

COERCIVE COVERAGE?
A STUDY OF MEDIA INFLUENCE ON U.S. FOREIGN POLICY
TOWARDS SIERRA LEONE

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Capstone Project

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Sierra Leone civil war of 1991 to 2002 has a unique position in post-Cold War geopolitics. While the United Kingdom, United Nations and regional actors militarily intervened, the United States' foreign policy responses fluctuated dramatically over the eleven-year civil war. Policies ranged from logistical and financial support for the multilateral and British interventions to humanitarian relief and culminated with the U. S. becoming the biggest financial supporter of post-conflict truth and reconciliation processes. Undoubtedly, the U.S. policy responses to the conflict must be considered within the context of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, wherein the potential success of military interventions on humanitarian principles was called into question and non-military humanitarian spending increased. A result of the reorientation of foreign policy spending is, however, the uneven application of the doctrine of intervention on humanitarian principles. Accordingly, a number of scholars have noted the “surge-spending” on policies towards high-profile European conflicts, such as Kosovo, at the expense of conflicts that receive relatively less international attention, such as Sierra Leone (Stoddard, 2012). As such, fundamental questions emerge as to how and why a given conflict appears on the agenda of decision makers, while others remain on the sidelines of foreign policy.

To explain this phenomenon, scholars have developed the concept of the CNN effect—or media's influence over foreign policy agendas—and assessed the relationship between media and state foreign policy decisions to militarily intervene during humanitarian crises (Hawkins, 2002; Livingstone, 1997; Robinson, 2000, 2002; Wolfsfield, 1997). There is also a growing body of literature on the relationship between media and foreign policy decisions during different phases of conflict (Bloch-Elkon, 2007; Jakobsen, 2000) and on the media's impact on humanitarian aid spending (Brown & Minty, 2006; Olsen, Carstensen, & Hoyen, 2003; Rioux & Van Belle, 2005). The existing literature, however, almost exclusively assesses the media-state relationship in the most high-profile conflicts of the 1990s, which comes at the expense of a deeper analysis of

media-state relations in many of the world's brutal and protracted conflicts. The focus also neglects consideration of the extent to which there exists a media-state relationship when foreign policy decisions emphasize non-coercive responses, such as humanitarian assistance, rather than direct military intervention.

In the following study, I assess the relationship between U.S. news coverage of the Sierra Leone civil war and the U.S. policy agenda. The study expands the pool of literature on the CNN effect by providing among the first empirical analyses of the media-policy relationship in regards to the Sierra Leone civil war. I consider the question of media influence over policymaking processes and outcomes regarding the October 1999 decision to support the U.N.'s creation of a peacekeeping mission and the May 2000 decision to enable the mission's expansion. I apply Robinson's (2000, 2002) model of policy-media interaction and use the criteria of prevalence and frame of news articles and the level of policy uncertainty among decision makers to form the basis of my analytic framework. The analysis reveals that the CNN effect hypothesis does not explain the October 1999 decision, while the CNN effect is a plausible explanation for the May 2000 decision. In each case, media influence is considered in relation to other factors relevant to U.S. foreign policy towards Sierra Leone, including U.S. national interests, the conflict's timing, and the relationship of the U.S. to the U.N.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

a. Conceptual Foundations of the CNN Effect

The relationship between media and policy during periods of international conflict has, understandably, been a topic of academic discourse for decades. Most notably, the CNN effect emerged during the 1991 Gulf War as a potentially viable theory regarding the influence of media coverage during conflict (Robinson, 2000). What is notable about the growing prominence of the CNN effect in the 1990s is its emergence at a time in which traditional policy-making frameworks were decentralizing, intervention on humanitarian principles was becoming more common, and the real-time nature of media coverage was increasing due to new technologies

(Natsios, 1997; Neuman, 1996; Robinson, 2002). To varying degrees, scholars consider these three factors to be causal explanations for the CNN effect's plausibility.

Although the CNN effect is generally conceptualized as a question of varying degrees of influence between news media and state policy, no one definition, theory, or framework to explain nor test the relationship exists. I divide the body of relevant literature in the field of political communication into two branches based on two primary points of divergence. The first point is one branch's assumption that media influence policy, while the second branch is more concerned with the scope and extent of media influence. The second difference regards the conceptual foundation of the CNN effect. The first branch looks primarily at media influence on policy outcomes, while the second looks at media influence on the decision-making processes. The varying theoretical bases of how scholars conceptualize the CNN effect has spurred great debate and has led to different conclusions about the existence of the CNN effect when applied to case studies. Here, I will explore the two branches in more detail.

The first branch of political communication scholarship theorizes that the CNN effect is ultimately a question of who sets the media's agenda, and thus analyzes the degrees of political control by both the media and policymakers (Livingston & Eachus, 1995; Mermin, 1997; Neuman, 1996). When examining the relationship between media and U.S. policy towards Somalia, Livingston and Eachus (1995) assume that media images have the ability to influence policy debate and outcomes and are interested in understanding who controls the media's agenda. The authors theorize that the media are not outside of the control of state policy-makers. As a result, their empirical challenge is to distinguish between where the line of influence is drawn. Like Livingston and Eachus, Neuman (1996) argues that the CNN effect is not a question of whether the media influences policy-making, but rather who controls the media and what their agenda is. She posits that, while the media have an agenda-setting function, the level of media influence varies at different periods in a conflict's trajectory. The variance forms the "CNN curve," a variation of the CNN effect model used as the analytic framework of this study.

A point of departure between Livingston and Eachus and Neuman, however, is that Neuman argues that what empowers the media to influence policy-making is almost entirely its real-time nature. While Livingston and Eachus do not explicitly deny this, the authors give more credit to the post-Cold War decentralization of U.S. policy-making apparatuses. In later work, however, Livingston (2003) builds on Neuman's "CNN curve" by offering the concept of the "CNN Effect Plus." He argues that the increased availability of new communications technologies increases the number and geography of reporters, thus amplifying their influence.

In sum, scholarship by Livingston and Eachus and Neuman, among others, characterizes news media as "policy forcing" and generally defines the CNN effect as policymakers' loss of control to media reporters (Gilboa, 2005a). In their studies, many of these scholars use the variable of number of news articles published about a conflict preceding a policy decision as evidence of media influence, thus ignoring a more nuanced study of the type of coverage. Another primary critique of scholarship that assumes such a direct relationship between the quantity of media coverage and policy decisions is its inability to offer an in-depth analysis of the policy-making process (Gowing, 1994; Robinson, 2002). As such, the second and most prominent branch of the CNN effect to be explored here analyzes when, how, and to what extent the media influence policy-making processes and decisions. Scholars here push back against assumptions that media influence is the norm, and recognize factors, such as real-time news coverage and decentralized policy-making apparatuses, as creating conditions in which the CNN effect may occur.

Gowing (1994) suggests, much like Livingston and Neuman, that the real-time nature of media coverage is a key determinant of which conflicts are placed on policy-makers' agendas. He, however, distinguishes between problem-recognition and policy response components of the agenda, arguing that high prevalence and an emotive quality of news media coverage can place a conflict in the realm of policy debate, but will not cause a policy response. To reach this argument, Gowing looks at conflicts where media coverage is high and conflicts where the media

are relatively absent. He concludes that, where there is high coverage, “it is likely something will be done, but not much” (p. 62). Strobel (1997) similarly suggests, “under the right conditions, the news media can have a powerful effect on process” (p. 5). He cautions against arguments that the CNN effect is characterized by policy-makers’ loss of control to news media, arguing that foreign-policy makers determine the conditions of the policy-making process. Gowing’s and Strobel’s arguments narrow the conceptual scope of the CNN effect, thus giving way to later arguments that certain types of media coverage are more likely to influence certain policy responses. Natsios (1996) and Robinson (2000, 2002) offer similar conclusions, arguing that media are only likely to influence policy response when non-coercive and relatively low-cost policy options are under consideration. The 1984 famine of Ethiopia is a primary example (Robinson, 2000).

A number of scholars within this branch contend there exists a relationship of mutual influence between media and policy and understand media and policy-making as two distinct processes (Badsey, 1997; Malek & Wiegand, 1996; Seib, 2002). Seib defines the CNN effect as “the dynamic tension that exists between real-time television news and policy-making, with the news having the upper hand in terms of influence” (as cited in Gilboa, 2005b, p. 29). These scholars argue that one must analyze other variables to determine the relationship of influence between the two processes (Badsey, 1997; Gilboa, 2005b). A non-exhaustive list of the variables found in the literature include the length of conflict and number of deaths (Natsios, 1996), the ability of a conflict to “provide dramatic imagery” and compete in the typical news cycle (Olsen et al., 2003, p. 114), empathetic and critical news coverage (Robinson, 2000), the timing and type of political decision being made (Bloch-Elkon, 2007), and the political will and national interests of state policy-making apparatuses (Wolfsfeld, 1997). I will return to a number of these variables in a later discussion of the analytic framework used for my analysis of media coverage of the Sierra Leone conflict.

As demonstrated in the above review of literature on the CNN-effect, the extent of media influence on policy processes and decisions is a source of debate. Important to the debate is reference to another potential dynamic of the media-state relationship—the manufacturing consent theory, which hypothesizes that the state has complete influence over media apparatuses. Two versions of this theory exist in scholarship. First, the executive version contends that news media conform to the executive government’s agendas. One may observe this phenomenon in how news media interpret global events and frame news in a manner consistent with government interests (Robinson, 2002). This version is incompatible with the CNN effect theory, because it holds that media cannot influence policymaking (*ibid.*). The second version, elite manufacturing consent theory, finds that news coverage conforms to the perspective of any elite decision-maker. Scholars here argue that news media most often support official policy perspectives (Mermin, 1997), but can also be critical of policy decisions (Robinson, 2002).

The executive manufacturing consent theory is an important dimension of media-state relations and compatible with scholarship on the CNN effect, especially as the theory further elucidates the dynamic relationship between media and policymaking. While the manufacturing consent and CNN effect theories explain two polar extremes of influence, one can most likely consider the media-state relationship to be a spectrum. The level of influence the media or state waxes over the other shifts between the two poles at different times. Accordingly, political communication scholars put forth variations of the CNN effect theory to more precisely explain the policy-media relationship. In the following sections, I review the different CNN effects scholars have identified and briefly introduce the cases to which the models have been applied. I conclude the literature review by identifying gaps in the literature thus far.

b. Differentiating Types of CNN Effects

Given the diversity of perspectives regarding the existence of the CNN effect, it is unsurprising that scholars have attempted to bring clarity to the concept by identifying different types of CNN effects. As a result, scholars better understand the function of news media vis-à-vis

policy-making processes and decisions, as well as the potential consequences of news media on policy outcomes. In this section, I discuss different types of CNN effects identified by prominent political communications scholars, notably Freedman (2000), Livingston (1997), Robinson (2002), and Strobel (1997).

Livingstone (1996) posits there exist three primary effects of media on policy: the media setting policy agendas, shortening decision-making time, or impeding policy decisions by undermining morale and/or threatening security. The most problematic and dramatic version of the CNN effect is the “agenda-setting function.” Here, emotive images—“battles between gun-toting teenagers...massive flows of refugees, the pathos of a starving child” (pp. 6-7)—compel policy makers to act and may persuade publics to pressure their leaders to take action. The danger of this effect is that it can lead to hasty irrelevant decisions. Strobel (1997), however, identifies a positive attribute of the effect, namely that it increases the accountability of policymakers to their publics. Strobel writes that the power of the agenda-setting function of the CNN effect is that it “makes the conduct of foreign policy and the use of military force more transparent, subjecting diplomats and military officers to a level of democratic review that has little, if any, historical precedent” (p. 7). Livingstone and Strobel, as well as Natsios (1996), note that few scientific studies of the CNN effect’s agenda-setting function exist, and thus caution against arguments that this function is the norm.

Assuming Strobel’s argument is true that increased access to real-time coverage holds governments more accountable, Livingston’s “emotional impediment effect” reflects policy makers’ desire to prevent negative and/or emotional coverage of conflict. Similarly, the “threat to operational security impediment effect” applies during operations requiring strict operational secrecy. Both types of impediment effects apply primarily to conventional wars in which U.S. national interests are high. Livingston’s impediment effect is conceptually similar to Freedman’s (2000) “bodybags effect,” which occurs when public support for war is low and the media reports high rates of casualties, which decreases public support for policymakers. The bodybags effect,

however, is distinct from the CNN effect, as it occurs after the decision has been made and so retrospectively condemns actions. The effect theorizes, however, that images of the human suffering brought about by the policy decision to “do something” during conflict can lead governments to pull back under the right conditions (Freedman, 2000).

