

## **The Influence of the CNN Effect and the Al Jazeera Effect on American Foreign Policy**

Shqipe Palloshi\*

### **Abstract**

This article explores the relationship between American mass media and foreign international news channels on United States foreign policy. Initially, the paper examines the ability of contemporary global mass media to influence governments' policy making. Then, it focuses on the ability of American mass media to influence the foreign policy decisionmaking at the White House. The last part of this article examines the influence that foreign global mass media (in this case, Al Jazeera) can or cannot have on U.S. foreign policy decisions. Finally, the article ends with an assessment of both the CNN Effect and the Al Jazeera Effect in terms of the significance and the benefits and/or drawbacks of their influence. In conclusion the article discusses whether the United States government has the ability to control this media influence and use it to support its policy agenda, and with an assessment of the future of the CNN effect and the Al Jazeera effect.

**Key words:** U.S. foreign policy, media, CNN effect, Al Jazeera effect;

### **Introduction**

With the advent of geosynchronous satellites, first launched by the US government in 1965, the ability of governments to exclusively control information came to a slow but profound end (Price 2002), and the process of foreign decision-making has become more of a theater. The public now receives information about international events as they happen, leaving little time for policymakers to consider their options. In our era, the prestige and power of a state are not determined by military power, but by media influence. It is true that the media are one of the most powerful and effective means to achieve a certain goal these days, but do media really have the ability to affect a government policy, or are they the mere conveyors of what governments decide?

American media have proven themselves to have an influence on the public that is worthy of being taken into consideration when analysing American politics, and it has often seemed that they have pushed the government into undertaking something to resolve a particular issue, but do American media truly have the ability to shape Washington's policies

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\* Undergraduate student, Faculty of Languages, International Balkan University, shqipepalloshi@hotmail.com

toward other countries? And finally, has the rise of non-American and non-Western media significantly changed the balance of news flows in the international market, introducing a different perspective to the so-far-dominant Western perspective. And can these new media – Al Jazeera, in particular – influence the Pentagon’s responses towards international events and developments?

Scholars and media observers alike maintain that both networks are able to influence politics and society. According to Belknap (2001) the advent of real-time news coverage has led to immediate public awareness of policies. Baker (1995) says the CNN Effect forces policymakers to respond to events and developments, while former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton firmly claimed that Al Jazeera is effectively changing people’s minds (The Huffington Post 2011). To explain the phenomenon of this influence, scholars have designated both a “CNN Effect” and an “Al Jazeera Effect”. The CNN effect was acknowledged during the 1990-91 Gulf War, while the Al Jazeera Effect builds upon its predecessor and was recognized after September 11, 2001. These terms refer to the ability of these two networks to affect foreign policy through their covering and broadcasting of international events.

### **Scope**

The primary question of this article is: Do the CNN effect and the Al Jazeera effect influence the foreign policy decisions made by the United States government? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to assess whether global mass media have the ability and capacity to be an important actor in domestic and international politics. More importantly, it is also necessary to discern whether they have the ability to influence American public opinion and government strongly enough as to generate policy responses that are in line with the media interpretation of issues.

The following subquestions are posed to further illucidate this topic:

Do global mass media in general influence governments’ foreign policy making?

Can the CNN effect influence U.S. foreign policy decisions?

Can the Al Jazeera influence U.S. foreign policy decisions?

What are the possible benefits and detriments that the CNN Effect and the Al Jazeera Effect can bring to international communications and politics?

The “CNN Effect” and “Al Jazeera Effect” phenomena refer to a wide range of Western media, as well as new media from the Middle East, Latin America and Asia. This article focuses on the CNN and Al Jazeera because they are the prime examples of these phenomena and currently the two of the most important news outlets globally.

## **Global Mass Media and Government Foreign Policy**

### **Can media affect foreign policy at all?**

Media influence on policy, foreign and domestic, has been the subject of some research, but is not generally taken seriously in the relevant disciplines. So far, there is a lack of systematic research and acknowledgement of media influence on policymaking (Arnold, 2011). This may be due to the indirect nature of the media’s effects. The media do not influence policymakers directly. Their framing of issues and events influences the electorate’s willingness to approve of the policymakers decisions (Arnold 2011).

Seib (2008) argues that the media are able to influence foreign policy by shaping international and public opinion. His main idea is the “virtual state”: dispersed communities achieve an unprecedented cohesion that puts them on the political map internationally. In this way, global mass media create a “virtual sovereignty” by cultivating a shared identity among dispersed members of ethnic and religious communities. Real-time coverage of crises has made the public a party of policy discussions. This has not abolished the high diplomatic discussions altogether, but it has created a global scene for this discussions on which to take place. In her review of Seib’s *The Al Jazeera Effect*, Arnold (2011) upholds the relevance of the “virtual state” theory for foreign policy. In her opinion, virtual states can affect the stability of traditional states and the media can alleviate tensions and conflict by providing new perspectives to audiences.

