

**Media Coverage and American Foreign Policy  
Regarding the 2004 Southeast Asian Tsunami:  
The CNN Effect Revised**

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June 2017



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## **Abstract**

The CNN effect theory is widely used in multiple social sciences. However, many academic debates about this theory exist. Furthermore, the CNN effect lacks a clear-cut definition. Therefore, this study further explores how the extent to which this theory influences foreign policy can be indicated. To do so, a new definition will be proposed based on the most common definitions that were used in previous research. This new definition will be used as a model while looking into a case study: the media's (more specifically; newspapers') impact on US foreign policy regarding the 2004 Southeast Asian tsunami. In two separate steps that follow the new definition, this case study aims to clarify how the extent to which media impacts foreign policy can be indicated. First, newspapers' influence on American public opinion will be explored. Then, the extent to which public opinion influenced the Bush-administration's foreign policy regarding the affected regions will be analysed. The results show that multiple other factors apart from media influence come into play when making foreign policy. Furthermore, it turns out that without access to reports on foreign policy makers' backroom conversations, it is not possible to find out which factors have been decisive in forming foreign policy. However, the study has also shown that media might have played a decisive role in forming American public opinion on the Southeast Asian natural disaster. Further research could therefore focus on the media's influence on public opinion on faraway natural disasters, which could even be considered a CNN effect on its own.

*Key words: CNN effect, Southeast Asian tsunami, foreign policy, natural disaster, media influence.*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

“Thousands Die as Quake-Spawned Waves Crash onto Coastlines Across Southern Asia” (Waldman, 2004). Headlines like these took the covers of most Western newspapers in the first weeks after a major natural disaster hit Southeast Asia. On December 26 2004, an underwater earthquake occurred in the Indian Ocean. The sudden and violent movements of tectonic plates resulted in various disastrous tsunamis that hit the coastal areas of fourteen countries. These tidal waves affected five million people, of which 230000 lost their lives (Brinicombe 2014). The disaster encouraged an exceptional response from Western media. An unprecedented amount was covered on this faraway disaster by Western newspapers and broadcast media in the weeks following the catastrophe (Brown & Minty, 2006, p.5). Many private donations for tsunami relief were paid, as well as unprecedented government donations by 99 different governments. The United States government took a central role in providing both financial and military aid (BBC News 2005; White house archives George W. Bush Website, 3-01-2005; Telford & Cosgrave, 2007, p.3).

As the tsunami was so widely covered in the American news media and impacted the Bush administration’s foreign policy greatly, it makes an interesting case study to scrutinise the so-called CNN effect. The CNN effect is a theory that is widely used in several social sciences, such as media studies, international relations, political science, communication studies and sociology. Even though the theory is used so widely, a clear definition remains non-existent. However, it suggests that media coverage influences foreign policy making. The theory is widely criticised in current research, as scholars disagree on its exact definition, as well as on how and if this effect can be indicated. Therefore, this study will aim to answer to following research question: **How can the extent to which the CNN effect affects foreign policy be indicated?**

In the first chapter, the method that is used to conduct this research is outlined. The second chapter looks further into the academic debates regarding the CNN effect, and a new definition to be used in this study is drawn up. In chapter 3, this definition is used as a model for researching how the extent to which the CNN effect can be measured in the case study. This thesis will conclude by trying to answer the research question, as well as critically looking at the newly drawn up CNN effect’s definition and by making recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 2: Method

This study consists of a literature analysis on the CNN effect theory, as well as a case study on American newspaper influence on public opinion and foreign policy in the United States regarding the 2004 Southeast Asian tsunami.

Firstly, a theoretical framework is outlined. The position of the CNN effect theory in current research will be analysed. It will be explained that a clear-cut definition of the CNN effect is not present in existing studies. Therefore, a definition for this study will be drawn up based on the most important features from returning definitions. This is done since a clear definition is necessary to research this theory. The definition that is drawn up consists of two separate steps that will later on be studied separately in the case study.

