

“CNN Made Me Do (Not Do) It”

Assessing Media Influence on U.S. Interventions in Somalia and Rwanda

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My initial premise upon undertaking this study was a simple one: The U.S. had intervened in Somalia in response to media images of starving children in 1992 but had not acted to stop the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 – not because government officials were unaware of what was taking place there¹ – but because the public did not know. CNN was not on the scene beaming home real time images of the killings. Thus, the administration was under no pressure from the public to do something about the genocide.

This is a common view of the power of the media, especially television journalism which through emotive images moves the public to demand action of its government. The “CNN Effect”, it is argued, pushes the government into foreign policy pursuits in response to public opinion. Why did Bush authorize humanitarian intervention in Somalia? Because the media told him to. Why did Clinton not authorize intervention in Rwanda? Because the media, representatives of which had been evacuated from Rwanda as the genocide unfolded, were simply not there to report what was happening. Disturbing images of innocent people being hacked to death did not make the nightly news and did not therefore force the administration into an intervention. If it had made the nightly news, the argument goes, the “CNN Effect” would have forced the US to intervene as it had in Somalia.

That is what I thought I would find. But a review of the coverage of the news stories from Somalia and Rwanda presents a different picture. Media coverage followed political debate or policy action in the government. Rather than setting the agenda, the media reflected the government’s agenda, covering what the government decided was important. It is not the all-powerful independent institution that the term “CNN Effect” connotes. Nor does it take foreign policy decision making away from the government as it is assumed.

Somalia

By 1992, starvation gripped Somalia in the wake of the civil war that followed the overthrow of Mohammed Siad Barre in January 1991. As Barre fled, the scorched earth policy of his retreating troops created a famine belt. Once a common enemy no longer existed, the clans that had united to overthrow Barre fought for control of the government. (Factions of the Hawiye based USC guerrilla army supportive of Ali Mahdi Mohammed fought factions of the Hawiye forces loyal to Mohammed Farah Aidid.) Fighting, coming at the same time as a

serious drought, led to anarchy and famine. One point five million out of a population of 2 million were threatened with starvation, and 300,000 had already died, including 25% of all children under five (Schraeder, 1994: 177).

A United Nations Security Council resolution called for a cease-fire in January 1992 which was to go into effect in March. Still, factional fighting continued. In April, the Security Council authorized a modest military operation which was delayed by negotiations with Somali factions. On July 27, the Security Council voted to airlift food, and on August 12 announced plans to send 500 troops to protect the relief effort. On August 14, President George Bush announced that the U.S. would take charge of the airlift.

The airlift fell short of its goals, since there was no way to guarantee that the food once dropped reached the famine victims. Five hundred troops, with the support of US warships carrying 2100 Marines, arrived in September but were unable to protect the relief effort. On November 26, after UN Secretary General Boutros-Boutros Ghali announced that the relief efforts were not working, President Bush announced that the US would send ground troops to protect food convoys, and the UN passed the authorising resolution on December 3rd. The first troops of "Operation Restore Hope" hit the shores on December 9th.

What did the media report? Jonathan Mermin's analysis of television coverage of ABC, CBS, and NBC points to very low coverage of Somalia from January through June, an increase in July, and extensive coverage in August and September, a sharp drop off in October, and a recovery in November. Three full stories occurred on January 5th, February 27th, and March 2nd with grim predictions of numbers who would starve without relief. Mermin argues, however, that these stories, broadcast five to seven months before Bush's decision to take charge of the airlift, could have had little impact on his decision (Mermin, 1997: 391).

In July and August, three full stories ran on the networks: July 22 by ABC, July 31 by CBS, and August 13 by ABC, all containing videos of starving children. It was these images which had pundits like Bernard Cohen later claiming: "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" (Cohen, 1994: 9-10).