The final type of CNN effect identified by Livingston is the “accelerant effect,” the consequences of which are also rushed policy decisions. The accelerant effect is a reaction to the shortened news cycle and has dramatically altered the conduct of decision-makers within policy-making apparatuses. Livingston notes, “Intelligence agencies now must compete with news organizations, thus speeding up their assessments, and be prepared to defend their assessments against the evidence presented on television or other real-time media” (1997, p. 3). While the consequences for foreign policies may be dire, how the benefits of real-time news compare to this downside is not yet clear. What is most important to Livingston, however, is how the various effects of real-time news coverage influence different types of policy, such as conventional warfare, peacekeeping, and consensual humanitarian operations among others. Consequently, he advocates a redirection of studies of the CNN effect away from the generalized model of media-state influence, and towards empirical studies of the CNN effect vis-à-vis different policy outcomes.

Robinson (2002) attempts to “identify instances when media coverage comes to play a significant role in persuading policymakers to pursue a particular policy” (p. 37). He identifies several types of CNN effects, each at different points on the spectrum of influence on the policy-making process. First, the “strong CNN effect” is the most influential and most similar to Livingston’s agenda-setting effect. The strong CNN effect exists when “media coverage becomes a large factor in encouraging policymakers to act” (p. 37). It is important to note, however, that Robinson does not argue that any particular type of CNN effect can cause policymakers to pick a particular policy. Instead, he tests the extent to which media coverage is considered in the process. The second type of CNN effect Robinson identifies is the “weak CNN effect,” “whereby

media reports might incline policy-makers to act rather than create a political imperative to act” (p. 39).

In his analytic model, Robinson also uses the accelerant and impediment effects conceptualized by Livingston (1997). When describing his use of the accelerant effect, however, Robinson suggests that it is both conceptually distinct from the strong CNN effect and necessary to include in order to evaluate the potential for a causal relationship between news media and policy outcomes. He contends that, should a strong CNN effect be found, one can evaluate media coverage within the context of other factors related to policymakers’ decisions to pursue particular courses of action, thus positioning one to determine whether the influence of media coverage is greater. In regards to the impediment effect, or Freedman’s body-bag effect, Robinson justifies its inclusion in his analysis by noting the potential for media coverage to impede the consideration of certain policies. He names this the “potential impediment effect,” which is when policymakers are concerned that future negative news coverage could decrease public support either due to criticism for non-intervention in the face of humanitarian suffering or due to a failed intervention.

A final role of news media identified by Robinson is the “enabling effect,” which occurs when media coverage creates conditions, such as increasing public support, that allow policymakers to pursue their desired course of action. The enabling effect, however, is not a type of CNN effect, because it does not describe instances when media influence policymakers to take a particular course of action (p. 41). Furthermore, one can discern the existence of the enabling effect from the strong CNN effect when policymakers articulate a strong policy stance and media are both supportive of the policy and empathetic to the humanitarian necessity.

Taken together, the types of CNN effects reviewed above reflect the diversity of perspectives regarding the role of media vis-à-vis policymaking during conflict. All of the types reflect post-Cold War changes in the media’s capacity to report real-time on conflicts in distant places. Regardless of the exact effect of media coverage at different periods in the policymaking

process, it is undeniable that news media covering conflict can have a profound effect and play numerous roles. During conflict, media may “mobilize conscience” and “play a decisive role in informing the public” (Cohen, 1994; Rosenblatt, 1996, p. 40).

c. Application of CNN Effect Models

Few empirical studies of the CNN effect exist, and those that do exist use different analytic frameworks and methodologies, thus posing challenges to the comparison of conclusions. The majority of studies, however, test media influence on foreign policy decisions to militarily intervene during the height of humanitarian catastrophe. One of the most commonly debated interventions is the U.S. intervention in Somalia. In this section, I demonstrate the application of the CNN effect concepts and types reviewed above by briefly discussing the literature on the CNN effect in Somalia. I then introduce a more nascent field of studies of the CNN effect, which is the hypothesis’ application to humanitarian aid. I conclude the literature review by discussing gaps in the literature.

The U.S. intervention and withdrawal from Somalia is one of the most common case studies for scholars looking at the CNN effect, largely prompted by common allegations that the media played a large role in the U.S. decisions to both intervene and eventually withdraw. For example, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, US General John M. Shalikashvili noted, “The CNN effect? Surely it exists, and surely we went to Somalia partly because of its magnetic pull. Surely the world’s actions – or inaction – and political leaders’ pronouncements are greatly influenced by this effect” (as cited in Jakobsen, 2000, p. 133). Most scholars, however, call Shalikashvili’s and others’ claim of inevitable media influence a myth (Jakobsen, 2000; Livingston, 1997; Livingston & Eachus, 1995; Mermin, 1997; Robinson, 2000, 2002). Regarding U.S. media coverage of Somalia, Livingston and Eachus (1995) and Livingston (1997) argue that the news media were not “independent agents in the development of issues and concerns” (Livingston & Eachus, 1995, p. 427). Instead, using content analyses, they found that dramatic increases in media coverage almost always followed official policy action (Livingston, 1997, p.

8). Similarly, Robinson (2000, 2002) concluded that policymakers set the media's agenda regarding Somalia. At most, the media enabled policymakers to pursue particular actions, but did not influence them to follow a particular course of action (Robinson, 2002, p. 71).

The above review suggests that, while there is much agreement that the allegations of the CNN effect in Somalia are false, scholars have not reached the same conclusions regarding the specific relationship between policymakers and media agents, specifically the extent to which policymakers set the news media's agenda. There are, however, numerous scholars concluding that news media outlets exercised considerable agency over how and from where they reported on Somalia (Cohen, 1994; Hawkins, 2002). Hawkins (2002) explores "the other side of the CNN factor" by looking at media interests in covering the humanitarian crisis in Somalia. While he does not argue that the media fully explains the U.S. decisions to intervene in and withdraw from Somalia, he argues that a more complex model for assessing the existence of the CNN effect is necessary to understand the confluence of factors impacting both media and government decisions. He uses the variables of media-industry competition, geographic accessibility, and advances in communications technology to create this model. Hawkins concludes that media were "pulled" into Somalia by factors more numerous and complex than government policies.

Gilboa (2005b) concludes that U.S. policy decisions regarding Somalia have been a "battleground for studies of the CNN effect" (Gilboa, 2005b). Somalia and other high profile conflicts, such as Northern Iraq and Kosovo, have attracted substantial attention from scholars. Undeniably, much of the attention is compelled by the substantial media attention these conflicts receive. It is necessary to note, however, that media attention to conflict is imbalanced in two primary ways. First, media attention is highest at the height of conflict, thus neglecting coverage of conflict in the pre- and post-violence periods (Jakobsen, 2000). Second, media fail to report on most of the world's crises and, when conflicts are covered, media attention is often short-lived (Jakobsen, 2000; Livingston, 1997; Olson, et al., 2003). Media attention is undeniably uneven and, perhaps as a result, empirical studies of media influence on policymaking are also uneven,

thus creating substantial gaps in our knowledge of media-policy relationships. Gaps identified so far include the relationship between media and policy when there is no policy response, consequences of high or low media coverage of pre- and post-violence phases (Gilboa, 2005b; Jakobsen, 2000), media influence regarding non-coercive humanitarian policies (Livingston, 1997), and comparisons in coverage by Western and non-Western sources (Gilboa, 2005b).

d. Media and Non-Coercive Humanitarian Intervention

In the midst of international increases in humanitarian assistance allocations since the end of the Cold War, a growing body of literature questions media's impact on humanitarian spending. Although nascent, the conclusions of the literature are as diverse as those on the existence of the CNN effect for the U.S. intervention in and withdrawal from Somalia. The majority of studies look at the relationship in conjunction with other variables, such as a recipient country's level of democracy and corruption (Raschky & Schwindt, 2012), donor country trade relations with a potential recipient country and past donor-recipient relations (Fielding, 2013), as well as donor interests, such as national security (Olson, et al., 2003). Among these, Olson, et al. have published the most prominent study of those finding that media "only occasionally play a decisive role in influencing donors" (p. 124). The authors find that the extent of media coverage of an emergency has no greater an influence on U.S. humanitarian spending than other variables, such as U.S. political interests, national security concerns, and the strength of NGO appeals. Similar to conclusions made by Natsios (1996), Olson, et al. contend that large portions of humanitarian spending goes to unreported or sparsely reported crises. As such, "media attention is not a precondition for bringing about policy responses to humanitarian crises" (p. 125). It is, however, necessary to note that Olson, et al. do not take into account that differences in amounts of humanitarian spending may result from factors outside their model. The lack of attention to this potential problem calls their findings into question.

Unlike Olson, et al.'s, the majority of studies of media salience find a positive relationship between levels of media coverage and U.S. humanitarian spending. Robinson (2002)

concludes from his application of the analytic framework for testing the CNN effect, which will be reviewed in Chapter Four, that humanitarian relief is more likely to become a policy response in instances of the CNN effect, i.e. when donors are pressured to follow a particular course of action. His study, however, is one of the few to use qualitative research methods, as the majority of inquiries into media influence on humanitarian spending are econometric. A limitation of those studies reviewed here is that they do not address the timing of news media coverage vis-à-vis policymaking processes and decisions. Instead, the studies use the variables of cumulative news media coverage over a defined period of conflict and cumulative humanitarian spending to draw conclusions regarding news media saliency.

Eisensee and Stromberg (2007) produce one such study. The authors find that news media mobilize U.S. policymakers to act, biasing them in favor of the disaster types and regions covered in the news. The authors study humanitarian spending on and coverage of conflicts that occurred during the Olympics and those that did not, finding that disasters during the Olympics received less coverage and less aid. The extent of the difference caused by the timing was almost identical for each of the variables. This study serves as a useful and valid contribution to the literature, particularly given the authors' efforts to reduce potential endogeneity. For example, they note that problems would most likely result from the news pressure variable, which here is taken to be the unweighted average of forty days of daily news coverage (p. 718). Accordingly, they tested for bias by conducting two extreme measures of news pressure. First, the authors excluded days on which news media reported a disaster, and then increased the length of time spent reporting a disaster. They found only a modest bias between the extremes. Another interesting finding from their analysis relevant to the study of Sierra Leone is that "it requires forty times as many killed in an African disaster to achieve the media attention expected for a disaster in Eastern Europe of a similar type and magnitude" (p. 697).

Other scholars studying the media's relationship to humanitarian spending have weighed in on the policymaking process for providing relief, noting how it differs from typical

policymaking processes. In a review of literature on humanitarian spending, Fielding (2013) contends that U.S. humanitarian decision-making is different from other aid allocation processes because conflicts and disasters are unpredictable, thus requiring apparatuses that allow for budgetary allocations outside of the typical budget cycle. In a study of the influence of *New York Times* coverage on U.S. policymakers' decisions to allocate humanitarian aid to conflicts, Drury, Olson, and Van Belle (2005) offer a useful means of characterizing what Margesson (2006) calls the "complex web" of humanitarian decision-making (p. 2). The authors argue that the humanitarian decision-making process is political, and that U.S. policy makers confront two fundamental decisions of whether or not to give aid, followed by how much aid to give (p. 456). The two decisions are prompted by different degrees of politics, with the first decision being an undeniable result of politics, and the second being less so. Drury, Olson, and Van Belle also introduce the variable of the crisis' severity, as measured by the number of fatalities and people made homeless, to their study of media salience. The authors find that a disaster-affected country receives an average of \$395 in aid for every fatality, while it receives \$594,057 for every *New York Times* article (p. 469). Based on this finding, the authors contend that the level of media coverage is "determinant" of U.S. humanitarian policy. While this study's model broadens the empirical limitations of the literature, it is non-conclusive about the problem of endogeneity. Accordingly, there needs to be a greater pool of empirical evidence to support the authors' conclusions.

The salience of media coverage found by the above authors is not unique to humanitarian spending by the U.S. government. Rioux and Van Belle (2005) conducted statistical analyses of *Le Monde* news coverage and French foreign aid allocations between 1986-1998. What is unique about the study is the authors' comparison between the saliency of media coverage versus variables associated with the political, economic, or humanitarian uses of aid, such as membership to the Francophonie or balance of trade. The authors find a correlation between media attention to a country and French foreign assistance, but other variables, such as the

adoption of French as a national language among former colonies, had a stronger correlation. Accordingly, the study evidences that news media play a role in influencing humanitarian aid allocations, but the role is not singularly causal.