Mody (2010) argues that media influence foreign policy by putting issues on the public agenda and by framing them in a way that catches the attention and sympathy of a large audience, which then demands action from their representatives. She argues that the Somali famine and the Darfur genocide were included in the international public agenda only after the media began covering them. She terms this phenomenon as “mobilizing conscience” – media making policymakers uncomfortable for not reacting to a crisis. However, Arnold (2011) argues that the media face multiple constraints, such as geopolitical history, national interest, state

ownership, and audience demands. These constraints may hinder the media's ability to become an important factor on the political scene, as well as their ability to shape public opinion and drive policymakers into action. O'Neill (1993) maintains that global television has a decisive and dominant role in international politics, adding that it has completely changed the conventional diplomatic system that determined political and diplomatic outcomes.

Ammon (2001) has coined the term "telediplomacy" to describe the emergence and growing in influence of the global news system, which has brought dramatic changes to the international politics scene. In his opinion, "telediplomacy" has the power to drive policy and determine diplomatic outcomes. However, other scholars claim that despite the its great potential, leaders enjoy an information advantage over the media. Policymakers are the primary traders of information in the marketplace of foreign policy, and the media have to use them as their primary source of such information (Baum & Potter 2007). As a result, the government has the ability to state its desired perspective of an issue.

However, the media are very important in the process of foreign policy because their role as the mediator between officials and the public prompts officials into sharing this kind of information with the public. Nevertheless, the mediator role can be troublesome. The leaders and the public often have opposing interests and the media should please both. On one hand, they should preserve elites' preferred framing of information in order to continue to be able to use them as information source, i.e. to preserve their willingness to share their valuable information. On the other hand, they should frame the news in such a way as not to seem to supportive of political elites and lose the support of the public. Thus, the media walk a fine line—paying enough deference to elite frames to maintain access, while deviating enough to generate and maintain public interest in these news (Baum & Potter 2007).

The most accurate way to explain the relationship between the media and foreign policy, is by acknowledging the potential that the media have to influence international politics due to their role as the connecting bridge between public opinion and foreign policy makers, but also being aware of the impediments that they face due to economical factors or the compromises they have to make in order to ensure their existence, to preserve their information sources and the public's trust. They can often be manipulated by political elites, whose official rhetoric they must follow, or are sometimes forced to index their coverage to the official line of policy

direction in order to avoid being labeled as unpatriotic, especially in cases of a war that is widely supported by the public.

### **How can the media affect government policy?**

According to Livingston (1997), Bahador media's effect on government policies, can be divided into the following categories: the accelerant effect, the impediment effect, the agenda-setting effect, the force-multiplying effect.

#### **The Accelerant Effect**

The accelerant effect refers to the media's ability to indirectly influence government decisions by shortening the time for government officials to consider an event and to come up with a policy response. Instantaneous reporting of events demands instant analysis by governments (Burns 1996). Real-time media shortens the decision-making time which can lead to policymakers formulating a policy response without having a detailed report of the issue, and thus come up with a wrong decision.

#### **The Impediment Effect**

The impediment effect describes the media's ability to undermine public support for an action or policy, and thus hinder the implementation thereof. This is particularly true for cases of war. Broadcasting pictures of dead American soldiers fighting in a war where no major U.S. interest is at stake can seriously diminish public support for the war.

#### **The Agenda-Setting Effect**

Formally developed by Dr. Max McCombs and Dr. Donald Shaw in their study on the 1968 U.S. presidential election (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), this theory suggests that an issue that is frequently covered by the media ends up being perceived by the public as being important. Consequently, policy makers are forced to respond to it.

### **The Force-Multiplier Effect**

Television is all about compelling pictures (Sardesai 2009). The force-multiplying effect is the media's ability to consolidate and strengthen support for a government policy by speaking in its favor, or it can be government using the media to repel the opponent by magnifying its power.

### **The CNN Effect and American Foreign Policy**

#### **Origins of the CNN Effect**

Ted Turner established CNN in 1980. It is the first news network that started to broadcast 24/7 news around the world. The crucial moment for CNN's recognition as a factor in global communications and politics was the 1990-91 Gulf War. This war established CNN as one of the "big three" American networks due to the impressive reporting the network offered, as it was the only news outlet broadcasting from inside Iraq during the American bombing campaign. At this time CNN became the first example of how the media could influence both domestic and global politics. It also gained praise for the role it played in the wars in Bosnia (1995) and Kosovo (1999) and in the famine crisis in Somalia (1990-1991). As a result, the public began thinking that this network had a major role in global politics and was able to affect Western governments' decisions regarding foreign policy. This supposed effect was named as the "CNN Effect", the "CNN Complex", the "CNN curve", and the "CNN Factor" (Hulme 1996). Politicians who believed that the U.S. defeat in Vietnam came as a result of critical television coverage initially developed the concept. Others attribute the CNN effect with helping foster the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ever since, the media has been considered an adversary to government foreign policies.

Leaders' fascination with CNN also resulted from the idea that television was the most significant broker in politics. The CNN Effect was attributed the power to transform international politics, and the CNN was considered as a superpower in the world of foreign policy and international relations. To describe this phenomenon, scholars and media observers coined many terms such as, mediademocracy, mediacracy, mediapolitik, teledemocracy, and medialism (Gilboa 2005).