Further on in the theoretical framework, academic debates regarding the amount of influence the media has over foreign policy making will be clarified. Here, the fact that factors other than media reporting also have influence over foreign policy making will be mentioned as well. Moreover, an academic, historiographical debate will be discussed. The debate involves the influence on foreign policy that new media, such as live broadcasting, have had in comparison with traditional media, such as newspaper reports. The academic debates that are described lead to the following research question: **How can the extent to which the CNN effect affects foreign policy be indicated?**

In order to answer the research question and contribute to the presented academic debates, this study will focus on a single case study, namely United States' newspaper coverage of the 2004 Southeast Asian Tsunami and its implications for American foreign policy regarding the areas that were affected by the natural disaster.

This case study was chosen partly because the amount of media attention for this natural disaster was unprecedentedly large. Furthermore, United States foreign policy decisions regarding the areas that were affected by the tsunami were remarkable, as the sum of government donations and military pledges rose enormously within just a few days.

It was decided to focus on newspaper coverage in order to be able to contribute to the historiographical debate regarding the effect of broadcast media as opposed to more traditional media on foreign policy.

The case study follows the newly established definition of the CNN effect that consists of two separate steps in an attempt to indicate to what extent newspaper media coverage influenced foreign policy.

First, it is aimed to outline the influence of two well-known US newspapers' coverage of the tsunami on public opinion. Previous research on newspaper coverage of the tsunami in relation to charitable giving by the general public will be analysed, as well as a study on the influence of newspapers photography on charitable giving by the general public. More specifically, *New York Times'* and *Wall Street Journal's* coverage will take a central position, as they have the largest circulation of US newspapers and can thus be considered to reach many US citizens. Moreover, *New York Times* is considered to attract a more liberal public, whereas *Wall Street Journal* is often perceived to take a more conservative stance (Eisinger, Veenstra & Koehn, 2007; Groseclose & Milyo, 2005). Thus, it is aimed to represent both the left-wing and right-wing public by analysing these two newspapers. Other possible reasons why the public donated as much as they did, apart from media influence, will be presented as well.

Then, this study will further look into the second part of the definition, in which it will be researched how public opinion might in turn have influenced foreign policy. Furthermore, other reasons why the US government decided to donate as much as they did will be outlined.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

As this study further considers how the extent to which the CNN effect affects foreign policy can be indicated, it is crucial to explain the position of this theory in academic research. This chapter summarizes academic debates about the exact definition of the CNN effect. Furthermore, it summarizes academic debates regarding the media's influence on foreign policy. Moreover, a historiographical debate about broadcast media's influence as opposed to traditional media's influence will be introduced.

### *3.1 Defining the CNN effect*

The CNN effect is a theory that is used in a multidisciplinary manner. In several social sciences, such as communication, political science, media studies, international relations, sociology and psychology, the CNN effect has been studied (Gilboa, 2005, p.31). Despite its frequent usage in these academic fields, the theory lacks a clear-cut definition. In this section, some definitions will be outlined to highlight the different nuances that are often given to the CNN effect in academic research.

Some studies define the CNN effect as a direct link between media coverage and foreign policy, for example: "The CNN effect can be described as a loss of policy control on the part of the government officials charged with making that policy. This definition implies that there is an independent effect on the foreign policy making progress by the media such as CNN. As a result, the news media influence or determine what governments do" (Balabanova, 2004, p.275). Other studies take a different approach by centralising media influence on foreign policy makers' agenda setting in the definition, rather than focussing on direct media influence on foreign policy. In this definition, global real time coverage, such as television, but also traditional media such as newspapers largely determine foreign policy makers' agenda-setting. (Hawkins, 2011, pp 57-58). One more returning definition of the CNN effect introduces another actor: the general public that determines public opinion (Groeling & Baum p.318). An example of this definition is "when CNN floods the airwaves with news of a foreign crisis, foreign policy makers have no choice but to redirect their attention to the crisis at hand. It [the CNN effect] also suggests that crisis coverage evokes an emotional outcry from the public to 'do something' about the latest incident, forcing political leaders to change course or risk unpopularity" (Cohen & Neuman, 1996, pp.15-16) or "The CNN effect

means that the media determine the national interest and usurp policy making from elected and appointed officials” (Gilboa, 2008, p.63).

Even though these definitions of the CNN effect take different approaches, they all proclaim that news coverage influences foreign policy. Researchers differ on the ways in which and to what extent this influence takes place. Some scholars claim news coverage influences foreign policy indirectly by affecting foreign policy makers’ agenda setting (*figure 1, model 2*), whereas others do not elaborate on the way in which news media influences foreign policy (*figure 1, model 1*). Furthermore, some research emphasises the ways in which news media influences public opinion, which in turn influences foreign policy makers’ decisions (*figure 1, model 3*), whereas other research does not pay much attention to this aspect.