Common across the studies reviewed here, with the exception of Robinson's and Drury, Olson, and Van Belle's studies, is that they use the fixed variables of level of humanitarian spending and number of news articles to study the media-humanitarian spending relationship. Furthermore, an empirical analysis of both the *prevalence* and *type* of news media coverage and its timing in relation to policy decisions, as well as a systematic analysis of the policymaking process resulting in certain decisions, is missing from all but Robinson's study. Robinson, however, does not conceptually distinguish humanitarian decision-making from military intervention, nor is humanitarianism the explicit focus of his work. As such, the following study builds upon two often-distinct fields of literature—the CNN effect literature and the media-aid allocation literature. I expand the application of Robinson's policy-media interaction model to decisions regarding U.S. humanitarian and diplomatic responses to Sierra Leone at two different points in the conflict. It is hoped that this study can become among the first of many to utilize more nuance in the study of the media-aid allocation relationship.

III. SIERRA LEONE CONFLICT

In 2000, after the collapse of the Lomé Peace Accord, the Sierra Leone civil war was the most covered African conflict in the U.S. press, and yet only the fifth most covered in the world (Hawkins, 2002). Prior to this spike, however, media coverage was notably sparse. For example, in 1996, there were an estimated 1.8 million people at risk in Sierra Leone, but the conflict was only mentioned 26 times by CNN and 63 times by the *Times* (Livingston, 1997, p. 9). On first glance, U.S. domestic coverage of the conflict is largely notable for its absence, and yet policymakers credit the type of coverage existent during the height of conflict for prompting U.S. policy responses. Former Alternate U.S. Representative for Special Political Affairs Nancy Soderberg argues that “the horrific pictures of chopping off of hands” placed Sierra Leone on the

U.S. policy agenda (as cited in Cook, 2008). Such observations and allegations highlight the need for empirical analysis of the prevalence and type of media coverage of the Sierra Leone conflict and the coverage's relationship to U.S. policy responses. In this section, I provide background on the Sierra Leone civil war, including the role of international actors.

a. **Background to the Conflict**

The Sierra Leone civil war is considered to be one of the most brutal conflicts in African history. The war of March 1991 to January 2002 resulted in the displacement of an estimated 2.6 million people and the deaths of 70,000 (Kaldor & Vincent, 2006), and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has evidence of 40,242 human rights abuses ranging from drugging and kidnapping to rape (Bah, 2013). The conflict began when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) advanced on Sierra Leone's diamond-rich eastern district of Kailahun under the auspices of Charles Taylor and led by Foday Sankoh. It is notable that, in the beginning, media coverage and President Joseph Momo disregarded the RUF youth fighting as "raw conflict," or conflict only for violence's sake (Abdullah, 2000). There were, however, clear contextual motivations for an uprising. Factors leading to the conflict include state neglect under two successive authoritarian leaders, high unemployment among rural young men, a post-Cold War arms surplus, and interference from Libya and Liberia (Hirsch, 2001; Kaldor & Vincent, 2006).

The RUF would go on to fight three successive governments, with all sides looting minerals, abducting children to increase their ranks, and committing atrocities against civilians, including executions and amputations (Kaldor & Vincent, 2006). In November, 1996, the RUF signed the Abidjan peace agreement calling for its disarmament and transformation into a political party. Fighting, however, almost immediately resumed and the regional actor Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) attempted to restore civilian rule with a strategy of dialogue, sanctions, and force (Hirsch, 2001). Two of the bloodiest periods in the war occurred during the ongoing battle between the ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and the RUF junta, which were RUF attacks in Freetown in February 1998 and January 1999.

Following these attacks, rebels signed the Lomé Peace Accord in July 1999, but the agreement did not end violence for long. In 1999, the United Nations established the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), which grew to become the largest UN peacekeeping force in history as the UN continuously strengthened UNAMSIL in response to escalating violence, including the taking of UN hostages. In May 2001, all sides signed a new peace agreement, which prompted the disarmament of 72,000 combatants and officially ended the war (Kaldor & Vincent, 2006).

b. International Response to the Conflict

In hindsight, responses to the conflict in Sierra Leone by the United States, United Kingdom and the United Nations are criticized for lacking both strategy and a long-term plan. International involvement, save for regional action by ECOWAS, began late in the conflict's trajectory with the establishment of the UN Observer Mission of 1998, which became UNAMSIL. Hirsch (2001) attributes the slow response time to four primary factors: Sierra Leone's lack of strategic interest; little outside awareness as to the scale or brutality of RUF violence; the dearth of involvement of the UK and US in tracking the illegal money, arms, and diamonds trade in West Africa prior to and during the conflict; and the lack of coordination between Western powers in formulating foreign policies (p. 153). While Hirsch explains the slow onset of international responses, Fanthorpe (2003) seeks to explain what eventually prompted outside interest. He identifies interest in preventing a potential domino effect of conflict across the entire region and curtailing the looting of valuable resources as primary motivations. Most importantly, Fanthorpe writes,

Humanitarian concerns have also galvanized the recent international intervention in Sierra Leone. The suffering of children has been particularly extreme, and Sierra Leone has become symbolic of Western governments' desire to score a success in the peace-building arena after the debacles of the former Yugoslavia and Somalia and the ongoing chaos in Congo and Angola" (2003, p. 54).

Accordingly, international responses cannot be separated from the geopolitics of the region and the conflict's timing.

The UK bore the primary responsibility of intervention among Western actors, and the country's military operation is credited for ending the war (Gberie, 2005). The U.S., on the other hand, intervened in the capacity of "limited intervention" through the provision of financial and logistical assistance to the United Kingdom, UNAMSIL, and regional ECOMOG peacekeeping missions (Cook, 2008). The United States saw its primary foreign policy role as one of support. The U.S. consistently voted in favor of expanding the UN presence in Sierra Leone and worked tirelessly to secure additional troops and resources for the fatiguing ECOMOG, until the mission's phased withdrawal in October 1999 (ibid.). In addition to assisting others' military interventions, American diplomats were instrumental in bringing warring parties together to negotiate the Lomé Peace Accord in 1999 and the 2002 Abuja Peace Accord, which officially ended the conflict. Despite the international community's late arrival, the scope and financial scale of the ensuing intervention is credited as being an innovative response to the unprecedented warfare of today (Kaldor & Vincent, 2006).

IV. ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

This paper answers the question: *What effect did U.S. domestic media coverage of the Sierra Leone civil war have on U.S. policy towards the conflict?* My question is based on a definition of the CNN effect aligned with the second branch of the literature reviewed above, which is that the CNN effect represents the media influencing policymakers to pursue a particular course of action during the policymaking process. The divergence of opinions regarding the CNN effect, however, demands the use of an empirically sound analytic framework and methodology. Gilboa (2005a) writes, "A valid scientific approach to the study of the CNN effect requires two interrelated comparative analyses: (1) an assessment of global media's impact on a specific foreign-policy decision in comparison with the relative impact of other factors, and (2) application of this procedure to several relevant case studies. Only a few researchers have

followed this procedure” (p. 335). My research meets Gilboa’s criteria of utilizing a valid scientific approach by building on the analytic framework and methodology of Robinson (2002). Accordingly, Robinson’s (2002) policy-media interaction model and series of case studies, which include Somalia, Rwanda, Kosovo, and Northern Iraq, is lauded as one of the most empirically sound analyses of the CNN effect to date.

a. **Robinson’s Policy-Media Interaction Model**

Robinson’s (2000; 2002) policy-media interaction model (depicted below in Figure 4.1) is based on the argument that the existence of the CNN effect can only be concluded when the content of news media coverage and the policy-making process are considered. Robinson’s model identifies from the literature two factors that determine the extent of media influence on policymaking: the level of policy certainty within the executive and the media frames used to cover the conflict and policy responses. For the CNN effect to occur, Robinson finds that policy uncertainty in the executive must occur in conjunction with critical news coverage of official policy and empathetic coverage of the conflict to result in the CNN effect. Specifically, the hypothesis is that empathetic and critical media coverage builds public pressure, thus making unsure policymakers more susceptible to pursue actions advocated by non-elites. Robinson then uses variance in the strength of these factors to determine which type of CNN effect occurred, including a strong CNN effect, weak CNN effect, accelerant effect, impediment effect, and enabling effect.

Figure 4.1: Robinson’s Policy-Media Interaction Model

	<i>Government Policy Line</i>	<i>Direction of Influence</i>	<i>News media Coverage</i>	<i>Policy–Media Relationship</i>
Media influence	Uncertain	←	Extensive and critical	In this scenario media influence occurs. In the absence of a clear, well-articulated policy line, the government is vulnerable to critical and extensive media attention. If news reports are critically framed, advocating a particular course of action, the government is forced to do something or face a public relations disaster. Here, media can significantly influence the policy process.
No media influence	Certain	⇒	Indexed to 'official agenda'	When the government has clear and well-articulated objectives it tends to set the news agenda. Coverage might become critical if there is elite dissensus. With the executive decided on a particular course of action, media coverage is unlikely to influence policy.

i. Media Framing

Journalists employ the use of frames to synthesize large quantities of information into culturally relevant narratives from which audiences can more easily make meaning (Entman, 1991; Wolfsfeld, 1997). Wolfsfeld (1997) contends that journalists undergo an often-unconscious process of seeking out a “narrative fit” to report news events (p. 35). Bloch-Elkon (2007) builds on this, arguing that a frame is a “decision to raise the prominence of a particular subject, to choose and to emphasize a certain image or word, to promulgate specific explanations and commentary regarding the reasons for – and consequences of – events” (p. 27). Accordingly, journalists attempt to connect new events to past ones using a variety of narratives with which to frame conflict. These frames include the “brutal repressions” and “innocent victims” frames to describe conflict (Wolfsfeld, 1997), and the “moral humanitarianism” and “watchdog” frames to describe policymaking (Bloch-Elkon, 2007). These frames are specific to the content of a story, the dynamics of the conflict.

Robinson bases his analytic inquiry into media framing on the argument that media frames giving unconscious clues as to the geographic and cultural proximity of a conflict and the justifiableness of policy responses are laid over the more specific article subject (2002, p. 28). He uses two categories of frames to assess the media response to government decisions. These are:

1. *Support framing* – when government politics and policies are deferred to and media may implicitly or explicitly support government policies of intervention or non-intervention.
2. *Critical framing* – when government policies are implicitly or explicitly criticized, resulting in negative coverage of government action or inaction.

Robinson also identifies two categories of frames with which to assess the effect of media coverage of the conflict. These are:

1. *Distance framing* – when the coverage reinforces cultural differences between the audience and populations affected by the conflict, often through a process of othering the population and emphasizing technical facts over individuals' suffering. Distance framing supports a policy of non-intervention.
2. *Empathy framing* – when the coverage “encourages people to associate with the suffering of people” by emphasizing victims of conflict. Empathy framing supports policies of intervention (2002, pp. 28-29).

Using these four categories of frames, Robinson's model shows that when empathy and critical frames are utilized, policymakers may “feel a political imperative...to do something” (2002, p. 29). Robinson notes, however, that empathy frames can function to support government decisions to intervene. Thus, to understand the full function of these frames vis-à-vis government policies, it is necessary to assess government policies and the extent of policymakers' certainty.

ii. Policy Uncertainty

Robinson (2002) notes that the literature on the CNN effect lacks a coherent definition of policy uncertainty, which is one of the primary causes of inconsistent conclusions as to media's potential to influence. For example, Gowing (1996) defines policy uncertainty as “moments of panic,” in which government does not have a policy response after media coverage demands government action (as cited in Robinson, 2002, p. 26). When a state of policy uncertainty exists,

the media has an opening to wage influence during the policymaking process (Shaw, 1996; Robinson, 2000, 2002). Robinson defines policy uncertainty as “the degree of consensus and coordination of the sub-systems of the executive with respect to an issue” (2002; p. 26). He categorizes policy uncertainty into three types:

1. *No policy*
2. *Inconsistent or undecided policy* – when policymakers openly contradict one another’s statements out of disagreement or a lack of clarity regarding policy positions within the executive.
3. *Wavering policy* – when policies frequently change and a clear lack of commitment is demonstrated (2002, p. 27).