### **What is the CNN Effect?**

The idea behind the “CNN Effect” is that real-time communications technologies are able to influence officials’ decision-making as well as the perspectives of the public regarding global events. According to Livingston (1997), the CNN effect is a loss of policy control on the part of policy makers because of the power of the media. It includes everything from the impact that graphic pictures of human suffering on television can have on the public, to the media’s power to force officials to take quicker decisions in response to foreign events involving (or not) U.S. interests. The CNN Effect also refers to officials’ use of the media to send messages to their counterparts in another state, thus altering standard diplomatic communication methods. Though named after the Cable News Network, the phenomenon does not refer only to CNN, but all mass media that have a global reach, such as Fox, SkyNews, BBC World and MSNBC. So, the CNN effect is the collective impact of all real-time news coverage.

Many scholars have written about the CNN effect. Some take it as gospel, and some dismiss its importance. Zingarelli (2010) suggests that the CNN Effect exists, even though it has more complexity than simple cause-and-effect. Scholars hold varying definitions, but all agree that this phenomenon describes the amount of influence that real-time media have on both elite policymakers and public opinion. Livingston has defined the CNN Effect thinking of the relationship between government officials and the media as dance. The claim of the CNN Effect is that at various points in time it’s the media who are leading the dance and the government is responding to the media’s initiatives.

The CNN Effect represents a conflict of pressure of public opinion on leaders who feel that they should make decisions based on expertise and rationality, rather than the news cycle (Livingston & Eachus 1995). According to Seib (2002) the CNN effect is presumed to illustrate the dynamic tension that exists between real-time television news and policymaking, with the news having the upper hand in terms of influence. The CNN Effect theory suggests that crisis coverage evokes emotional outcries from the public to do something about the incident, which forces political leaders to change course or risk unpopularity (Neuman 1996).

### **Does the CNN Effect influence U.S. Foreign Policy?**

Scholars hold opposing opinions as to whether the CNN Effect influences U.S. foreign policy. Gowing (1994) found that media influence upon strategic decisions to intervene was rare, while

tactical and cosmetic impact was more frequent. Mandelbaum (1994) maintains that television pictures of human suffering are able to drive U.S. governments to intervene to a crisis. Likewise, Shattuck (1996) claims that the media have the power to dictate foreign policy decisions. Researches conducted so far present mixed, contradictory and confusing results. Yet, most studies show that the CNN effect has been given more importance that it actually deserves.

It is true that it has brought significant changes to the policymaking process. It has shortened the time for decision-making and it has the ability to bring to the public's attention something that the policy makers would rather ignore. Gowing (1994) conducted a survey with dozens of British and American officials and found that every official interviewed agreed that the rise of CNN has radically altered the way U.S. foreign policy is conducted. Former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali claimed that in addition to changing the policymaking environment, the CNN Effect could also influence policy outcomes. He has gone so far as to consider the CNN "the sixteenth member of the Security Council" (Minear, Scott, & Weiss 1996, p. 4).

Indeed, the CNN Effect may have banished the privilege of careful and slow policy deliberation that leaders used to enjoy (Livingston & Eachus 1995). Yet, this only proves that it has changed the process of policymaking, and does not mean that it can also impact the foreign policy outcomes. Studies that analyse the supposed influence of the CNN Effect on foreign policy decisions suggest that the power of the media in this field is differential and limited. This is because government foreign policy decisions are most often driven by the policy goals of an administration, which have been formulated prior to televisions' coverage of a crisis.

According to Strobel (1996), the closer one looks at those incidents that supposedly prove a CNN Effect, where dramatic and/or real-time images appear to have forced policy makers into making sudden changes, the more the Effect shrinks. It is like a shimmering desert mirage, disappearing as you get closer. An increasing number of scholars doubt the idea that television (or the CNN in particular) is able to dictate U.S. foreign policy decisions. Studies on the CNN Effect reveal three major reasons why the CNN effect cannot influence foreign policy. Those reasons are explained by one or more the following theories/hypotheses: the indexing theory, the manufacturing consent approach, and the realistic theory.



### **The indexing hypothesis**

The “indexing hypothesis” predicts that news content on political and public policy issues will generally follow the parameters of elite debate: when political elites are in general agreement on an issue, news coverage of that issue will tend to reflect that consensus; when political elites disagree, news coverage will fall more or less within the contours of their disagreement (Bennett, 1990). In other words, this hypothesis suggests that the media are a tool in the hands of policymakers. Zaller and Chiu (1996, 2000) applied the indexing hypothesis to 42 foreign policy crises in the period of the Cold War until the 1999 Kosovo crisis, and found that the “indexing hypothesis” holds true.

### **The manufacturing consent theory**

Herman & Chomsky (1998) argued that mainstream media is a propaganda organ in the hands of the political elites, yet they wear a liberal coat to protect itself from criticism. According to them, the media are a machine that manufactures public consent by shaping, determining and restricting the network of how political and social debate can occur within the public discourse. The manufacturing consent theory suggests that the elite controls the media through economic power and uses it as a supportive arm for their policy goals.