But by superimposing events in Washington onto the timetable of stories, Mermin demonstrates that it was official Washington which set the context in which the media responded. On July 22nd, the day the ABC story aired, the House Select Committee on Hunger held hearings on Somalia. Senator Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS), the senior Republican of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's sub-committee on Africa, who had just returned from a fact-finding mission, testified, "I strongly support sending a United Nations security force to Somalia" (Mermin 1997: 392). This declaration clashed with the position of the Bush administration that a UN force should not be deployed until a cease-fire had been achieved. Senator Paul Simon (D-IL), chair of the subcommittee on Africa, also urged the administration to act, saying, "I don't want to wait to have a Democratic administration before we respond more adequately. I want to do it now" (Mermin, 1997: 393). The timing suggests the importance of Kassebaum and Simon and the House Committee on Hunger in getting Somalia on the media's agenda, not the media's power in getting Somalia on the

government's agenda. Strobel notes, "Television did not lead but followed policy action or proposals" (Strobel, 1997: 136).

The CBS Story on July 31st also followed this pattern. Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) in a hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee wondered, "why we're not moving in Somalia as we are in Yugoslavia". White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater in a press conference on July 27th stated: "The tragedy in Somalia...requires the urgent attention of the international community" (Mermin, 1997: 394). According to Mermin, CBS covered Somalia on July 31st only after actors in Washington defined it as a significant concern: "Instead of being out ahead of Washington, television appears to have acted in concert with Congress and the White House in illuminating events in Somalia" (394).

Airlift Decision: August 14th

The August 13th story on ABC followed two weeks of debate and action in Washington: The Senate Resolution on Somalia urging deployment of UN forces (August 3rd); Senators McConnell's and Jefford's comparisons of Rwanda and Bosnia (August 6th & 7th); Senator Rockefeller's criticism of Bush's inaction on Somalia (August 9th); the House resolution on Somalia (August 10th); the UN's announcement to send 500 troops to guard relief supplies (August 12th); and candidate Clinton's citation of Somalia as an important foreign policy issue (August 13th). Mermin points out that the case for the influence of the media on intervention is strongest here; the day following the ABC story, the White House announced it would airlift emergency aid in what it called "Operation Provide Relief" (Mermin, 1997: 396). But Bush had decided on August 12th (before the ABC story) in meetings with James Baker, Secretary of Defence Richard Cheney, and National Security Advisor Brent Snowcroft to authorize the airlift (Livingston and Eachus, 1995: 426).

Interestingly, the media framed the Somalia story as actors in Washington were framing it – that Somalia was a situation that the US should and could do something about. Mermin argues, "It is noteworthy that the framing of the crisis in Somalia as a humanitarian disaster that the United States could do something about does not appear on television until it has appeared in Washington first" (Mermin, 1997: 397).

Influences other than the media influenced the decision. Not to be underestimated is the cable sent by US Ambassador to Kenya, Smith Hempstone, in early July (the "Cable from Hell"), describing the desperate famine conditions. It was forwarded to the State Department, the National Security Council, and eventually to the President. Bush wrote in the margins, "This is very, very upsetting. I want more information" (Strobel, 1997: 132). The OFDA (Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance) of the AID had also been an early and forceful advocate within the administration on Somalia.

CNN had framed the story in May (eight reports in two weeks) as a disaster that the US could and should do something about long before the three networks did. At best, CNN's influence was subtle; perhaps the stories had some behind the scenes impact on Senators Kassebaum and Simon. But this is hardly the absolute "pressure of media" thesis that the "CNN Effect" posits (Mermin, 1997: 399).²

Even earlier (in January), *Nightline* did a special program on Somalia. Ted Koppel introduced his broadcast: "It's been called the most dangerous spot in the world, a civil war that

has killed or wounded 20,000 people. Widespread starvation. Even the UN has pulled out its relief workers, deeming it too dangerous for them to stay there... You should watch this. We all have a moral obligation to at least know what is happening in Somalia, but in fairness I must tell you it is a very disturbing piece of video". But there is no evidence that senior policy makers altered policy in response (Livingston and Eachus, 1995: 422).

Decision to Send Ground Troops: November 26th

From mid-August to mid-September, the networks devoted fifty-five minutes to the preparations for the airlift and the operation. From mid-September to November 8th – presidential election season – only 250 seconds of coverage was broadcast on Somalia. From November 9th to November 24th, the three networks broadcast four full stories. On November 26th, the White House announced the decision to send ground troops to secure relief delivery routes. During this period, Senators Simon, Kassebaum, and Wofford (D-PA) in a press conference called for further action (November 9th). On November 18th, a six-member Congressional delegation to Somalia held a press conference describing Somalia as "an affront to humanity" and urged further action (Mermin, 1997: 401).