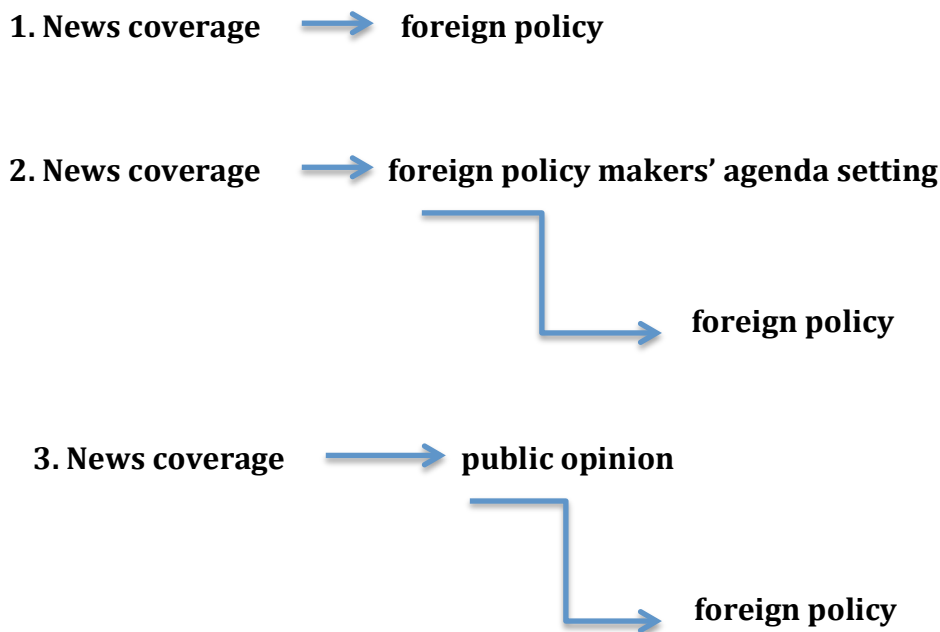


Figure 1: visual representations of the various definitions of the CNN effect

This lack of a clear-cut definition makes it harder to assess if a CNN effect has taken place, and to which extent it has taken place. Gilboa (2005) claims a workable definition of the theory is required in order to conduct valuable research (p. 29). However, the several definitions each offer different focal points for conducting research on the extent



to which a CNN effect can be recognised. Therefore, in this study a definition of the CNN effect will be proposed that is based on these various definitions but also on the academic debates regarding the CNN effect. The newly established definition of the CNN effect is the following: **The CNN effect is the influence that media, both new and traditional, have on public opinion, which in turn influences foreign policy makers' agenda setting and thereby influences foreign policy.**

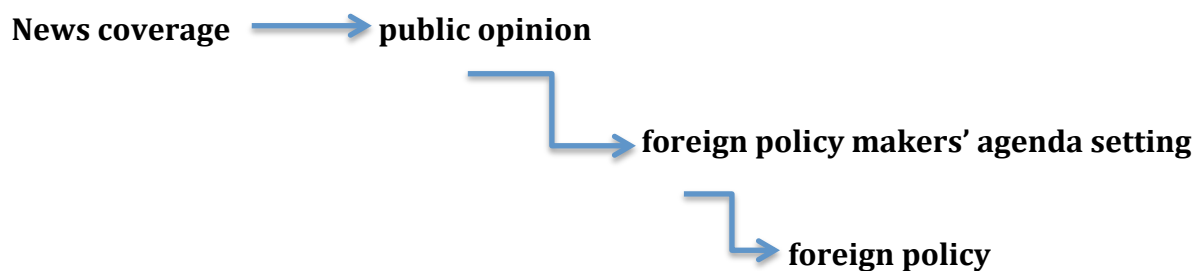


Figure 2: *Visual representation of the newly established definition of the CNN effect*

### 3.2 Academic debates about the CNN effect

The aforementioned scholarly debate about the definition of the CNN effect is not the only academic debate with regard to the CNN effect. It is hotly debated whether news coverage influences foreign policy, or whether it is the other way around. Many other scholars would not go as far as to say news coverage has no influence on the foreign policy making process. However, they argue that the extent to which the media has influence is often exaggerated as other factors apart from media influence play crucial roles in the decision making process as well.