### **The realist approach**

The realist approach claims that survival is the paramount goal of every state. It suggests that states are rational actors, which try their best to maximize their likelihood of continuing to exist (Slaughter 2011). Therefore, in foreign affairs, states pursue only power and national interest. This approach excludes the possibility that humanitarian considerations or global television coverage are sufficient causes for intervention.

Gibbs (2000) applied the realist approach to the intervention in Somalia and came up with results that suggested that the intervention was driven by American national interests rather than by media coverage of the famine. Livingston (1997) claims that some of the most prominent post-Cold War U.S. humanitarian interventions reveal equally compelling geostrategic reasons for the intervention. Gowing (1994) interviewed policymakers in several countries and came to the conclusion that policymakers refrain from acting in response to television news reports when there is no national interest at stake. He noted that, in 1991, the

United States refrained from intervention in Bosnia in spite of substantial news coverage of the crisis.

The media can impact policy when intervention in a country is perceived to be low cost and/or can make the country seem heroic. Robinson (2002) maintains that the media are likely to influence when an administration is uncertain about a policy. When policy is certain, media influence is unlikely to occur. He proves his theory to be referring to the U.S. policy to defend the Gorazde 'safe area' in Bosnia. According to him, the Clinton administration responded to media's coverage because they had no clear policy. Another similar case is that of Kosovo, but this time the administration had a clear policy of not including ground troops in the intervention, and the media was not able to persuade the administration to expand the operation.

### **Intervention in Somalia**

The U.S. intervention to Somalia offers an example of the dynamic interactive nature of foreign policy making and media coverage. This intervention is the most cited example both in favour of and against the CNN Effect.

Cohen (1994) maintains that television has demonstrated its power to move governments. By focusing daily on the starving children in Somalia, a pictorial story tailor-made for television, TV mobilized the conscience of the nation's public institutions, compelling the government into a policy of intervention for humanitarian reasons. Similarly, Mandelbaum (1994) also claims that television pictures of starving people drove the U.S. intervention, and Shattuck (1996) claimed that it was the media that got the U.S. government in and out of Somalia. Supporters of this idea claim that there was an equally severe crisis in Sudan, but the government did not do anything about it, simply because it was not covered by the media.

Other scholars claim that the coverage of Somalia came as a result of official action. Livingston & Eachus (1995) point out that the coverage of Somalia boomed only after the Bush administration decided to intervene. Analyses of the coverage of Somalia on television show that there were very few reports (15 on the three major networks) before the government's decision to intervene (Zingarelli 2010). In 1991 the US-AID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and Food for Peace Program shipped around 12,000 tons of food to Somalia (Livingston & Eachus 1995). After this, coverage of Somalia skyrocketed. The same phenomenon occurred later in 1992 when Bush sent 25,000 U.S. troops to safeguard

humanitarian aid. Every time, the media were either following the actions of relief officials or members of Congress, or the troops (Strobel 1996).

Furthermore, the journalists that reported on the Somalia famine were aided by international relief agencies that needed TV images to move governments to respond to a crisis. When the reporters arrived in Somalia – with the help of international and American relief organizations - they sent back compelling pictures of the famine, which were broadcast by American media around the clock. Livingston and Eachus (1995) concluded that the U.S. decision to intervene militarily in Somalia was the result of diplomatic and bureaucratic operations, with news coverage coming in response to those decisions. Mermin (1999) suggested that the intervention in Somalia is evidence of the power of governments to move television, rather than the power of television to move governments.

Gibbs (2000) upholds this claim. Referring to the realist approach, he maintains that the official reason for the intervention was a humanitarian concern, but the real reason for the intervention was U.S. strategic and economic interests. Somalia is located near the shipping routes in the Red Sea and to the strategically important Mandeb straits. The American oil company “Liberty Petroleum” had at the time been investing in oil explorations. However, Somali warlord Mohammad Aideed was not always willing to cooperate in favour of U.S. interests and the government felt it had to do something. This is why U.S. policy varied from cooperation to confrontation with the locals, depending on their willingness to preserve U.S. interests. According to Gibbs, it was U.S. national interests that caused this intervention rather than the CNN effect or humanitarian considerations.

The intervention to Somalia reveals the complexity of the CNN effect. Initially, officials used the media to justify their intervention. Consequently, the media proved their power to manufacture consent and persuade public opinion on the necessity to intervene.

### **The positive and negative aspects of the CNN Effect**

The discussion above reveals that the CNN Effect cannot be defined clearly. The most accurate answer is that it has both positive and negative sides. It can include issues on the policymakers’ agenda issues that they themselves would rather ignore, and thus force them to respond to significant events. This is an important positive aspect of the CNN Effect. Commenting on this, former Pentagon Spokesman Kenneth Bacon says that although it is often perceived as negative,

there are many aspects of the CNN Effect that are good (Strobel 1996). If the CNN criticizes important government policies, officials can arrange to appear on the network and state their perspective. Without CNN's real-time coverage, officials would have to wait until the next day to appear in public. With CNN they can do this many times in a day. Furthermore, the government can utilize CNN to help foster public support for a policy or intervention that is the interest of the country, for the press often makes the case of the need to be involved more than officials can (Strobel, 1996).