Thus, television coverage and actions of politicians are correlated, with official actions preceding Somalia's becoming a news story. If television contributed to the emergence of Somalia as a foreign policy issue, "it had powerful, outspoken allies in Washington, whose efforts to get Somalia onto the news in the first place appear to have been indispensable" (Mermin, 1997: 403). Journalists reported on and thus facilitated other actors' agendas. There is no evidence that the news media by themselves forced the U.S. government officials to change their policies. But, when as in Somalia, policy is in flux, or weakly held, or without congressional support, the media can have an impact on policy by covering critical viewpoints.

Between November 26th, when the decision to launch "Operation Restore Hope" was announced, until December 9th, the day the US troops landed near Mogadishu, there were ninety-five news reports, and coverage remained relatively high through year's end (Strobel, 1997: 136-37).³ The images broadcast on CNN and the three networks helped Bush explain why the mission was necessary. Thus, the media became an instrument of policy. Former State Department spokesman Richard Boucher explained: "We didn't have to spend as much time postulating an argument for [intervention]" (Strobel, 1997: 86). When Navy Seals and Marines landed on the beach off Mogadishu on December 9th, the networks and CNN were already there, having sent in their stars, Ted Koppel of ABC, Tom Brokaw of NBC, and Dan Rather of CBS, in what is derisively called "parachute journalism".⁴ In addition to the journalists waiting on the beach, more than twenty journalists accompanied the Marines as they prepared for the beach landing (Strobel, 1997: 96).

Pulling Out

In response to the June 5th, 1993, attack on Pakistani peacekeepers, the mission changed, and the new goal was to "get Aidid". A four-month period of open warfare between UNOSOM (the United Nations mission) and General Aidid's militia culminated in the October 3rd US Ranger raid on a meeting of his top officers in Mogadishu, which turned into a

day-long fire-fight that resulted in the deaths of eighteen American soldiers. By this time, no American reporters were left in Mogadishu.⁵

The “CNN Effect” clearly did not ‘push’ Bush into action he would otherwise not have taken (dispatching troops in December 1992), but did it ‘pull’ Clinton out? Was it media coverage of the deaths of eighteen Army rangers killed in a fire-fight that ensured the US would withdraw? There was no video of the fire-fight itself, but when the image of a dead soldier poked with a stick and dragged through the streets of Mogadishu to the cheers and jeers of the crowd, and that of a very battered captured US pilot Michael Durant, were broadcast on October 4th, 1993, television sets were on in nearly every corner of the White House as well as American households, tuned to CNN. It is widely assumed that these images broadcast around the world forced the US out of Somalia.

But, it was not the images per se that caused the US to withdraw. The US could just have easily responded by massive retaliation, an action it considered. The US had intervened because a consensus developed that it was do-able with little risk of casualties. This turned out to be incorrect, especially when the mission changed. Clinton had not been interested in or able to communicate to Congress or the public the changed mission and the reasons for it. Mounting calls on Capitol Hill for withdrawal rose to a level that President Clinton could not ignore. On October 7th, he announced that all troops would be withdrawn by March 31st, 1994. The risks of escalation did not measure up to the stakes. According to former press secretary Dee Dee Meyers, “The decision was made that it wasn’t worth a lot of American lives to go after this guy”. Jeremy Rosner, then National Security Council staff’s chief liaison to Capitol Hill, concurs: “The lack of perceived security stakes ended up shaping things more than anything else” (Strobel, 1997: 178). According to Strobel, Clinton was already moving in the direction of withdrawing troops even before the deaths of the eighteen Rangers made the news, and he was motivated by factors other than media coverage, especially congressional pressure (180). Strobel writes, “Public support declined not because of the news media, and specifically televised images of casualties, but because the costs, duration, and outcome of the missions began to diverge from what the public had expected. The televised images of casualties fell into this gap; there is no evidence that they created it” (Strobel, 1997: 204). The decision to withdraw was then reinforced by media stories that followed on ‘traditional clan hatreds’ that conditioned the public to view Somalis as very different kinds of human beings, who ultimately can be deserted (Besteman, 1996: 139).