One of Robinson’s primary contributions to the literature on the CNN effect is his offering of a clearly articulated definition and typology of policy uncertainty, as discussed above. He goes on to use quantitative and qualitative methodologies to assess the media frames and levels of policy uncertainty relevant to his six case studies. Based on his analyses, Robinson identifies the relationship between media and policymaking in each conflict.

b. Application of the Policy-Media Interaction Model to Sierra Leone

For the case of Sierra Leone, I use Robinson’s policy-media interaction model to assess U.S. domestic media coverage of the Sierra Leone conflict and two critical U.S. policy responses discussed below. Accordingly, my analytic framework is multi-leveled. First, I assess the relationship between prevalence and timing of media coverage and policy decisions. Second, I assess the relationship between the coverage’s frames and policy decisions. Third, I assess the level of policy uncertainty within the executive. Here, I outline my three competing hypotheses and describe my indicators.

Hypothesis One: The relationship between media coverage and U.S. policy responses indicates the existence of the CNN effect.

Indicators:

- a. *Frames*: The majority of newspaper articles selected for analysis emphasize the suffering of affected populations and are critical of U.S. policy, thus utilizing empathy and critical frames.
- b. *Prevalence and timing of media coverage*: A front-page story for at least three days in a row before a policy decision is needed to indicate a strong CNN effect, while a handful of articles in the back pages of a newspaper over a consistent time period indicates a weak CNN effect (Robinson, 2002, pp. 38-39).
- c. *Policy uncertainty*: Official press statements regarding specific policy decisions are inconsistent, wavering, or lacking an official policy position, thus indicating policy uncertainty.

Hypothesis Two: The trend of the relationship between media coverage and U.S. policy responses indicates policy-influenced media coverage.

Indicators:

- a. *Frames*: The majority of newspaper articles selected for analysis utilize an empathy frame when U.S. policies support intervention, but coverage is distant when policies oppose intervention or no policy is articulated. Media coverage uses a support frame.
- b. *Prevalence and timing of media coverage*: Media coverage functions to justify recently announced policies. There is an increase in media coverage of the conflict and U.S. policies during and following the decision-making process.
- c. *Policy certainty*: Policy was clearly articulated, thus indicating policy certainty, or there was no official policy stance.

Hypothesis Three: There is no relationship between media coverage and U.S. policy responses.

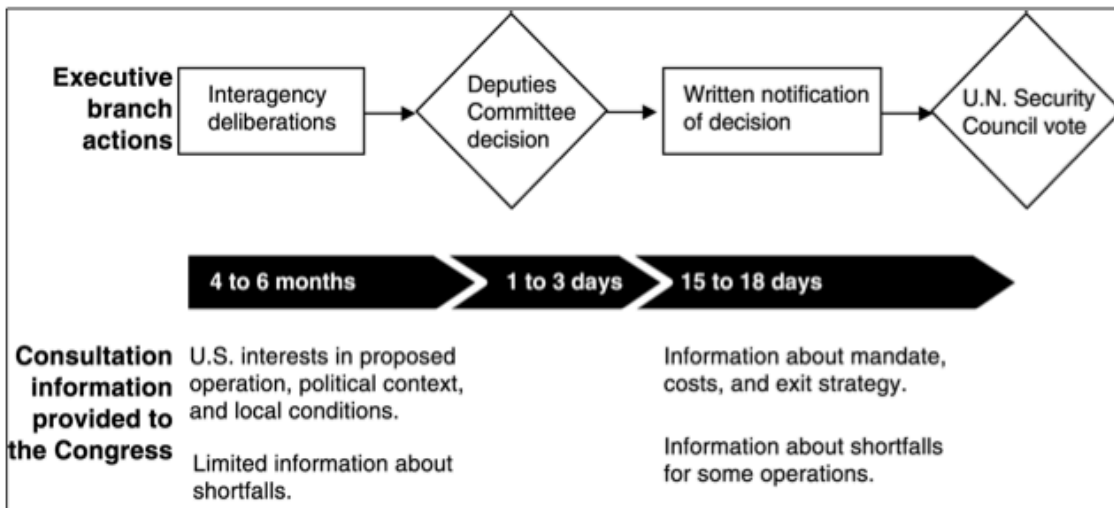
Indicators:

- a. *Frames*: The framing of news reports is inconsistent, varying substantially across policy decisions.
- b. *Prevalence and timing of media coverage*: There is no increase in media coverage of policies before or after the policymaking process.
- c. *Policy uncertainty or certainty*: Policy can be certain or uncertain when media coverage is not critical of the uncertainty.

I test the above hypotheses in the context of two executive branch decisions to support multilateral peacekeeping operations in Sierra Leone between September 1999 and January 2000. The extent and type of U.S. involvement differed drastically between the two decisions. The first

key decision I analyze is the U.S. support to create the U.N. Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) in October 1999. This decision is one of most crucial times in which the executive ordered a Presidential Decision Directive-25 (PDD-25), which authorizes an inter-agency assessment of the need of and operational readiness for U.S. involvement in multilateral peacekeeping missions following the Security Council proposal of a U.N. peacekeeping mission. Each PDD-25 prompts a decision-making process within the National Security Council (NSC) and the State and Defense Departments followed by a review of agency assessments and another decision by a Peacekeeping Core Group, which is a working group comprised of assistant and deputy assistant secretaries of each decision-making agency. Finally, a Deputies Committee chaired by the Deputy Advisor to the President for National Security Affairs decides how the U.S. will vote on the Security Council resolution and informs Congress, which may hold hearings about the decision. The dates of each step are important for analysis, although a government review of the PDD-25 process between 1999 and 2000 reveals that each step is iterative (GAO, 2001). The report depicts the process and time period generally associated with each step below.

Figure 3: Timing and Content of Consultations for U.N. Operations in East Timor, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1999 to Early 2000



Source: GAO analysis of executive branch records.

For the purpose of analysis, Robinson (2002) notes that it is imperative to know when policy decisions are made within the executive versus when the decisions are made public, so as

to discern if media plays a potential role of mobilizing support within the executive or building public support for intervention (p. 43). As such, I have located the exact dates upon which different steps in the process were completed. For each of the three steps shown here, I use the Deputies Committee's final decision to support a multilateral peacekeeping mission as an anchoring decision around which to base my analysis of decision one.

I begin my analysis of media coverage and policy certainty two weeks before the Deputies Committee decision and until Congress is notified. As such, on October 4, 1999, the Deputies Committee decided that the U.S. would support and assist with the creation of UNAMSIL. Congress was informed on October 10 and the U.N. passed Resolution 1270 establishing UNAMSIL on October 22, 1999. UNAMSIL was primarily prompted by the failure of warring parties to implement the Lomé Peace Agreement as well as by the persistence of severe human rights abuses. By supporting the mission, the United States agreed to finance one-fourth of its total budget and played an instrumental role in finding, training, and equipping peacekeeping forces (Cook, 2008). The U.S. was clear, however, that it had no intention of ever deploying military force to comprise the mission's original 6,000 troops.

Instead, the United States continued using diplomacy as the primary policy tool by influencing the Nigerian-backed ECOMOG to delay the regional peacekeeping mission's withdrawal, which had been announced immediately following the signing of the Lomé Accords on July 7, 1999. The United States' goal at this time was to ensure a smooth transition between an earlier UN monitoring mission and UNAMSIL, while minimizing the extent of its on-the-ground involvement. To analyze this policy, I study the period from September 23 to October 10.

The second decision I analyze is the expansion of UNAMSIL's capacity on May 19, 2000, which followed the revision of UNAMSIL's mandate to include the use of force and a total fighting force of 11,000 troops in U.N. Security Council Resolution 1789 on February 2, 2000. The U.S. supported the February expansion of UNAMSIL with a PDD-25 analysis conducted between January 13 and January 24, 2000. However, the U.S. did little of the work involved with

implementing Res. 1789 until escalating insecurity caused the international community to rapidly respond in May 2000. Accordingly, I use the May decision for this study. Cook (2008) describes this subsequent expansion of UNAMSIL as a last resort in the face of “a chain of events that put the UN mission in a disaster mode reminiscent of Somalia.” These events include RUF attacks against U.N. personnel and the theft of military supplies, the rebels’ hold of key diamond-mining areas, and the lack of progress on implementing the Lomé Accords, especially the disarmament of rebels (ibid.; GAO, 2001).

The United States played a key logistical role in the May 19, 2000 expansion to 13,000 troops. Between May 3 and May 20, the House of Representatives and President Clinton authorized a total of \$40 million. Half of the funds went to the Department of Defense to support UNAMSIL in military transport and equipment, while the other \$20 million went towards the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, World Bank reconstruction efforts, and the Sierra Leonean judiciary. Accordingly, the policymaking period upon which I focus is May 1 to May 22. Although no presidential directive was issued at the time, its inclusion allows for a more conclusive study of the range of policy responses the U.S. pursued, including direct humanitarian relief.

V. METHODOLOGY

To test the likelihood of the above hypotheses vis-à-vis the two policy responses, I conduct quantitative and qualitative analyses of news media, and executive press statements and briefings. I also consult secondary academic resources to provide context for the decisions. In this section, I describe my methodology for assessing policy uncertainty and media coverage.

a. Assessing Policy Uncertainty

To measure the level of policy uncertainty, I analyze press briefings and press statements from the policymaking apparatuses involved in the analysis of and decisions regarding PDD-25s and successive executive actions. I also analyze statements from officials in the executive branch and interpret their consistency with official policies. Additionally, I consult secondary academic

sources and congressional records. As Robinson (2002) notes, press briefings and statements are the key way in which “the executive attempts to set the news agenda and to sell policy to a wider public” (p. 135). Briefings are also the most reliable source of information from which one can measure the level of policy uncertainty (ibid.). I obtain access to official documents from the websites of the White House, State Department, and Department of Defense and from Lexis Nexis. In reviewing each document, I look for consistency within and across agencies. Four guiding questions serve as the basis of my analysis, which are:

- What policies does the document outline?
- How do agency representatives justify action or inaction?
- Is there consistency over time?
- Are the briefings and statements consistent across agencies at a given time?

b. Assessing Media Coverage

To measure the prevalence and frame of news media coverage, I analyze the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. These papers belong to the elite press, or the newspaper sources most likely to be read by and influence policymakers (Bloch-Elkon, 2007), and have among the highest rates of national readership. Robinson (2002) also cites these papers as “the most influential of the dailies” (p. 140), and a study by Van Belle (2003) contends that the *New York Times* is the best indicator of news media salience. It is necessary to note, however, that the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* are among the most liberally biased of the news dailies and thus may readily assume a critical bias against U.S. policies. Nonetheless, the diversity of types of coverage found by political communication scholars testing the CNN effect for various case studies using these dailies discredits an argument that this is always the case.

I obtained archived *New York Times* and *Washington Post* articles via Lexis Nexis by searching for all articles containing the keyword “Sierra Leone” within each identified time period. I read the sentence in which the keyword was used to determine that the article indeed referenced the conflict, and so the inclusion of an irrelevant article did not contaminate the data. The compilation of relevant articles using a keyword count allows for conclusions about the

relationship between the amount of media coverage and the policymaking process. I then use the relevant articles as the data pool from which to identify the frames of coverage for each policymaking period under analysis. This is a two-step process. First, I measure the frequency of each keyword I associate with each of the four categories of frames. My prediction of keywords is based on Robinson's (2002) methodology, but contextualized to be of relevance to the Sierra Leonean conflict. The keywords for each category are:

Support	Critical	Empathy	Distance
<i>Keywords</i>	<i>Keywords</i>	<i>Keywords</i>	<i>Keywords</i>
Save	Uncertain	Die/Died/Dying/Dead	Killing
Protect	Fail/Failure	Women	Rebels/Fighters
Help	Withdraw	People	Soldiers
		Refugee	Warlord

After verifying the results and recording each keyword's frequency, I use a keyword systematic, in which I read every fifth article within each of the two data pools for an interpretive analysis. The interpretive analysis is a qualitative method that allows "a competent observer" to form theories and derive a deeper meaning from a text's word choice (Neuendorf, 2002). From the articles, I pull out additional words and descriptions characteristic of the dominant frames. The descriptions provide additional evidence for the prominence of certain frames over others.

c. Limitations to the Research

While the methodology described above is systematic, there are a number of limitations to any study of media influence on policymaking. One limitation regards the measure of prevalence of media coverage. Hawkins (2002) argues that it is necessary to measure prevalence through the volume of coverage, i.e. the total area of news articles measured in square centimeters, while other scholars measure prevalence through the number of news articles written on the subject. This study is in line with the latter methodology, but recognizes the shortcomings