These claims suggest that decision makers can use CNN's reach and popularity to manufacture public consent and manipulate public opinion. Another danger that the CNN Effect poses is making the government act based on what the network broadcasts, which might be at odds with U.S. national interest. But, officials claim to have learned to deal with the CNN Effect, thus preventing it from risking the country's interests. Nevertheless, the CNN Effect does contribute to an accelerated decision-making, which can result in policies that lack in-depth analysis, and can, in turn, lead to events cascading out of control and to unexpected confrontations.

## **Al Jazeera and American Foreign Policy**

### **“The Rise of the Rest”**

Ever since the advent of global media, the dominant perspective in these media has been the Western one. The CNN and the BBC have been the two most important voices of the international media. Their reports shaped the truths about global events and as their perspective was the only one whose voice was strong enough as to be heard globally. Scholars have considered this to be a new form of colonialism: electronic colonialism (Zingarelli, 2010). Using its media influence, America and the West propagated their cultural, social, and political ideas and ideals to the rest of the world. People from all over the world lacked a voice of their own, and were consequently subject to the West's portrayals of themselves, their countries and cultures. Moreover, they were forced to see the world through the lenses of the Western media.

In the last two decades, people from other regions of the world started creating their own global-reach media, in order to offer the world their perspective on international events and developments. Zakaria (2009) comments on this phenomenon saying that, in the first stage of globalization everyone watched CNN, in the second stage BBC and Sky News emerged. Now

every country is producing its own version of CNN, such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabia, New Delhi's NDTV and AajTalk.

However, the prime example of the new media phenomenon and “the rise of the rest” is the Qatar-based Al Jazeera. Like other new media networks, it seeks to bring a different perspective on international events to the Western one and to fill the information void. With the emergence of these new media networks, the power to impact international politics does not belong exclusively to American and Western networks any longer. This is important, because as Seib (2008) notes, it is media power, rather than military might that establishes prestige and power in our era. Until recently, this enormous power has been in the hands of America and the West. This facilitated the implementation Western international policies due to the media's ability to shape the international public opinion.

The rise of the new media is perhaps the most important development of our century for it has the power to create a balance of viewpoints. People are now able to choose among a wider array of international networks, be exposed to varying perspectives and consequently have a better understanding of the global dynamics as well as the lives and cultures of people and nations at the other end of the globe.

### **Origins of Al Jazeera**

Al Jazeera is owned by the Al Jazeera Media Network, funded by the House of Thani, the ruling family of Qatar. The original Arabic channel was founded on November 1, 1996. It now has five branch channels including: Al Jazeera English, Al Jazeera Mubasher, Al Jazeera Balkans, Al Jazeera Turk and Al Jazeera Documentary. Its English channel was launched in November 2006 (Zingarelli, 2010). Al Jazeera produces and disseminates news, political commentary, cultural, sports and children's programming. It borrowed the programming format from the CNN, yet it aims to establish for itself an identity that would differentiate it from Western networks. Al Jazeera represents a critique of Western news and programming, while at the same time embodying a hybrid identity of Western technologies and formats adapted and evolved to meet the culturally and historically constructed expectations of Arab and Muslim societies (el-Nawawy & Powers, 2008). It strives to provide an alternative perspective to that of Western media. This aim is represented in its motto: “Al rai wal rai akhir” – “The opinion and the other opinion”.

In the Arab consciousness Al Jazeera emerged as the result of its coverage of the second Intifada (Al Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002). There was little coverage of this on the CNN (and other American networks) and it was biased towards Israel. Al Jazeera offered the Arab perspective of the issue. It began by giving Arabs their perspective on news and challenging governments in the Middle East. It's coverage of Operation Desert Fox in 1998 brought it much notoriety, yet it was its broadcasting of Bin Laden and Al Qaeda tapes that paved its way to the global media mainstream. The interesting fact about Al Jazeera's becoming popular is that it had existed before the appearance of Bin Laden, and Western channels had used its materials before, but it became popular only after broadcasting Al Qaeda tapes. Although policymakers had known about its existence, no one realized its full potential until it aired the first Bin Laden tape on October 7, 1991.

Al Jazeera's launching was welcomed by Western leaders and citizens. President Clinton's administration described it as a beacon of light (Pintak, 2006). Yet, its reputation was diminished after 9/11 due to it being associated with Al Qaeda and its terrorist activities. Its coverage of complicated events, has made it victim of much criticism and accusations: during the 2003 Gulf War, the West accused it for broadcasting Iraqi casualties and Alliance casualties and prisoners, when covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Arab world criticised it for interviewing Israeli officials, and so on. However, Al Jazeera has been able to spread and grow globally, creating an Al Jazeera Effect which symbolizes the liberating effect of the new media on the global society.

### **The Importance of Al Jazeera**

Al Jazeera currently broadcasts to over 220 million households across more 100 countries (Al Jazeera 2014). It has a great impact over the Arab world and in many other places across the globe, particularly the Arab Diaspora and the Muslim population in various countries. The importance of the network lies in the fact that it has been able to change the flow of information from the Western media to the rest world, and turn it the other way around. Pintak (2006) links America's falling popularity to the proliferation of Al Jazeera and other new media. He also accredits Al Jazeera with contributing to the 2005 Cedar Revolution in Lebanon. In his opinion, Al Jazeera's bold criticism enabled the people to see the protests against the Syrian rule, which then caused the revolution.