Rwandan Genocide: The Background

On April 6th, 1994, President Juvenal Habyarimana was killed when his plane was shot down by ground-to-air missiles over Kigali on his return from a summit of African heads of state in Tanzania. Within thirty minutes of the crash, even before news reports of the crash, the FAR (Rwanda Armed Forces) and the Interahamwe (Hutu militias) set up road blocks throughout Kigali and proceeded door-to-door with detailed hit lists prepared in advance. Although a small unit of UN peacekeepers was in Rwanda under resolution 8726 to monitor the ceasefire between the government of Habyarimana and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), adopted under the Arusha Peace Accord, the blue

helmets with UNAMIR stood by, forbidden by their mandate as Chapter VI peacekeepers to intervene. The next day, ten Belgian soldiers with UNAMIR were tricked into giving up their weapons and were tortured and murdered. One week after the murder of the Belgian soldiers, Belgium withdrew from UNAMIR, and the U.N. voted to reduce the UNAMIR troops from 2500 to 270.

Media Coverage of Genocide

Turning back to my original assumption that the US had not intervened in Rwanda because of the lack of media images inciting the public to demand that something be done – what is the evidence? Hutu forces murdered at least fourteen Rwandan reporters and editors in an effort to prevent coverage of the genocide (*Africa Report*, 1995: 8). Plus there were just two international journalists, Lindsey Hilsum and Katrin van der Schoot, on the ground when the genocide began. Many Africa journalists were in South Africa covering the upcoming elections when the killings began (Murison: 30). After Mandela's inauguration on May 10th, several correspondents left South Africa to cover the Rwanda story. But because of the danger involved, most journalists covered the massacre from the safe shores of Lake Victoria where the story literally came to them as thousands of corpses washed down the river (Livingston and Eachus, 2000: 223).

Journalists were caught off guard when the story broke. Rwanda should have been on the government's 'radar screen' since both the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations⁷ and the CIA⁸ were aware of the impending plan to exterminate Tutsis, but unfortunately Rwanda had no important advocate within the U.S. government to put it on the foreign policy agenda. Gowing writes, "The lower the national interest and the greater the distance, the less likely it is that news organisations will have anything more than a passing interest in the developing story" (Gowing, 1997).

Nevertheless, a survey of network evening news stories mentioning Rwanda in 1994 reveals that the networks actually covered the slaughter in Rwanda in April and May 1994 more heavily than they covered Somalia in 1992 (excluding the US troop deployment in December). But the stories "held no power to move the US administration to intervene or to move the public to demand that it do so" (Strobel, 1997: 144).

Early coverage on the three networks and CNN focused primarily on the exodus of Americans and Europeans from Rwanda (Martin, 1994: 9). The Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (JEER) noted that "with the withdrawal of foreign personnel there was a precipitous drop in coverage..." (JEER, 1996: 46). The three networks covered the plane crash on April 7th – twenty seconds on ABC and fifteen seconds on both NBC and CBS. On April 11th, a story broke the two-minute mark on ABC (Livingston and Eachus, 2000: 218). There was significantly more coverage in May, which is explained by the fact that reporters were covering the inauguration of Nelson Mandela and were thus available to be deployed to cover the Rwanda story.

What the journalists reported was often wrong. Original stories mistook the genocide for a two-sided civil war – one that the reporters said the Tutsis were winning (Kuperman, 2000: 101). Rwanda had been wracked by a low-level civil war from 1990 to 1993 between the Hutu controlled government and the mainly Tutsi resistance, the Rwanda Patriotic Front,

based in Uganda. At the time the genocide began, the two sides had signed a peace accord that called for the return of Tutsi exiles, integration of the armed forces of both sides, a provisional government, and multiparty elections. The initial killings were reported as the resumption of the civil war, a view the Rwandan government favoured, because it would keep outsiders from intervening. One of the early stories from the *New York Times* (April 12th, 1994) of the killing of Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana said she had been killed because she was a Tutsi. She was in fact a Hutu (Myers, 1995: 35). Reporters were unaware that not only all Tutsis but also moderate Hutus in favour of the Peace Accord were targeted.

