need a journalist to say categorically "something must be done." No viewer, whether politician or not, could fail to be appalled by the un-sanitized images of shredded limbs, headless bodies, puddles of blood and the torsos being shipped on trucks like animal carcasses.<sup>51</sup>

President Clinton's immediate reaction to the shelling was not action, however. The President was said to be "outraged" by what he saw on television, even though the White House had "become so inured to violence that the early reports created only a small stir."<sup>52</sup> Clinton's position initially was officially described as "tentative."<sup>53</sup> He was still operating from previous sentiment – nearly a year before, the administration had decided that there would be no unilateral U.S. action in Bosnia – seen largely as a reaction to western Europe's rejection of Clinton's proposal to "lift and strike" (lift the UN arms embargo as it applied to the Muslim-led Bosnian government and conduct air strikes against Bosnian Serb positions).<sup>54</sup> The President's advisors were also unwilling to recommend retaliation while it remained officially unclear who had fired the mortar shell.<sup>55</sup> This gives evidence that officials do not always react immediately to dramatic news media reports that may later turn out to be inaccurate or incomplete. Following the massacre, the President's political conundrum was between exercising "caution," and as

Anthony Lake put it, a realization that “we’ve got to do something.”<sup>56</sup> According to Nik Gowing:

*Indeed the President went out of his way not to appear to be responding too hastily to TV images. He made a point of discussing health care strategy, playing golf, and giving the impression of ‘business as usual,’ even to the point of not inviting the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to a Sunday meeting for fear of raising expectation with the press over air strikes.<sup>57</sup>*

With caution prevailing, his instinct was instead to ask the allies what to do.

## **THE FRENCH**

From this, the overt pressure on U.S. foreign policy came not from the television images but on the phone from the French government. France had been furious with the Serb leadership since mid-January when President Milosevic and the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic had reneged on assurances given to the French relating to the peace process. The French felt betrayed and, under growing internal political pressure, France was determined to “take political revenge” against the Serbs.<sup>58</sup> White House Communications Director Mark Gearan commented that “it [coverage of the market massacre] helped the [French] argument.”<sup>59</sup> Taking its cue from the massacre and the intense coverage surrounding it, France led the way in demanding that the West threaten air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs, who were immediately presumed to have fired the shell. The French used this momentum, along with intense diplomatic activity both in person and by telephone, to force the U.S. hand towards agreement and involvement.<sup>60</sup> Graham Allison, Assistant U.S. Defense Secretary at the time, confirmed that “France was pressing for action. The Sarajevo market massacre crystallized for the Clinton administration that it had to do something; that we could not do nothing. Those who wanted to do something seized on it.”<sup>61</sup>

This change in French position regarding air strikes was significant because, as the largest contributor of ground troops to UNPROFOR, France had rejected previous proposals for the use of air power (citing troop safety).<sup>62</sup> In almost a complete 180-degree shift, Juppé spoke with Christopher by telephone on Saturday and Sunday arguing that NATO should seize the momentum and use the threat of force to create a demilitarized zone around Sarajevo (the French proposal was later ultimately adopted as both U.S. and NATO policy, as modified by Washington).

## **IMPLICATIONS OF “REAL-TIME” REPORTING**

The gruesome scenes on television also helped Christopher – who was now a principal advocate of powerful and commanding U.S. action in the Balkans – make his case both publicly and within the administration.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the “real-time” facet of television images accelerated the policy process and forced decisions outside of the bureaucracy – at least according to Michael McCurry (Christopher’s spokesperson at the time). “It could have taken weeks or months. The impact of the marketplace bombing was to force there to be a response much quicker than the U.S. government” would normally produce.<sup>64</sup> Another high-ranking State Department official anonymously supports this position: “In some ways, it kind of jelled with exactly the direction we were going. The marketplace massacre gave us a change to come in, be responsive to

the Bosnian [government's] concerns, strengthen our credentials."<sup>65</sup> These descriptions of the news media's role concur with previous studies of far different kinds of policy decisions: namely, that the media can have their largest impact when the U.S. foreign policy process is incomplete; that it speeds up the process; and that coverage, particularly negative coverage, propels the issue up the bureaucratic ladder to higher-level officials.<sup>66</sup>

The discussion of whether the United States and Europe would have taken more decisive action in Bosnia in early 1994 without the momentum and force provided by the horrific images from Sarajevo borders on the existential.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the event has captured on videotape out the pain of Sarajevo and the inadequacy of Western policies at the top of global (and U.S.) agenda, but this was despite the fact that nothing had really changed. A senior official anonymously commented to Warren Strobel that "people had been dying day after day after day." But once the images flashed across that television screen, people "think something new or different has happened... a discrete act that needs to be responded to."<sup>68</sup>

It is debatable whether the Clinton administration could have explained a more forceful policy in the Balkans to the American people, much less convince reluctant allies such as Britain and Canada to participate, without the action-imperative social and political atmosphere created by the vivid images from Sarajevo.<sup>69</sup> Even if true, this perspective on television's impact is far different from the cause-effect relationship that often is cited.<sup>70</sup> Far from driving government officials and policymakers where they fear to tread, dramatic "real-time" television images can open the door to action that was desired but might not have been possible before.<sup>71</sup> It is also equally as valid to ask what effect the bloody images from Sarajevo would have had if U.S. policy had been moving in the opposite direction – away from further action in Bosnia. Several policymakers have cited a belief that images play a role only when events are already moving in the direction that policy suggests. A senior official communicated to Warren Strobel that "there have been two images that, at least in terms of television have been most vivid since I have been here [in the Clinton administration]."<sup>72</sup> One was the image from the marketplace massacre in Sarajevo; the other was that of a U.S. soldier's corpse being pulled through the streets of Mogadishu in October 1993.<sup>73</sup> The official continues that:

*In both of those instances, there seemed to be an intersection of an event with a growing mood, frustration, [and] policymaking decisions being imminent. They propelled policymakers to take certain steps. For the media to have a dramatic input on policy, there almost has to be a convergence of certain factors for that to happen.*<sup>74</sup>

Finally, the marketplace massacre example provides evidence of how the dramatic impact of television images declines over time. On August 28, 1995, another artillery shell fell in the very same marketplace in Sarajevo's old city. It killed at least 36 Sarajevans and wounded scores more. Additionally, a UN investigation left no doubt that the Bosnian Serbs had fired the shell, and (several weeks before, following the fall of the Srebrenica and Zepa "safe areas" of the Serbs) NATO's defense ministers had pledged to protect the remaining safe areas, including Sarajevo, from attack.<sup>75</sup> Ultimately, the international community's reputation and credibility was on the line, and these non-media factors – the strategic and diplomatic environment – determined U.S. policy in this instance far more than the television images. Mike McCurry, White

House press secretary, submits that the only real question was, “were we going to make good on those commitments?”<sup>76</sup> History shows us that NATO did, launching a massive and extensive air campaign against Bosnian Serb targets. According to McCurry, the equally horrifying new images from the marketplace played a much smaller role in the policy process than they had in February of 1994. Simply stated, McCurry said that, “because it’s the second time around, it had less shock value.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Nik Gowing. p. 70.

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