Al Jazeera's importance lies in the fact that it offers a different perspective on world events, especially those concerning the Arab world. Its coverage is changing both the West's understanding and perception of the Arab world, and the Arab world's understanding of itself and its place in the global scene. It has become a trusted chronicle of Arab and Muslim interests (Seib, 2008). After its boom in popularity in 2001, Al Jazeera has also become an important actor in the global and regional mediapolitik process. As New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman has put it, Al Jazeera is not only the biggest media phenomenon to hit the Arab world since the advent of television, it also is the biggest political phenomenon (Centre of Excellence, 2007).

Furthermore, it is the first Arab news network that challenged the Arab and Middle Eastern tradition of non-criticism towards the dictatorial regimes of the region. It has also taken the monopoly of information from the hands of the regimes and has made it harder for them to rule over a more informed public. It has demonstrated a strong agenda-setting effect with Arab governments by bringing more freedom of thought and speech. This is an indicator that the network has the potential to bring democracy to the Middle East. Al Jazeera has empowered the Arab people and given them the opportunity to make their voice heard and for the world to see their perspective of international events. According to Ghareeb (2000), an expert on Middle Eastern affairs, it has raised the level of debate, opened the door for freer and more accurate news in the Arab world and has helped satisfy a hunger in the Arab world.

### **What is the Al Jazeera Effect?**

The Al Jazeera Effect is a term used in political science and media studies referring to the influence of the new media on global politics. It describes the influence that new global media have on global society. The Al Jazeera Effect theory states that the new media have been able to reduce the government and mainstream media monopoly on information and have empowered groups that previously have lacked a global voice. The most important example of this effect is the network after which it was named: Al Jazeera.

The Al Jazeera Effect functions in the same way as the CNN Effect. It generates accelerant, agenda-setting and impediment effects on governments and has an enormous impact on the international political discourse. Seib (2008) counts the Al Jazeera Effect as a part of the

entire system of new media, including satellite broadcasting, digital technology and even text messaging. He writes:

“To varying degrees throughout the world, the connectivity of new media is superseding the traditional political connections that have brought identity and structure to global politics. This rewiring of the world’s neural system is proceeding at remarkable speed, and its reach keeps extending farther. It changes the way states and citizens interact with each other and it gives the individual a chance at a new kind of autonomy, at least on an individual intellectual level, because of the greater availability of information” (Seib 2008, p. 175).

The most important feature of the Al Jazeera Effect is that it changes perspectives and creates a balance of in the international media and communications environment. One of the prime examples of the Al Jazeera Effect is the War in Iraq. Al Jazeera presented a completely different perspective on the war and diminished the Western media’s exclusive power to define the war. The Al Jazeera Effect does not refer to Al Jazeera only; it applies to all new media that have been able to attract audiences and disrupt the informational monopoly of mainstream media. In a way, mainstream media, including CNN, foster the Al Jazeera Effect providing opportunities for citizen journalism and online activism, and by featuring news about local normal citizens (“CNN Heroes”) instead of talking about mainstream issues and concerns or important figures.

### **Does the Al Jazeera Effect Influence U.S. Foreign Policy?**

Al Jazeera has the ability to influence U.S. foreign policy. By showing American foreign policies in a bad light, it can well undermine its international popularity and impede its international involvement policies and wars. During the 2003 Iraq war, the network provided an impediment effect to American military power. As a consequence, coalition weapons began to hit Al Jazeera crews resulting in the death of Tareq Ayyoub, an Al Jazeera correspondent. Many believe this was a direct attack on Al Jazeera, despite the coalition’s denial. Al Jazeera’s being attacked by coalition forces, proves that Al Jazeera is influential and can impact U.S. politics and policies.

Al Jazeera can affect U.S. foreign policy by providing the different perspective it aims to. Zakaria (2009) writes that many of “the rest” are dissecting the narratives, arguments, and assumptions of the West and countering them with a different view of the world. Consequently, American media are not the single source of information anymore and people do not receive



only information that is biased towards the U.S.. For example, Al Jazeera called its coverage of Operation Iraqi Freedom “The War Against Iraq”. It used lead-ins that showed civilian casualties, exploding bombs and U.S. soldiers on patrol in civilian areas, and broadcast interviews with Osama bin Laden. It presented graphic pictures and videos of the suffering that American weapons had caused. Contrary to Western media Al Jazeera specialized in an up-close, in-your-face approach to covering the Muslim world’s first television wars. Dead babies, wounded children, screaming mothers dominated the channel’s coverage of Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine. When these reports made their way into Western homes and government offices, through other news networks or the Internet, it was shocking. Westerners were seeing the wars they waged from the perspective of those who were living in hostile territory (Pintak 2006, p. 208). This different perspective can make American audiences think twice about the wars their country wages, and thus undermine public support (both domestic and international) for the wars.