The Western media swallowed the ethnic interpretation of conflict. Pieterse calls it “a media circus of clichés which privileges whatever notions come floating up that are consistent with conventional wisdom, which are then endlessly and uncritically repeated” (Pieterse, 1998: 80). According to McNulty, most reporters’ sources appear to be limited to their own organizations’ cuttings and audio/video library. Interviewees on the ground were invariably Westerners: NGOs, UN troops, and other journalists (McNulty, 1999: 277).

If journalists’ stories, as I have argued for Somalia, follow official sources, what were the official sources in this case? Journalists accepted uncritically the interim Rwandan government’s explanation that this was a spontaneous and unforeseen violence resulting from public outrage at the assassination of the president whose plane was shot down on April 6th. This was a self-serving explanation that was not questioned by journalists, who unfortunately had little knowledge of Rwanda. The political context of the fighting – a hard-line group of Hutu officials seeking to jettison a power-sharing agreement that would have included Tutsi and pro-democracy Hutu parties – was ignored.

Susan Douglas writes that it took at least a month for the news media to stop dismissing the conflict as ‘tribal’ war and to acknowledge that there were actually political and economic reasons for the bloodshed (Douglas, 1994: 15). Jean-Paul Chretien says, “We had to wait until the start of May [1994] for the media, [human rights] associations, and then governments to [acknowledge] the genocide...Until then observers and [the Rwanda government’s] partners continued to evoke ‘inter-ethnic clashes’ which, it was suggested, were the legacy of some barbarism” (Cited in McNulty, 1999: 278). References to a ‘centuries-old’ ethnic conflict was misleading as Hutus and Tutsis had intermingled to the point that ethnographers no longer recognized them as distinct ethnic groups, and since the first incident of systematic political violence between Hutus and Tutsis wasn’t recorded until 1959.

Lack of Government Interest

Despite extensive, if misleading, press coverage, there was little interest from Washington in the story. When President Clinton did speak of Rwanda in the initial days of the massacre, it was of concern for the 258 American expatriates’ safety (Clinton, April 9th, 1994; April 12th, 1994). His statements in April called on both sides to stop the violence, which played into the media’s interpretation of this as a civil war (Clinton, April 7th, 1994. See Burkhalter, 1994/1995: 47). Policymakers hesitated to call it ‘genocide’. State Department spokesperson Christine Shelly insisted on saying “acts of genocide may have occurred”, but that the government was not prepared to use the term genocide, which led one exasperated

reporter to ask, "How many acts of genocide does it take to make genocide?" (US State Department briefing, June 10, 1994). James Woods, assistant secretary for African Affairs at the Department of Defence, has no doubt that the government knew it was a genocide as early as the second week: "Never mind that the American press, which was poorly represented anyway, hadn't quite got it right yet, at all, in fact...there was plenty of evidence around if you'd wanted to use it...It was known that this was planned, premeditated, carefully planned, and was being executed according to a plan with the full connivance of the then Rwandan government. This was known" (*Triumph of Evil*, 1999).

Even the House African Affairs Sub-Committee members, whom one would expect to speak for African interests, were muted in their calls for action. Nine members wrote to the president asking for strong support for an active US role "short of committing U.S. troops" (Melvern, 2000: 190). Senators Jeffords and Simon of the Senate Sub-Committee on African Affairs petitioned the White House on May 13 to request that the Security Council approve sending troops to stop the slaughter. The president did not respond for twenty-seven days (Melvern, 2000: 203). These few individuals appear to be the only important voices in the Congress calling on the US to respond. By contrast, Senator Dole on "Meet the Nation" had argued, "I don't think we have any national interest here...I hope we don't get involved there" (Melvern, 2000: 148). Likewise, senior members of the Defence Appropriation Subcommittees of the Senate and House were wary of peacekeeping after Somalia (Burkhalter, 1994/95: 48).

At the NSC, neither Don Steinberg, senior director for Africa, nor his boss, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, "appears to have played the role that was clearly needed on Rwanda" (Burkhalter, 1994/95: 52). At the State Department, George Moose and his deputy, Prudence Bushnell, favoured a stronger mandate and troop increase for UNAMIR but found themselves ignored by those higher-up. The under secretary for political affairs, Peter Tarnoff, had no interest in Rwanda. And the under secretary of state for global affairs, Tim Wirth, apparently played no role in the decisions although his brief included human rights (Burkhalter, 1994/95: 47). Because of the lack of high-interest attention to Rwanda at the State Department, Pentagon thinking held sway. According to Burkhalter, when the various agencies met to discuss Rwanda, the Pentagon sent its top brass, including Under Secretary of Defence John Deutch on one occasion, to make its case (Burkhalter, 1994/95: 48).