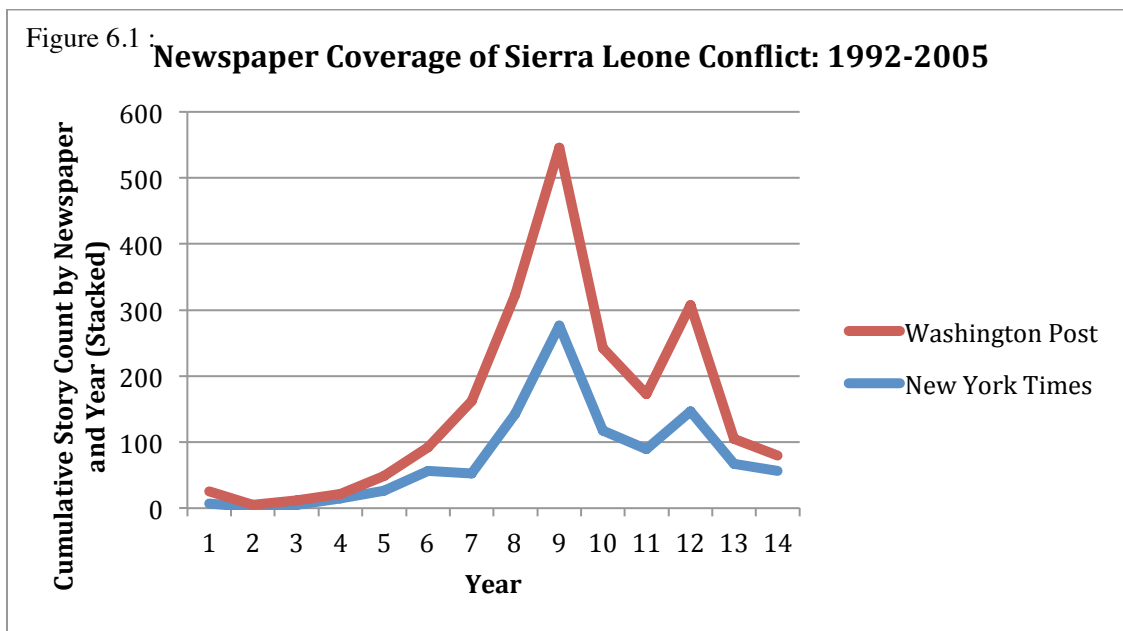
of studies that do not consider the spatial characteristics of news articles. I attempt to partially correct this shortcoming by noting when articles are full-length or in brief, as well as when they are editorials. Such information is needed to discern the strength of a potential CNN effect, as discussed above.

Furthermore, analysis is limited to news articles' text and keywords, rather than including television coverage and newspaper images. Images on screen or in print may, however, have a greater impact on policy processes than news text due to a number of factors. As Hawkins (2000) notes, news images have become "the backbone of news coverage of conflict" and their effects can be more emotive than text (p. 227). Images are also rapidly digestible and aid in viewers' recall of information. Relatedly, Brosius (1993) finds that emotional images actually aid in the recall of incorrect information, because viewers remember overgeneralized judgments based on the limited focus of an image. All of these factors have obvious implications for policy debates. Accordingly, subsequent studies of the effects of news media images on policy or public opinion regarding the Sierra Leone civil war can add additional depth to our understanding of the media-policy relationship.

Another primary limitation is the retrospective and outsider nature of the study, which most heavily affects analysis of the key policy decisions. While every attempt has been made to verify the dates in which the policymaking process occurred and when decisions were made, this study does not include firsthand sources from policymakers involved in the decision making process. As such, all attempts to verify timing are based on secondary academic sources and government records. The absence of firsthand insider sources also limits the ability to draw conclusions regarding the relevance of the chosen newspapers to decisions made about this particular conflict. Accordingly, this study does not draw firm conclusions regarding the media's role in policymaking towards Sierra Leone, but rather attempts to find correlations and provide an assessment of the media's relationship to policymaking based only on the literature reviewed within the paper.

VI. FINDINGS

It is first necessary to contextualize the relationship between prevalence of news media coverage and policy responses over the course of the conflict to understand the full range of coverage by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. A count of articles published on a yearly basis between the Sierra Leonean civil war's start on March 23, 1992 and the expiration of UNAMSIL's mandate on December 31, 2005 reveals substantial variance (see Figure 6.1). For example, following the RUF attack on the Sierra Leone-Liberia border in March 1992, the *New York Times* only published seven articles and the *Washington Post* published 18, compared to the *New York Times*' 276 articles and the *Washington Post*'s 270 in 2000. The disparity in coverage demonstrates Neuman's (1996) observation that media coverage varies greatly over a conflict's full trajectory, while the spike in coverage corroborates Hawkins' (2002) observation that, after the collapse of the Lomé Peace Accord in 2000, the Sierra Leone civil war was the most covered African conflict in the U.S. press, and yet only the fifth most covered in the world (Hawkins, 2002).



a. Decision One

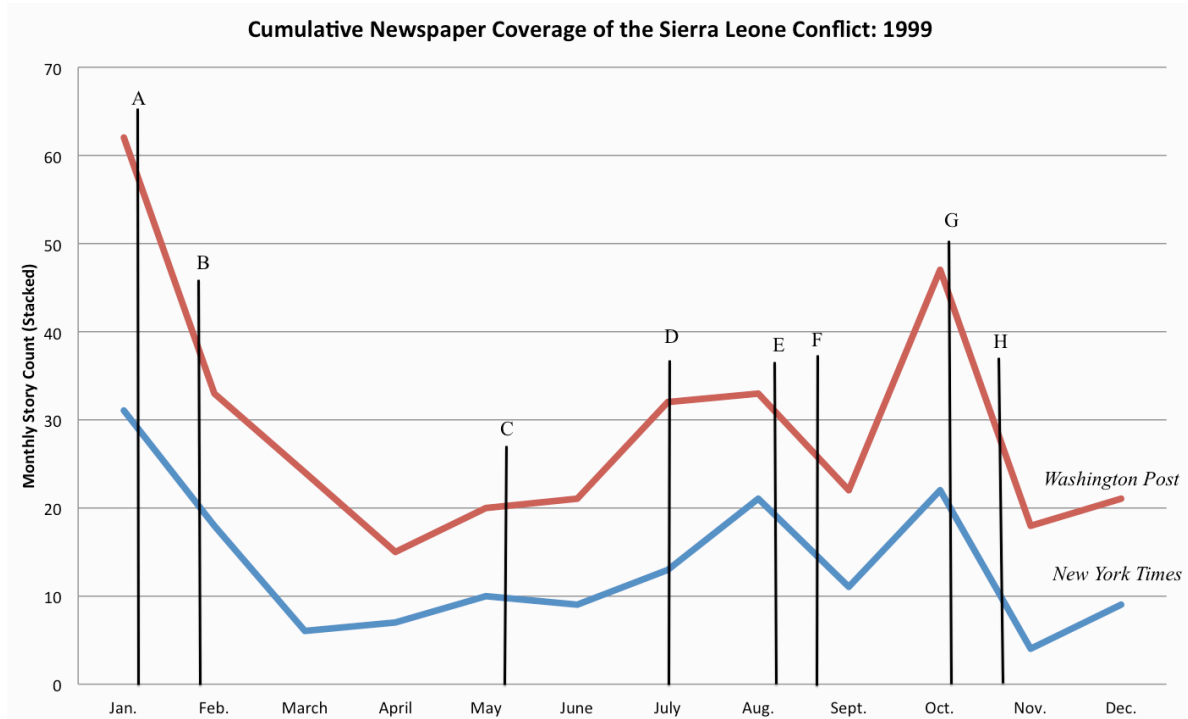
i. Prevalence of Media Coverage

In 1999, the year in which the first policymaking period occurs, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* published a cumulative 323 articles about the conflict and attention was highest in January, when the RUF waged the infamous “Operation No Living Thing,” considered the most brutal period of the war. Figure 6.2 depicts monthly media coverage by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* for 1999 in relation to key events in both the conflict’s trajectory and the U.S. government’s involvement. During this time, however, the U.S. did not make a considerable response, but continuously used diplomatic efforts to secure financial support for ECOMOG. Neuman goes on to argue that periods of highly prevalent media coverage “force policymakers to do something” (p. 110), while Gowing (2012) adds the caveat explored above that the “something... might not be much.” Gowing’s hesitation to claim the CNN effect as the dominant explanation of policy outcomes is supported by this period in which media attention was high and the U.S. policy response was not proportional to either media coverage or the scale of violence.

The policymaking period under consideration in 1999, however, received relatively less media attention than January. Between September 23 and October 10, only seven articles were published in the *New York Times* and ten in the *Washington Post*. The majority of the 17 articles published directly address the U.N.’s consideration of a peacekeeping mission. The *Washington Post* devoted two full-length stories and three “world-in-brief” articles to Sierra Leone, as well as made reference to the crisis in relation to other humanitarian emergencies, such as Kosovo and East Timor, in five additional full-length articles. At this time, the *New York Times* published three full-length stories about Sierra Leone, one of which was an editorial by humanitarian-critic David Rieff. The relatively small amount of media coverage during the time in which a key policy decision was made suggests that media did not heavily influence policymakers to pursue creating UNAMSIL. The lack of highly prevalent media coverage does not reach the critical tipping point needed to “mobilize the conscience of the nation’s public institutions” (Cohen, 1994 as cited in Robinson, 2001), thus discrediting Hypothesis One that a strong CNN effect existed during this policymaking period. It is still possible, however, that there was a weak CNN effect,

in which policymakers were personally motivated to pursue a specific policy due to emotive coverage within the small data pool.

Figure 6.2:



Caption: A) RUF takes Freetown and UNOMSIL evacuates; B) ECOMOG regains control of Freetown; C) Peace talks begin between rebels and government; D) Lomé Accord is signed; E) Deputies Committee decides to support UNOMSIL expansion; F) U.N. Res. 1260 expands UNOMSIL; G) Deputies Committee decides to expand UNAMSIL; H) U.N. adopts Res. 1270 to establish UNAMSIL

ii. Media Framing

An interpretive analysis of this data (results shown below in Figure 6.3) reveals that articles published during the policymaking period at hand were largely critical of the international community's do-nothing approach to the conflict and empathetic to the humanitarian suffering of Sierra Leoneans. Table 6.3 shows examples of descriptors used by *New York Times* and *Washington Post* articles between September 23 and October 10, 1999. Media coverage elicited sympathy for the suffering of men, women, and children affected by the violence, but painted

often horrific and repellent pictures of the extent of the atrocities. The coverage also framed the contributions of Western governments to ending the crises as insufficient and always pointed out where U.S. contributions were particularly minimal. As such, the media coverage used a type of critical frame that was both critical of current U.S. policies and supportive of increased humanitarian attention. This is called a “do more frame” here opposed to a “keep status quo frame,” which would be supportive of the U.S. continuing the dominant course of action at the time.

The majority of the full-length articles discuss Sierra Leone in the context of an on-going debate about the role of international actors in humanitarian intervention. The September 23 *New York Times* editorial by David Rieff is a primary example. Rieff writes in response to a speech by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan hailing Annan’s call for “a new commitment to intervention,” but criticizing Western governments who do not include regional security and the amelioration of humanitarian suffering as national interests. The publication of Rieff’s article is representative of the critical stance taken by the newspapers at this time, but also the lack of attention given specifically to the United States’ policies towards Sierra Leone. Where Sierra Leone is discussed, it is used as one of many cases of problematic international involvement with others including Kosovo and East Timor. Where the United States is referenced, it is almost always in relation to the U.N. Indeed, newspaper coverage at this time placed the burden of response on the shoulders of the United Nations. For example, the *Washington Post* published a statement by U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Richard Holbrooke on September 30. Holbrooke says, “We are anxious to begin disarmament and demobilization in Sierra Leone. We need the U.N. to be ready to introduce a full peacekeeping operation in December, when the Nigerians plan to leave.” Here, Holbrooke places emphasis on the role of the U.N. and only indirectly suggests that it is the responsibility of member states to prepare the international body for intervention.