Another aspect of Al Jazeera that enables it to influence American foreign policy is that it is quite popular among Arab and Muslim populations, and thus it can shape their opinions against American policies. The same event can have a much greater impact when broadcast in Al Jazeera, because it is in Arabic (Schleifer, 2000). Al Jazeera can create consent among the Arab people and mobilize them to achieve their common goals.

In spite of its capacities to influence, Al Jazeera faces important drawbacks that decrease or impede its influence. In America, very few people can watch it on TV. It is available in the Washington area, and in places like Toledo, Ohio and Burlington, Vermont (Pew Research Center, 2012). In order to watch it, people have to search it online, and there are very few people who would seek to hear a different perspective from their American one, especially not from Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera’s sympathetic reporting of the perspective of families living through the conflict in Iraq looked like an endorsement of terrorism and anti-Americanism. Its coverage of the war in Iraq triggered charges that it had links to terrorist groups that would tell the network in advance where a bombing would happen, so that it could film it, and thus propagate a negative view of the war (Miles, 2006). At the same time as Al Jazeera was enhancing political discourse in the Middle East, it was perceived as a tool of terrorism in the West (Zingarelli, 2010).

Another reason that prevents Al Jazeera from being influential enough, is that when Western media cite it, they edit its feeds. Al Jazeera shows the wars just like they are, using close-ups of wounds, and people in agony. But U.S. networks usually ignore these pictures. Where audiences watching Al Jazeera and the other broadcasters saw bleeding children and destroyed homes, Americans experienced the war as a Hollywood extravaganza on the small screen, billed in advance by the White House as certain to evoke shock and awe (Pintak 2006, p. 209). For instance, Al-Jazeera was first with the story of possible nuclear contamination after villagers looted a top-secret production site in Iraq, but the American networks did not pick up the story. Najjar (2003) comments that the Western channels have Al- Jazeera running twenty-four hours a day, but they don't seem to be paying attention to what's running there. And of course, the major reason why Al Jazeera can hardly influence U.S. policy is that each administration has firmly established policy goals, and these cannot be changed by what the media say. The evidence and explanation for this is provided in the CNN effect part.

### **The positive and negative aspects of the Al Jazeera Effect**

As with all complex phenomena, the Al Jazeera Effect cannot be clearly defined. It has both its pros and cons. The major benefit this network brings is educating and opening up Arab societies. Prior to Al Jazeera, the control of information rested on mainstream state media. Regional news—a coup, a civil war, and a massacre—might never be broadcast if deemed embarrassing to a friendly fellow Arab state. Al Jazeera senior producer Samir Khader says that Al Jazeera exists to educate Arabs about democracy and to shake up their stagnant societies (Hurwitz, 2004). Furthermore, Al Jazeera challenges the claims of the regimes, creating a more transparent informational environment and diminishing the regimes' monopoly on information. In addition to this, it creates balance in the international information scene by putting an end to the single-source news and information flow that has lasted for decades. It brings a different perspective to the informational mosaic and thus enables Arabs in particular and Muslims in general to have their voice heard.

Nevertheless, it can create conflict by providing different perspectives to world events, which can anger people and mobilize them against each other. It broadcasts the same coverage for its Arabic and English channels, and it rebroadcasts news from American media that are intended for American audiences. Therefore, what is intended for Americans is seen by Arabs

and vice-versa. For instance, with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, both the west and the Arab world had to reconsider each other, and opportunities abounded for hostile attitudes to grow through media. Information that the Bush Administration intended for domestic ears played on Al Jazeera too, and it sounded much different-even inflammatory-in another cultural context (Pintak, 2006). Bin Laden had been on TV before, but Western networks could easily filter and deflect his rhetoric because they did not broadcast in Arabic or give much time to his comments. But through Al Jazeera, he could speak directly to the Arabs he wanted as partners (Pintak, 2006).

The Al Jazeera Effect has many sides that make it impossible to single out a definite answer as to whether it is completely positive or completely negative. Yet, when weighting both sides, the positive one seems to weigh more. This is because, in spite of the possibilities for furthering animosities and creating conflict, the Al Jazeera Effect has an enormous positive impact both regionally and globally; it enables people to be more informed and to better understand the dynamics of the current international events and relations.

### **The Future of the CNN Effect and the Al Jazeera Effect**

It seems like the future of the CNN Effect and the Al Jazeera Effect is going to be confusing. Belknap (2002) says that the two networks will continue to grow in their potential to impact international politics. They have found that these effects are growing in influence, and so is their potential to apply pressure on world leaders and give the public the opportunity to stay informed about global events.

The CNN and Al Jazeera can bring the Western and Middle Eastern perspectives closer to each other, thus creating new international dynamics. This can have two possible results: it can create mutual understanding or it can trigger conflict. The CNN and Al Jazeera can provide opportunities for mutual understanding between the people from the Middle East and the West, fostering a better communication and dialogue. They can generate constructive debate or lead to international conflict. According to New York Times writer Roger Chen the encounter between Americans and Westerners with people from Asia, the Middle East and the developing world has produced new dynamics that can bring about peaceful integration (Zingarelli, 2010). But, they can also increase the potential for conflict by propagating cultural misunderstandings.