The Clinton administration decided in wake of the Somalia debacle not to intervene again in Africa for humanitarian reasons that fell short of vital national interests, and quickly signed Presidential Decision Directive 25 that severely limits US involvement in international peacekeeping operations. Because there were no strong voices of opposition in the government, the president's view was the one that got reported by the media. The US's obligation as a signatory to the Genocide Convention, not only to punish but also to prevent genocide, was not mentioned by the president nor raised by the media.

Media Reporting After the Genocide:

By July, as the RPF took over more and more of the country, the Hutus fled to neighbouring Zaire in anticipation of Tutu retribution, where they languished in overcrowded camps. Despite the fact that between 500,000 to 800,000 were killed during the genocide

– at least five times as many as those who died of disease and violence in the refugee camps – there was substantially more coverage of the latter, leading to a “false impression that this was the ultimate tragedy” (Philo, Hilsun, Beattie, Holliman, 1998: 229). Rwanda became a major story in July and August (with 15% more broadcasts of the refugees than the earlier genocide on the nightly news). ABC devoted almost 50% of its overall Rwanda coverage to the refugee story, and CNN devoted nearly 70% of its Rwanda coverage to the refugees (Livingston and Eachus, 2000: 220). If one accepts that the media follows foreign policy, not vice versa, the stories reflect the fact that the Clinton administration put the Rwandan refugee crisis on the foreign policy agenda, as something it could do something about, perhaps to assuage guilt for not doing anything earlier to stop the genocide. Because the government decided it could do something, images of dead Rwandan cholera victims dumped in pits in Goma were followed by government response that was “high profile, low risk, very visible, and conceived for maximum media impact so that the public would conclude that ‘something is being done’” (Gowing, 1997).

A better way to understand why the US intervened in Somalia but not in Rwanda has less to do with the media than with the perceived do-ability and level of risk. Judith Murison has coined the phrases “Helpless Africa” and “Hopeless Africa” to describe this phenomenon. She argues that the US will intervene for “Helpless Africa” – starving children, famines, cholera and the like, but when the image is one of “Hopeless Africa”, the US refuses to intervene. These conflicts are viewed as primordial, ancient rivalries. The point is that nothing can be done, so why bother? Livingston and Eachus concur: “There are fewer rational responses to irrational behaviour, such as a presumably spontaneous massacre” (Livingston and Eachus, 2000: 226).

The media reflected the US government’s view of Rwanda as “Hopeless Africa”. (In Somalia, a switch occurred from its original portrayal of “Helpless Africa”, needing to be fed, to “Hopeless Africa”, mired in unresolvable clan conflict.) In Rwanda, only after the genocide was ended when the Rwandan Patriotic Front rebels had captured most of the country and declared a cease-fire on July 18th, did the media shift its portrayal of Rwanda. Now the image was of “Helpless Africa” (starving children and cholera corpses), and media accounts were at their greatest number, focusing on the refugee camps in Goma.

Only when the genocide was over did the US offer assistance to “Helpless Africa” – those refugees in the camps in Zaire who were suffering from cholera, dysentery and malnutrition (many of whom were genocidists hiding among other Hutus). Television images of refugees streaming into camps framed them as victims of hunger and disease and not the perpetrators of genocide. This portrayal followed the government’s spin; Clinton in an exchange with reporters in Hot Springs, Arkansas, on July 23rd said: “The previous government slaughtered large numbers of people, and so those who survived fled...” (Clinton, July 23rd, 1994).

Coverage of the flood of refugees coincided with Clinton’s announcement on July 22nd that the US military would assist the UNHCR and other relief agencies by airlifting food and supplies in “Operation Support Hope”, and in securing the Kigali airport (Clinton,

July 22nd, 1994). One senior official admitted that whereas the footage of corpses floating down the river earlier had not provoked an intervention, the “later scenes of the refugee camps were a different matter...The mind-numbingness of it all was almost a made-to-order operation for what the US can do and do very quickly. But it was into a basically benign environment” (Strobel, 1997: 144). The framing of these images – these are the victims – reflected the administration’s and other important official actors’ viewpoint and was picked up uncritically by journalists.