Figure 6.3: Framing descriptors from *New York Times* and *Washington Post* coverage between September 23 to October 10, 1999

Empathize with Victims	Do More Frame
Many horror stories	United States and other nations essentially stood by
Habit of chopping off the limbs of their prisoners	There are more urgent tasks confronting the people of Sierra Leone
Mutilating captured children and filling the country with orphans	The rest of the world wins itself no glory in all this
Slaughtered the innocent	Terrible failure
Scene of horrific atrocities	Had the resources—but not the will
People of Sierra Leone have every right to be wary	As aid money pours into Kosovo, countries have pledged almost nothing to help Sierra Leone
	No American troops would participate
	Some U.N. diplomats remain skeptical about Washington’s commitment to African problems

Figure 6.4: Cumulative keyword count from *New York Times* and *Washington Post* coverage between September 23 to October 10, 1999

Empathy Frame		Distance Frame	
Descriptor	Frequency	Descriptor	Frequency
Die/Died/Dying/Dead	3	Killing	1
Women	5	Rebels/Fighters	9+3
People	24	Soldiers	1
Refugee	20	Warlord	1
<i>Total</i>	52	<i>Total</i>	15
Do More Frame (Critical)		Maintain Status Quo Frame (Support)	
Descriptor	Frequency	Descriptor	Frequency
Save	1	Uncertain	0
Protect	0	Fail/Failure	0
Help	7	Withdraw	0
<i>Total</i>	8	<i>Total</i>	0

The results of a keyword analysis of the 17 articles (shown above in Figure 6.4) support the interpretive analysis’ suggestion of an empathetic frame that is both critical of the U.S. policies at this time and supportive of doing more. In regards to the categories of empathy and distance frames of Sierra Leoneans involved in or affected by the war, keywords predicted to

demonstrate the existence of empathy framing occur 52 times compared to the occurrence of keywords associated with distance framing 15 times. This difference is greater than three to one. The occurrence of keywords associated with the do more and keep status quo frames were drastically less. The total frequency of keywords associated with support of greater humanitarian action was 15, while the frequency of keywords critical of greater action was zero. The distribution of these keywords was also evenly distributed over the policymaking period, suggesting consistency in news media coverage. The small samples available for both keyword and interpretive analysis, however, make definitive conclusions challenging, but nonetheless important for analysis.

The results of both the interpretive and keyword analyses demonstrate that the small amount of media attention given to the Sierra Leone conflict during the first policymaking period was empathetic and critical of the U.S., as well as supportive of the U.S. and other international actors doing more to end humanitarian suffering in Sierra Leone. The descriptors, keywords, and relatively low number of articles suggest the existence of a weak CNN effect in which policymakers were emotionally affected by the framing and “inclined” to act (Livingston and Riley, 1999; Robinson, 2000, 2001, 2002). As Robinson notes, however, occurrences of a weak CNN effect can only be considered in relation to other prominent factors influencing policymaking processes and outcomes, most important of which is policy uncertainty.

iii. Policy Uncertainty

Following findings suggestive of a weak CNN effect, the crucial question remains as to the level of policy uncertainty within the executive. During the policymaking period from September 23 to October 10, 1999, executive agencies issued few to no press briefings or statements. The Department of Defense and White House issued no statements, while the Department of State issued two concurrent statements on September 23 and 24. The first press statement applauded ECOWAS members for creating a new plan for regional stability in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone at a recent meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, while the second press statement

announced an upcoming visit by Secretary Madeline K. Albright to African states, including Sierra Leone, on October 17-27. During the policymaking time in question, the subject of the conflict also failed to arise in Congressional or Senate meetings. This period of relative silence within the executive following the issuance of the PDD-25 discredits Hypothesis Two, which is that policymakers influenced media by using it to put the conflict on the media agenda and create a constituency for action. Had this hypothesis proven true, the case would have had similarities to Robinson's case study of Somalia reviewed above. In that scenario, policymakers pushed out press statements in attempts to get the crisis in Somalia on the media agenda. Subsequent press coverage enabled policymakers to pursue their desired course of action by creating the domestic constituency needed.

While hypotheses one and two are ruled out by the absence of both prevalent news media coverage and publicized discussions within the executive, the absence of discussion within Congress is telling of the policymaking climate during which the Sierra Leone conflict occurred. Prior to the establishment of UNAMSIL, the executive tirelessly emphasized diplomacy, such as by appointing Special Envoy Jesse Jackson, facilitating the Lomé peace agreement, and encouraging a stronger ECOMOG presence. The Lomé peace accords, however, are heavily criticized as lacking muscle, international or Sierra Leonean will for implementation, nor opportunities to bring justice on behalf of victims of conflict. Speaking retroactively, then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Leonard Hawley captures popular sentiment within the executive regarding the decision-making behind Lomé. He says, "Lomé was a screwed up agreement largely because it was put together by diplomats who wanted to get a solution to the fighting because it was pretty bleak. They wanted to open the door so they could get something in there... not really appreciating the military and other aspects of it" (as cited in Cook, 2008). Despite the bleak outlook for Lomé from the beginning, the United States continually supported the agreement and used justifications of U.S. national interest in West African regional stability within executive discussions. The U.S. support of UNAMSIL, although devoid of U.S.

contributions of ground forces, thus represented a substantial foreign policy change. The decision was not, however, without hesitation.

During the PDD-25 decision-making process, the Deputies Committee judged the political and operational feasibility of each proposed peacekeeping operation against a set of criteria. Support for the establishment of UNAMSIL met political feasibility factors of furthering U.S. and international interests, posing consequences for inaction, and breaching international peace, but failed to meet political feasibility factors of a conflict posing a considerable threat to international peace and security or a proposed mission with the consent of warring parties (GAO, 2011). The mission also failed to meet almost all of the operational feasibility factors, including adequate financial resources and troops and a clear mandate (*ibid.*). Assessments by the State and Defense Departments and White House, nonetheless, recommended pursuing the mission citing “unacceptable humanitarian consequences of inaction” and the overall support for the mission by Security Council members and West African regional allies, notably Nigeria (*ibid.*). Believing that the advantages to the peacekeeping mission outweighed the shortfalls, the Deputies Committee and Peacekeeping Core Group took actions to increase the mission’s feasibility, such as recruiting U.N. member states to deploy better trained forces and increasing logistical support (*ibid.*).

Despite the clear operational shortfalls of the mission, Congress did not object to its establishment. The Deputies Committee decided to support the establishment of UNAMSIL on October 4 and notified Congress four days later. Congress is authorized to hold a hearing regarding any Deputies Committee decision immediately following receipt of the notification letter. Congress, however, chose not to object nor discuss the decision. The important question regarding this finding is, of course, why not object to—or at least deliberate upon—a tremendous shift in U.S. and international policy towards Sierra Leone? The GAO’s evaluation of the PDD-25 process reveals one partial explanation. There was a lack of communication between the Deputies Committee and Congress regarding both the benefits and shortfalls of peacekeeping

operations. The evaluation found that the Deputies Committee failed to convey any of the operational feasibility shortfalls to Congress during the period of investigation, nor in the official notification letter. As such, a potential hypothesis is that Congress was simply unaware of the full extent of the shortfalls. It was not until later in 1999 that Congress expressed concern over the financial constraints facing the mission, although the State Department and White House differed by expressing “interdepartmental understanding that this was the best mission possible at the time” (Cook, 2008).

Nonetheless, an interesting parallel between policy discussions prior to the Deputies Committee decision and findings from the news media coverage discussed above is the extent to which Sierra Leone is referenced in relation to other humanitarian emergencies. One example is a statement by Representative Ehlers in support of Congressional Resolution 4237 to express concern over escalating violence in Sierra Leone. Ehlers says,

It is particularly troubling when one compares our Nation's response to this situation [Sierra Leone] to the response we mounted in Kosovo and Yugoslavia. It is dangerous to make comparisons, of course, because they are far different parts of the world. But I do find it troubling that, even though Sierra Leone had more deaths and more people displaced than Kosovo at the time the bombing began in Kosovo and Yugoslavia, we did not chose to take action in Sierra Leone.

Accordingly, a second hypothesis as to why Congress decided to pursue a different course of action without strong hesitation is expressed in sentiments by Ehlers and others that there was indeed a humanitarian motivation and belief within the executive that a humanitarian response would further U.S. national interests in protecting West African regional stability and supporting Sierra Leone’s return to a democratic state. Clearly, the timing of the Sierra Leonean conflict cannot be separated from conflicts in Kosovo, Yugoslavia, and East Timor, which may explain executive agencies’ hesitation to entangle the U.S. in another humanitarian emergency.

By providing logistical and financial support to a U.N. peacekeeping mission, however, the U.S. could minimally fulfill what was becoming considered an international obligation to intervene on humanitarian principles, while avoiding critical domestic news media, financial consequences, or casualties. As will become increasingly clear in the analysis of the second policymaking period, U.S. executive members were careful to create policies that displaced full responsibility from the U.S.—a decision that garnered increasing criticism as the conflict escalated.

iv. Media Influence

The initial hesitation by members of the executive to do more followed by a quick change in policy evidences a minimal degree of wavering policy in the September 23 to October 10 policymaking period. The lack of both discussion within the executive and opposing sentiments publically expressed by executive members does not, however, suggest a high level of policy uncertainty. In regards to news media, the minimal existence of coverage during the period strongly empathized with the suffering of Sierra Leoneans and minimally supported humanitarian intervention. When paired with a low level of policy uncertainty, however, the hypotheses that media influenced policymakers to pursue the establishment of UNAMSIL or that policymakers used media are unsubstantiated. Accordingly, one can conclude that there existed, at most, a minimal relationship between news media coverage of the Sierra Leone conflict and U.S. support for UNAMSIL. News media at this time subtly enabled policymakers to pursue the particular course of action by using language supportive of a humanitarian response and keeping Sierra Leone on the news media agenda, but did not force policymakers to pursue this outcome. This finding supports Olson, et al.'s contention that high rates of media coverage are not always necessary to prompt humanitarian responses to conflict.

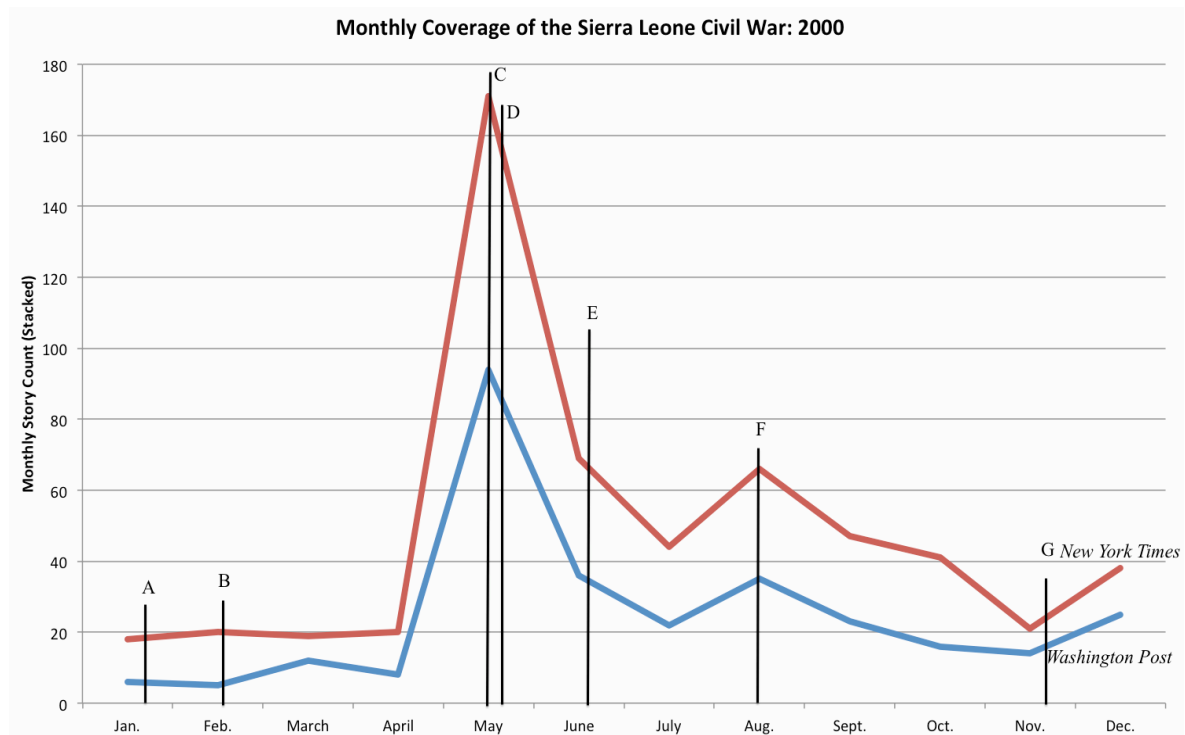
b. Decision Two

i. Prevalence of Media Coverage

Relative to September 23 to October 10, 1999, the second policymaking period of May 5 to 22, 2000, received considerably higher media attention. The *New York Times* published 80

articles about Sierra Leone and the *Washington Post* published 51. Figure 6.3 below depicts media coverage over the course of the year 2000, and the high spike in May is the policymaking period under consideration. Rapidly increasing hostilities between the RUF and peacekeeping forces caught the media's attention, as well as prompted an increase in military intervention by the United Kingdom. Media coverage during this time period was highly supportive of increased military and humanitarian action. Two dominant themes in the coverage during this time were the Lomé Peace Accords and Sierra Leone as a case for the justifiableness of military intervention.