According to Zingarelli (2010), there is tension between American and Western news viewpoints and the rest of the [Arab] world, and the CNN and Al Jazeera are symbols of this situation and how news and international perspectives are changing. Because the West does not dominate communications anymore, the Al Jazeera Effect has the potential to challenge assumptions about history and culture (Seib, 2008). The formula that Al Jazeera has chosen for itself: both emulating the ways of the CNN and distancing itself from CNN's interpretation of news could make Al Jazeera a huge success. It could become popular if Americans see it as chic and exotic, and thus it could attract viewers who want to see the Middle East from a different perspective and who want to appear sophisticated (Seib, 2008).

However, Strobel (1996) says that the CNN Effect and the Al Jazeera Effect will be diminishing in the future, due to people getting accustomed to seeing images of casualties and war victims on television. People will learn to cope with this as they do with any new technology. Furthermore, both officials and the public will come to realize that that they cannot intervene in every crisis and risk the security and well being of their own country. People are dulling their senses and therefore images of human suffering will no longer have a strong impact. This can be illustrated by the statement a viewer made when interviewed by an NBC audience researcher: "If I ever see a child with flies swarming around it one more time, I'm not going to watch that show again" (Strobel, 1996).

In his book "The Post-American World", Fareed Zakaria (2009) claims that the influence of the CNN in the international news scene has been fading, but is still strong. Pintak (2006) attributes this fading to the emergence of Al Jazeera and other new media. Zakaria (2009) suggests that the future world will not be an anti-American one, rather one that is not directed from a single centre, due to the rise of the rest. Nevertheless, 'the rise of the rest' may also strengthen the CNN Effect because American people will tend to accept the CNN version of events and the right one, due to CNN being an American network and thus more trustable. On the other hand, the Al Jazeera Effect will continue to grow because people want to understand local and international events from their own perspective.

Finally, Newawy (2008) suggests that Al Jazeera can play the role of reconciliatory media, stating that people in six countries that he has investigated have said the channel has made them less dogmatic. Nevertheless, he has found that the theory of selective exposure holds true, that people chose the media that support their pre-existing points of view, and this can be a

serious obstacle for the “reconciliatory media”, for they cannot do anything if people are unwilling to watch.

## **Conclusion**

The advent of real-time coverage and 24-hours news programming has brought about major changes both in the international communications and the political relations scene. According to Seib (2008) the media are no longer only the media. They have grown to have a much larger popular base than ever before and are now able to impact international politics to a great extent. Therefore, they can act as tools of conflict and as instruments of peace alike. They can diminish the relevance of traditional borders and unify peoples from different parts of the globe. Thus, global mass media such as the CNN and Al Jazeera are reshaping the world and the way foreign policy is conducted. What used to be discussed only among policy makers in the past is now open to the general public’s view. Officials no longer enjoy the luxury of carefully analysing their policy options and coming up with a thoroughly examined policy decision. Moreover, startling pictures and videos of humanitarian or other crises puts great pressure on officials to intervene even in cases when there is no American interest at stake.

On the other hand, new media have also contributed to major changes in the way information flows globally. Al Jazeera has grown to become on the most influential news networks internationally. Its rise poses a challenge to the American and Western news outlets that used to be the only gatekeepers of information in the past. With Al Jazeera broadcasting internationally, the information flow from the West to ‘the rest’ has ended for good. This phenomenon can have major positive and negative effects at the same it. It can play the role of the “reconciliatory media” suggested by El-Newawy (2008) or it can lead to serious international conflicts.

However, while scholars agree that the Al Jazeera Effect will continue to increase in influence due to people’s thirst for news commentary that upholds their worldviews and beliefs, many of them opine that the CNN Effect will not be as influential in the future as it is now, for the American people will learn to cope with the fact that their government cannot intervene in every crisis.

As to whether the CNN Effect and the Al Jazeera Effect are able to influence the foreign policies of the United States, Gibbs (2000), Riley (1999), Livingston (1995) and Strobel (1996)

think that there is no substantial evidence to prove this. Black (1972) claims that belief in television's influence is rather like belief in life after death. Most people would like to be able to prove it, but the evidence is inconclusive. Yet, the fact is that both the CNN and Al Jazeera have a great potential to influence audiences, which is then expected to influence the decisions of policymakers. But these effects are far more complex than a simple cause-effect phenomenon. As Strobel (1996) comments, in a more perfect world, the news media--especially television--would be a more independent force, pointing out problems and helping set the public agenda. In reality, CNN and its brethren follow newsmakers at least as frequently as they push them or make them feel uncomfortable. Moreover, media content alone is not likely to lead to intervention. For an administration to decide to intervene somewhere, there has to be a major American interest at stake. In addition to this, officials are adapting to the CNN Effect and the Al Jazeera Effect and might have learned how to use them to their advantage.

Regardless of whether the CNN and the Al Jazeera affect U.S. politics or not, their existence is fundamental in having a more balanced global information and communications arena, and this is promising for a future world where people would know each other better and there would be more dialogue and understanding.

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