Other Variables

Another variable that may have informed decision-making is public support for various types of interventions, independent of media portrayal. Consistent with the “Hopeless/Helpless” Africa schema (intervening for helpless Africa but not hopeless Africa) are polling data collected by Jentleson and Britton that indicate the public is more likely to support humanitarian interventions (HI), defined as “the provision of emergency relief through military and other means to people suffering from famine or other gross and widespread humanitarian disasters”, and less likely to support internal policy change (IPC) interventions, defined as “influencing the domestic political authority structure of another state”⁹ (Jentleson and Britton, 1998: 399-400). Jentleson and Britton note that prior to March 1993, 74% of the public supported intervening for HI goals in Somalia but that between March and September 1993, support for IPC goals – getting Aidid – was only 47%. After the October 3rd debacle, only 34% supported IPC goals and 80% of respondents argued against getting “bogged down in a messy civil war” (Jentleson and Britton, 1998: 401). Ninety percent of the American public agreed with the statement: “The US had accomplished the humanitarian mission but now we can never hope to solve the Somalis’ political problems for them and so should bring our boys home” (Jentleson and Britton, 1998: 401-02). Yet notwithstanding the horrific pictures of dead GIs broadcast on the nightly news, the public did not clamour for the immediate withdrawal of American troops, as the “CNN Effect” would predict. A CNN poll revealed that only 43% of the public wanted the immediate withdrawal of American soldiers; the number was just 37% in an ABC poll. And a majority favoured increased involvement in the short term at least (Kull and Destler, 1999: 106).

Similarly, during the Rwanda crisis six months later, support for HI objective was high (75%) but support for IPC goals was low (43%) (Jentleson and Britton, 1998: 403). Would the administration’s actions have been different had the media accurately portrayed the Rwandan conflict for what it was: genocide, and not a civil war? Public support for IPC interventions (civil wars) is the weakest of the four categories of interventions in Jentleson’s and Britton’s framework. But Kull and Destler’s research indicates that the public is very supportive of intervening to allay civilian suffering and deaths (including stopping genocide) even where no national interest exists, even assuming American lives would be lost, if likelihood of success is high (Kull and Destler, 1999: 102-104). There does appear to be a dis-connect between public opinion in favour of intervening for non national-interest reasons and a tolerance for casualties than what government officials believe is public opinion.

Conclusion

The decision to intervene is less a function of media portrayal than of the president's calculations of stakes and risks coupled with the perceived public support for these operations. While Bush was willing to intervene in Somalia where no national interest existed, it was considered at the time to be low risk, and had strong public support. When it turned out not to be risk-free (with the deaths of eighteen Army rangers), President Clinton rushed to enact the presidential directive which limits humanitarian intervention only to places where a vital national interest exists. On no geopolitical or geo-strategic basis – trade relations, host of American military bases, control of shipping lanes, a critical ally in an unstable region – did Rwanda meet the traditional definition of “national interests”. And so the official response to the genocide appeared “lethargic and confused and lacked any White House, Defence Department or senior State Department commitment” (Natsios, 1996:158). Natsios argues that where geopolitical interests are not threatened, electronic and print media attention “will be tangential or irrelevant” to the decision to intervene or not (Natsios, 1996:153).

One reporter from Rwanda wondered, “Do you think we did enough? Is it our fault that the world didn't react to the massacres?” (Weiss and Collins, 1996: 40) Horrifying pictures of bodies floating down rivers perhaps pricked diplomatic consciences, but “they did not lead to any major or fundamental policy change...” (Gowing, 1997). Even if accurate reporting and moving real-time television broadcasts had been the norm,¹⁰ it is doubtful in the aftermath of Somalia that the Clinton administration would have been persuaded that this was an intervention worth the costs. Perhaps Clinton misread the public's unwillingness to intervene for goals short of national interest ones. In 1994, 65% of the public believed the US should intervene to stop genocide – 31% said always, and 34% in most cases (Kull and Destler, 1999, 51). But despite public support to stop genocide, it was not an issue about which Americans felt passionately enough to protest or to demand action from their government.