Figure 6.5:



Caption: A) UNAMSIL's mandate to use force; B) U.N. adopts Res. 1289 expanding UNAMSIL; C) RUF takes 700 peacekeepers hostage, U.K. sends paratroopers; D) U.N. expands UNAMSIL to 13,000 troops; E) RUF releases hostages; F) U.N. establishes Special Court to prosecute for war crimes; G) Ceasefire signed

ii. Media Influence

While news media coverage from the first policymaking period strongly emphasized humanitarian suffering, coverage during the second policymaking period remained empathetic but increasingly focused on the inadequacies of Western responses to the Sierra Leone crisis.

News media coverage was both explicitly critical of Western actors, specifically the long periods of their insufficient and delayed action, and supportive of increased intervention. The proportion of full-length articles also dramatically increased from the first policymaking period. Of the 80 articles published in the *New York Times* during this policymaking period, 41 were full-length, 15 were news summaries, eight were editorials, and 16 discussed Sierra Leone in full-length articles about another conflict or Western intervention generally. The *Washington Post* published 51 articles. Twenty-nine were full-length, 11 were editorials, seven were news summaries, and four mentioned Sierra Leone in relation to other subjects. Interestingly, when Sierra Leone was discussed in relation to other crises, journalists placed Sierra Leone in the forefront of analysis, rather than briefly alluding to the conflict as they had done during the first policymaking period. The total of 121 articles published in the two newspapers over the 18-day policymaking period under review averages out to 6.7 news articles a day. This well surpasses the threshold of articles needed to suggest the existence of a strong CNN effect, thus demanding in-depth consideration of Hypothesis One.

The results of an interpretive analysis reveal that news coverage thoroughly discussed the inability of Western intervention to stop the increasingly brutal reign of rebels' terror, the spiraling of the West's involvement into a Somalia-like catastrophe, and the need for a stronger more unified Western response. In advance of the May 19 announcement of UNAMSIL's expansion, news media explicitly supported doing more to end the suffering in Sierra Leone. A primary way in which the newspapers advocated increased action was by pointing out the uneven application of intervention on humanitarian principles and the need to expand U.S. interests to include humanitarianism. For example, in a May 11 *Washington Post* editorial, Jim Hoagland writes,

In the gold-rush mentality of Clintonian America, the inward, navel-gazing self-absorption of the European Union, the fragmentation of Russia and the relentless acquisitiveness of Asian nations, there has been little room for the compassion,

attention and help that the continent of Africa and most urgently Sierra Leone need today.

Three days later, the *Washington Post* published an editorial by Fred Hiatt, in which Hiatt expresses a similar sentiment. He writes,

So when should the United States intervene? In the end, you have to believe that vital national interests go beyond securing the sea lanes and petroleum reserves-- that the United States will be better off if democracy, prosperity and liberal and humane values spread throughout the world, and worse off if the Slobodan Milosevics and Foday Sankohs are allowed to triumph. That doesn't mean standing up to evil every time and everywhere, but it does mean that the map of U.S. interests can leave no continent out.

As is apparent from these editorials, news media adamantly advocated the application of intervention on humanitarian principles, as called for by Kofi Annan and discussed above in the context of the first policymaking period. By drawing comparisons to “the lessons” of Bosnia, Rwanda, and Somalia, the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* positioned the Sierra Leone conflict as capable of becoming, as one *New York Times* article put it, the next crisis in a “string of peacekeeping failures.” Accordingly, the language of the articles is reminiscent of Livingston’s emotional impediment effect, in which policymakers attempt to prevent negative news media coverage of conflict. The emotional impediment effect does not fully apply, because U.S. involvement does not meet Livingston’s criterion of being an operation involving strict operational secrecy. It could have been, however, that the executive hoped to avoid further negative coverage by supporting the UNAMSIL expansion.

Newspaper coverage during this time period gave ample attention to disagreement in government, emphasizing opposing positions. For example, a May 20 *New York Times* article discussed an act by Republican Senator Judd Gregg to block paying the U.S.’ \$368 million peacekeeping bill to the United Nations. Senator Gregg consistently blocked executive decisions

to payoff U.N. peacekeeping debt. The article states, “The dispute is the latest skirmish in a running battle between an administration that has used American power and money abroad in operations short of war and a Republican-led Congress that disdains many of those missions.” News media also highlighted policy uncertainty within the executive in the context of a string of shortcomings specific to the U.S., rather than the West more generally. In a *New York Times* editorial, Jane Perlez quotes former U.S. Ambassador and author Morton I. Abramowitz, a critic of the Lomé Agreement. The quotation reads, “Diplomats look to the short term, they tend to think any agreement is good. Diplomats like to export problems to the future.” Perez then offers her own commentary.

Even in Mr. Sankoh's case, there are divisions in the Clinton administration. While some officials argue strongly for bringing the warlord to justice, others seem to believe that he still may have a role to play in the evolving efforts to bring peace to Sierra Leone – or at least in freeing United Nations peacekeepers whom Mr. Sankoh's rebels have taken hostage. The Administration's envoy, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who is in the region now, is on good terms with Mr. Sankoh's companion warlord, President Charles Taylor of Liberia.

By giving attention to executive disagreement, news media amplified the level of policy uncertainty within the executive and painted the administration as being in a situation of panic, confronted with a quickly deteriorating humanitarian situation and an inability to respond given bureaucratic domestic entanglements. Like Perez's editorial, multiple articles discussed Rev. Jesse Jackson's relationship with President Taylor and Foday Sankoh. A *New York Times* article even went so far to ask, “Who are the real basket cases?” suggesting that U.S. policies toward Sierra Leone were not criticized enough in comparisons to the brutal rule of the West African rebel leaders in question.

Given the subject matter of the articles, determining precisely the existence of empathy or distance frames is more challenging in this case. Coverage continued to empathize with victims

of conflict by using language that elicited compassion and shared humanity. Of the articles read for the interpretive analysis, however, humanitarian suffering is only rarely the subject. Most articles devote attention to rebel actions, particularly the unfolding story of U.N. employees held hostage. Newspaper coverage at the start of the policymaking period more explicitly addressed the humanitarian suffering and the coverage became increasingly focused on the interaction between rebels and international actors. When conflict-affected people are referenced, it is in an empathetic manner. Accordingly, the language never meets Robinson's distance frame criterion of otherizing the affected population. I would, thus, argue that the descriptive language used is more suggestive of an empathy frame, despite the drastic thematic change in newspaper coverage over the time period. Figure 6.6 below displays a table of select descriptors found in *New York Times* and *Washington Post* articles during this policymaking period. The descriptors offer more examples of themes discussed above.

Figure 6.6: Select descriptors from *New York Times* and *Washington Post* coverage between May 5 to 22, 2000

Empathize with Victims	Critical of U.S. Policies/Support Humanitarian Intervention
Carrying loads on their heads and scrambling to board jammed buses	Whom do we blame for everything that has gone wrong in Sierra Leone?...Could it be the United States?
The people of Freetown, deceived so many times	Donor fatigue...tired of emptying out pockets down the rat hole of foreign aid
Wave of terror	The American government appeases evil
Kidnapped and humiliated	America could have helped Sierra Leone
Panicky men, women and children fled	Mission is in trouble
Traveling by foot, bicycle and vehicle	Divisions in the Clinton administration
Civilians streamed towards the capital	Bush's heedlessness and Gore's hypocrisy
Indiscriminate killing	Half-baked Security Council response is woefully inadequate
Specializes in limb hacking and child raping	Sent ambiguous signals
Burning houses, raping women and girls	Badly let down
Fed them drugs and forced them into combat	Should not preclude further aid
Killed, raped, and hacked off the limbs of thousands of citizens	Ready to weather criticism rather than become directly engaged
Heightened fears	Repress a legacy of shame
Stumps of his arms	Virtually everything has gone wrong
Wear charms [to] ward off bullets	Slow strength and poorly commanded
"There is no food!"	Collapse of the peacekeeping mission
Chopped off limbs with machetes and axes	Institutional amnesia...fatal compulsion to

	repeat
Searching for friends and relatives	Peacekeeping demands willingness
Slaying and killing	Sierra Leone debacle is the latest humiliation Institutional amnesia

Figure 6.7: Cumulative keyword count from *New York Times* and *Washington Post* coverage between May 5 to 22, 2000

Empathy		Distance	
Descriptor	Frequency	Descriptor	Frequency
Die/Died/Dying/Dead	30	Soldiers	145
Women	16	Rebels/Fighters	364
People	124	Men	60
Children	39	Warlord	20
<i>Total</i>	209	<i>Total</i>	589

Do More Frame		Maintain Status Quo Frame	
Descriptor	Frequency	Descriptor	Frequency
Save	4	Uncertain	2
Protect	13	Fail/Failure	17
Help	90	Withdraw	0
<i>Total</i>	107	<i>Total</i>	19

The results of the keyword count support the interpretive analysis findings that news media used a critical do more frame by a frequency of over five to one. The results regarding the use of an empathy or distance frame, however, differ. The keyword count suggests the use of a distance frame rather than an empathy frame by a frequency of nearly three to one. Undoubtedly, this is due to the vast attention given to fighting between UNAMSIL forces, the RUF, and other rebel groups. As a result, one cannot definitively conclude that one kind of frame over the other was used. Given the challenge, I do not rule out the possibility of a CNN effect, although the data does not fully meet the criteria of utilizing empathy and distance frames.

iii. Policy Uncertainty

During the policymaking period leading up to the U.S. support of UNAMISL’s further expansion, there was a notably larger response from executive agencies than when compared to the first policymaking period. Between May 5 and May 25, 2000, the Department of State

devoted ample time to Sierra Leone in seven press briefings, speeches, and statements, five of these times occurred between May 9 and May 12. The Department of Defense discussed Sierra Leone in one speech and two press briefings, which occurred between May 9 and May 16. Analysis of this data suggests that U.S. agencies advocated and eventually promised stronger U.S. involvement, but the resulting policy response continued to lack muscle due to disagreement within the executive as to the U.S.' responsibility. Over the course of this policymaking period, U.S. policymakers made a variety of policy decisions in addition to supporting the expansion of UNAMSIL. Other policy responses include the transportation of UNAMSIL peacekeepers via the U.S. military, the promised appropriation of \$20 million in training and equipment for peacekeepers, continued diplomatic engagement with the primary goal of freeing U.N. employees taken hostage, and financial support for a U.K. military operation. The disagreement around two particular decisions is, however, most telling of policy uncertainty. These decisions are the continued use of Reverend Jess Jackson as the primary channel of diplomatic engagement and the Senate's refusal to appropriate previously promised funds for UNAMSIL. The level of controversy these two decisions spurred highlights disagreement within and across policymaking bodies regarding the fundamental pillars of the U.S. response to Sierra Leone across the conflict's duration, most specifically the U.S. facilitation of the Lomé Peace Accords and their implementation.

The White House made clear from the start of the policymaking period that "the Lomé Accords were going to remain the only policy option" due to fear of another failure of coercive military involvement by the U.S. (Cook, 2008). Accordingly, the White House and State Department adamantly supported increasing U.S. assistance to UNAMSIL, arguing that the mission's ultimate mandate was the implementation of Lomé. A key aspect of the ensuing disagreement over the White House and State Department's support of UNAMSIL's expansion was their readiness to position the U.S.' role as that of negotiator by repeatedly tasking Reverend Jesse Jackson to facilitate discussions in partnership with Liberian President Charles Taylor, who

would later go on to be indicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone for war crimes. Critics viewed Jesse Jackson as an emblem of the U.S.-Liberia partnership, thus prompting publically displayed disagreement in May between agencies about Jackson, U.S. support to the Liberian president, the Lomé Accords, and the U.N. mission. Until the summer of 2000, the State Department provided humanitarian assistance to Taylor and recognized him as a partner in ending the war in Sierra Leone. According to primary research by Mahoney (2010), U.S. executive agency attitudes towards Taylor began shifting in late May. Consequently, the U.S. would become one of the biggest players in establishing the Special Court for Sierra Leone and bringing Charles Taylor to justice. Senator Gregg highlighted attitude change in a May 23 Congressional hearing. Gregg stated,

In fact, as of yesterday, the State Department changed its position as to the rebel leader [Charles Taylor] over there. Instead of him being a conciliatory, positive force for the basis on which they might base the peace accord over there [in Sierra Leone], this person-or people-should be brought before an international tribunal when they have committed crimes against humanity, which this individual clearly has. Maybe there is a shift of attitude occurring within the State Department. I hope there is because that would move us down the road towards resolving this issue.