The relationships between the media, foreign policy makers, and the public are complex. Much more research on the links between information, opinion, and decision-making needs to be conducted before definitive causal explanations can be made. But for now, it can be said that George Kennan's fear on the eve of the Somalia intervention – that American policy is “controlled by popular emotional impulses, and particularly ones provoked by the commercial television industry” (Kennan, 1993) – is not borne out. Gowing's conclusion that real-time television “creates emotions but ultimately makes no difference to the fundamental calculations in foreign policy making” (cited by Luke and Tuathail, 1997: 719) is a better interpretation.

NOTES

1. Recent books on the genocide dismiss the view that US officials did not know what was happening. See Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Problem of Genocide* (Basic Books, New York) and Michael Barnett, *Eyewitness to a Genocide* (Cornell University Press, 2002, Ithaca).
2. According to Strobel, CNN is now an integral part of the operations centres and situation rooms found throughout the national security and foreign policy agencies of the US government. (78)

3. Print reports followed the pattern of television coverage; lots of stories followed the announcement of the intention to use airlift capabilities for relief efforts and the later announcement to use US ground troops. (See Livingston and Eachus who followed coverage in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*.)
4. In peace operations (as opposed to wars), political leaders' need to attract and maintain public support in the absence of a 'vital interest' explains the lack of restrictions on the media in Somalia, a situation different from the Gulf War in 1991.
5. On July 12, 1993, four journalists were killed by a mob after US warplanes launched air strikes against Aidid. *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Los Angeles Times* pulled out of Somalia, joining the three networks who had left in January. CNN withdrew its American correspondents in September after its five Somali drivers and bodyguards were killed. The AP also pulled out its correspondents in September in response to Aidid's threats to kill Americans.
6. On April 5, the Security Council authorized Resolution 909 which extended the mandate of UNAMIR until July 1994 but with a pull out option in six weeks if the transitional institutions provided for under the Arusha Accords were not in place.
7. General Romeo Dallaire sent what has become known as the "Genocide Fax" on January 11, 1994 to UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations warning of the impending genocide and requesting more troops. (This cable was shared with 3 ambassadors in Rwanda, including the American ambassador David Rawson.) Strong warnings continued from Dallaire in weekly reports about the distribution of arms taking place, the plan to kill opposition leaders, and a plea for more forceful action (confiscation of weapons). The Security Council later claimed that they had not been sufficiently briefed by the DPKO.
8. In January 1994, the CIA had given the State Department a desk level analysis which warned that if hostilities resumed (and it predicted that the Arusha Accords would fail), upward of half a million people would die. The Secretary General's special representative Jacques-Roger Booh-Booh and Force commander Romeo Dallaire also met with three ambassadors in Kigali, including the US ambassador, with the information from the informant in the "Genocide Fax".
9. His research indicates the US public is the most supportive of foreign policy restraint (FPR) interventions for restraining an adversary engaged in aggressive actions against the US, its citizens, or its interests. The key example here is the Gulf War.
10. There was some good television coverage. ABC aired a story on May 7 that went beyond the superficial explanations. Ron Allen reported, "As investigators try to make sense of the killing there is more evidence Rwanda's massacres may be a premeditated political act, not a spontaneous eruption of ethnic hatred. Those responsible, human rights investigators say, are Hutu extremists with Rwanda's government trying to grab more power". (Cited by Livingston and Eachus, 2000: 218-219.) Even earlier on April 12, there was a news story by Jean-Philippe Ceppi in the French newspaper *Liberacion* that correctly identified the killings as genocide. "This was the first mention of genocide and then the word disappeared", writes Melvern (137). Not all the blame should be placed on reporters. The news organizations were responsible for not giving access to accurate stories. Melvern reports that Roger Winter, director of the US Committee for Refugees, had just returned from Rwanda and was desperate to correct the stereotypical reporting. Winter's article explaining the political nature of the violence, i.e. a plot by extremists to hold on to power by using ethnicity to achieve its end, was rejected by most American papers, including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, and was eventually published in *The Toronto Globe and Mail* on April 14 (138).

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