Prior to the change in attitude, however, the White House and Department of State strongly supported a May 9 ECOWAS summit held in Abuja, Nigeria in which Charles Taylor was appointed mediator for the conflict. The White House commended the ECOWAS effort in a May 11 press statement in which President Clinton announced that Rev. Jackson would return to assist Taylor in the mediation. Clinton announced the provision of military aid to Jordanian and Bangladeshi peacekeepers via the Department of Defense as part of “international efforts to restore peace in Sierra Leone and prevent a return to all-out civil war.” It was disapproval of these kinds of diplomatic efforts by the executive branch that led the Senate Appropriations Committee,

headed by Sen. Gregg, to block the repayment of the \$368 million U.S. owed for U.N. peacekeeping operations.

The Senate's blocking of appropriated funds, with support from members of State, is the second primary piece of evidence demonstrating a high level of policy uncertainty. President Clinton issued his second press statement during the policymaking period on May 20, writing that he would appropriate an additional \$20 million to the Department of Defense to assist in the transportation and logistical needs of U.N. peacekeepers. His announcement of increased humanitarian aid, however, was overshadowed by the on-going controversy surrounding Sen. Gregg's withholding of funds until the U.S. pursued a different channel for responding to the crisis than a peacekeeping mission in support of what Gregg believed was a failed peace agreement. Rev. Jackson became an outspoken critic of Gregg saying, "Holding up resources jeopardizes more lives. If U.S. troops are not going in, then the burden is on Congress to provide financial support for allies who are ready to help." Three days later, Kofi Annan openly criticized Gregg's act, as well. Annan said, "Let me say it is not helpful... Where a peace agreement is signed but one or more of the parties are tempted to violate it, the U.N. needs a credible and robust presence in order to deter and discourage potential violators."

The Senate's refusal to release funds also became the focus of many key figures within the executive. In a May 20 press statement, State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher expressed frustration over the Senate's decision. Boucher noted that the hold was 'negatively affecting the U.S. and U.N.'s activities' and referred to it as an act that disregarded earlier executive decisions to appropriate \$226 million to the U.N. Some members of the executive, however, agreed with Gregg's act, thus demonstrating the inconsistency of policy positions emerging from executive branches. An unidentified diplomat reported to the *New York Times* on May 20 that the U.S.' "cardinal principle" regarding stronger peacekeeping forces should be "We don't send them in until there is a ceasefire," which is aligned with Senator Gregg's demand and not executive policy.

In his May 23 Congressional remarks, Sen. Gregg responded to executive criticism by calling into question the accuracy of the amount of blocked funds cited in a *New York Times* article. Gregg remarked,

I think the record needs to be corrected. I presume this story came from a momentum within the U.N. to try to put pressure on the Congress to spend money on U.N. initiatives. Obviously, the U.N. feels that by using our media sources in this country, they can influence the activity of the Congress, specifically of the Senate. However, I would have hoped that the *New York Times* reporter would have reviewed the actual facts...Obviously, this reporter got his information from somebody, I presume, at the U.N., or maybe the State Department, and did not bother to check the facts.

Gregg's remarks evidence the inability of key figures during this period to offer a unified policy response to the question of how the United States and international community more broadly responded to the crisis. The contradictory statements by leading figures in the international response to the Sierra Leone crisis indicate what became an increasingly tit-for-tat game, in which members of the executive with strong positions utilized the channels available to them to push forward their desired course of action. Considering again the contention that there exists a relationship of mutual influence between policymakers and news outlets (Neuman, 1996), it is clear that policymakers and journalists each used the other for individual gain. The controversy surrounding Special Envoy Jesse Jackson, the Lomé Peace Accords, and U.N. peacekeeping in the media and behind closed doors clearly demonstrates inconsistent policy perspectives from the executive. Additionally, the State Department's shift in attitude in mid- to late-May exemplifies a wavering policy response.

The question that remains in light of the disagreement is what ultimately prompted the U.S. to support UNAMSIL's expansion and increase its financial and logistical support to the operation. The role of the U.S. in enabling UNAMSIL's expansion was ultimately key in the

mission's eventual success, but nonetheless far short of direct coercive action. There are many possible explanations as to why the U.S. chose a course of action that emphasized humanitarian assistance and diplomacy over military intervention. Cook (2008) offers the most persuasive explanation for why the U.S. chose the course of action it did. He argues that international involvement in Sierra Leone was always regarded as a U.N. mission and, thus, failure did not jeopardize the U.S. image. Were the U.N. to fail in Sierra Leone, however, the U.S.' relationship with international organizations would be jeopardized. As a result, Cook argues, "American policymakers saw support for UNAMSIL as support for international organizations" and the subsequent "credibility of U.N. peacekeeping" (2008). Eric Schwartz, Former Senior Director of Multinational and Humanitarian Affairs at the NSC, provides evidence for this conclusion when describing executive attitudes towards the decision. He notes, "There was awareness at the senior level of government that the credibility of UN peacekeeping was at stake and the lives of thousands of people were at stake" (as cited in Cook, 2008).

iv. Media Influence

Given the prevalence of news media articles, the highly critical and somewhat empathetic nature of the coverage, and the high level of policy uncertainty within the executive, the media-state relationship between May 5 and May 25, 2000 evidences the existence of hypothesis one, a CNN effect. The evidence reviewed in the news media data shows that the news media adamantly supported the U.S. and other Western actors doing more, thus not absolving the U.S. of a responsibility to participate in an international intervention. As such, Cook may be correct that the credibility of the U.S. was not the primary provocation for increasing U.S. involvement, but the U.S. certainly had an interest in supporting an international response. If nothing more, the interest may have originated from a desire to displace beliefs that the U.S. should be at the forefront of humanitarian intervention. To do this, the U.S. needed the U.N. to emerge from the peacekeeping mission with a capable image. Accordingly, the U.S. attempted to prevent further

spectacle being made of UNAMSIL following the widely reported “string of peacekeeping failures.”

Indeed, the media-policy relationship cannot be removed from other factors of relevance to U.S. decision-making, notably the humanitarian aspects of the conflict. Related to Cook’s contention, it is possible that the U.S. needed ‘a peacekeeping win’ following the string of failures in Rwanda and Somalia. As such, the timing of the Sierra Leone conflict may be an explanation for the U.S.’ decision, as it placed Sierra Leone to be well suited for fulfilling this strategic humanitarian interest. On the converse, some scholars argue the timing of the intensification of the conflict explains why the U.S. did not do more. During the policymaking periods, the U.S. was involved in or coming out of a period of involvement in humanitarian emergencies in Kosovo and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Cook, 2008; Hirsch, 2001). The impeachment trial of President Clinton was also ongoing, as CNN learned new facts until August 2000 (Cook, 2008).

Fanthorpe (2003) argues that international response to Sierra Leone as the convergence of the humanitarian interests reviewed above and “macro-level political interests,” especially regional security interests (p. 54). Simultaneous wars in Liberia and Cote d’Ivoire suggested a possible cascading effect of conflict in the region, particularly as the conflicts were often interpreted through Kaplan’s lens of “the coming anarchy,” or the complete breakdown of social order and law (Abdullah, 1997; Fanthorpe, 2003). The U.S., however, was not economically incentivized to secure the region, nor was it aware of the extent of the illicit weapons, money, and diamond trade in the region (Hirsch, 2001). Part of the ignorance arose from the fact that regional security concerns in Sierra Leone were less important than international security concerns, such as nonproliferation. As such, the U.S. had only a broad interest in assuaging conflict in West Africa.

Taken together, the security and humanitarian interests explain why the U.S. did not commit to a bilateral military intervention, but not why the U.S. remained committed to the Lomé

Agreement and increasing UNAMSIL's capacity in 2000. Arguably, it is necessary to consider the potential of media influence. Recalling Gregg's remarks about the *New York Times'* publication of his blocking of appropriated peacekeeping funds, Gregg suggests that news media were both playing a coercive role in policymaking towards Sierra Leone and being used by policymakers. Official statements reviewed above support the hypothesis that Congressional members and executive decision makers utilized media to push their opposing views, thus crediting the media's role in the debates. Furthermore, in a May 11 Congressional statement, then-Senator Joe Biden remarked, "I fear there will be some kind of a knee-jerk reaction because of the very disturbing news and film coming from Sierra Leone. The United Nations there obviously has not yet got it right." Senator Biden's statement directly references the emotional news coverage occurring during this policymaking period and cautions against what Livingston describes as the "accelerant effect" of real-time news media.

While the U.S. did not decide to use the strongest response possible in May 2000, it did respond to media calls to do more. The evidence collected here suggests that members of the executive who wished to do more in the case of Sierra Leone were both influenced by and took advantage of the presence of highly critical and partially empathetic news media to compel the policymaking apparatuses to take stronger action. If a strong CNN effect had existed, however, one would expect the U.S. to have done more, whether humanitarian-wise or militarily. The contention put forth here is that media coverage pressurized the U.S. to make the May 2000 decision to support UNAMSIL's expansion, but only in the presence of existing humanitarian and security interests. That is, the second policymaking period is not a case of a strong or agenda-setting CNN effect, whereby media "reorder foreign policy priorities" (Livingstone, 2007). Instead, prevalent news media coverage made policymakers evermore aware of the need to prevent a Somalia-esque failure and, thus, tipped the scale towards the U.S. decision to support UNAMSIL's expansion.

VII. CONCLUSION

The findings in this study of the relationship between American media coverage of and policy response towards the Sierra Leone civil war support and build upon many of the empirical studies explored above. Most importantly, this study serves as an exemplar of Margesson's (2006) contention that humanitarian decision-making is a complex and highly political web. Over the course of the policymaking periods reviewed, it was clear that U.S. national interests and priorities continuously shifted. During the first policymaking period, for example, U.S. interests in promoting regional stability through diplomatic channels reigned. In the second period, interests included regional security and saving the credibility of international peacekeeping to avoid the expectation of bilateral intervention by the U.S. in future humanitarian crises. Undeniably, many other interests and factors influenced the U.S.' decision-making and the courses of action it followed at various period's in the complete trajectory of the Sierra Leonean conflict. As already referenced, the timing of the crisis vis-à-vis other humanitarian emergencies, the geopolitics of Sierra Leone's placement in West Africa, and concerns over mission failure all contributed to the complex web.

As this study shows, however, the role of the media is a factor that cannot be ignored when examining U.S. policy towards the conflict. While media coverage leading up to and following the U.S. decision to support UNAMSIL's establishment was minimal, the parallels between the news' subject matter and the subjects explored in executive discussions is undeniable. On the other hand, the U.S. decision to support UNAMSIL's expansion perfectly demonstrates the dynamic relationship between news media and policymaking during conflict. The news media was overwhelmingly critical of the U.S. and largely empathetic to the humanitarian suffering of Sierra Leoneans, as well as became a major outlet for the expression of inconsistent perspectives on U.S. policy.

Taken together, however, the study demonstrates a larger more generalizable conclusion about the relationship between news media coverage of conflict and policy responses. It shows

the imbalance of media attention to conflict over the course of a conflict's trajectory, as well as the imbalance of U.S. responses between the world's most-covered humanitarian crises—such as Kosovo and Iraq—and the lesser covered, such as Sierra Leone. The imbalance is a troubling finding for anyone concerned about the justifiableness of humanitarian response and the value we, as an international community, place upon lives. Nonetheless, the power of the media-policy relationship cannot, as Jakobsen writes, “be wished away” (2000, p. 141). It is hoped that this study can be among the first of many that contribute to a better understanding of the media's role in influencing U.S. foreign policies towards the conflicts that do not attract high media attention. Together, these studies can form a more nuanced response to the question of why some conflicts appear on policymaking agendas and others are not, in an effort to even the imbalance.

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