A theory that is at odds with the CNN effect theory is the manufacturing consent theory. It holds that news coverage corresponds with the interests of political elites (Bennett, 1990). Thus, in this theory politically powerful groups influence which topics are covered in the media, instead of the other way around. It must be noted that in this theory government officials do not necessarily determine what is reported; journalists can indeed write critically on policy decisions. However, mass media news professionals

link news topics to the governmental debate, as they believe it is necessary for the general public to form an opinion on what is discussed in politics (Bennett, 1990, pp.124-125).

Another position that is often taken in the academic debate about the CNN effect is that news media can indeed influence foreign policy making, but the amount of influence is not as much as is often described by theories such as the CNN effect. Malcontent (2004) explains that media as an independent actor cannot provide enough ground to change foreign policy regarding humanitarian aid (p.155). He bases his argument partly on the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation's (NIOD) (2002) research on media implications on the decision of Dutch politicians to engage in the UN Srebrenica operation in Bosnia in 1995 by sending a battalion called Dutchbat to protect the safe area for Muslims in Srebrenica. In this report, it becomes clear that the Dutch government favoured sending Dutch troops to the area, even before this viewpoint was widely covered in Dutch elite newspapers (p. 719). Therefore, the media's coverage of its favoured course of action might have been the final push to send the troops, but it was very likely the Dutch government would have done so if this particular media coverage would not have taken place. This shows that media had influence, but it diminishes its influence as an independent actor. In *late-breaking foreign policy*, it is also highlighted that media can be influential in foreign policy making, however, it can never be the sole cause for action (Strobel, 1997).

Another point of discussion that relates to the question of how much the media influences foreign policy, is the way in which media influence can be measured. Robinson (1999) points out that much research on the CNN effect has made only vague conclusions concerning the extent to which the media has influenced foreign policy decisions regarding humanitarian crises (p. 304). He states that some relation between media coverage and foreign policy decision-making can often be found. However, it often remains unclear to what extent media influence played a role in foreign policy makers' decision-making processes (Robinson 1999).

One more interesting debate is the historiographical debate about the CNN effect's inherent idea that new real-time media, such as live broadcasting, changed the relation between media and foreign policy making. Despite the various definitions of the theory, many researchers assume that the emergence of real-time television in the 1980's was a turning point for the media's influence on politics (Robinson, 1999; Gilboa,

2005; Livingston, 1997; Jakobsen, 2000). However, others question if there was an enormous breakthrough with the rise of real time television, and argue that traditional media, such as newspapers also influenced and still influence foreign policy (Walgrave, Soraka & Nuytemans, 2008; Hawkins, 2011).

### *3.3 Connection between theoretical framework and this study*

The presentation above shows that the CNN effect is hotly debated in academic research. The fact that there is no clear definition of the CNN effect makes it hard to conduct research on this particular topic. Therefore, for this study a definition of the CNN effect that combines the most important features that are mentioned in current definitions was proposed. For this study, the CNN effect is defined as the influence that media, both new and traditional, have on public opinion, which in turn influences foreign policy makers' agenda setting and thereby influences foreign policy.

This study will try to answer the following research question: **How can the extent to which the CNN effect affects foreign policy be indicated?**

This study will continue by introducing a case study: the United States citizens' as well as the government's response to the 2004 Southeast Asian tsunami in relation to newspaper coverage. It will focus on coverage in US newspapers specifically to be able to contribute to the historiographical debate about the roles of new media and traditional media in foreign policy making. The newly established definition of the CNN effect will be used as a model to conduct this study.

Firstly, newspapers' influence on American public opinion will be researched by analysing previous research on the topic as well as analysing the amount of private donations for tsunami relief.

Secondly, the Bush-administration's foreign policy regarding tsunami relief will be explained, and several possible reasons why they took this position will be outlined. It must be noted that in this study, the final steps of the definition, foreign policy makers' agenda setting and foreign policy, are analysed as one component, as in this case-study both happened in a very short period of time, which makes it very hard to analyse them separately.

Finally, this study will conclude by trying to answer the research question as well as critically looking at the use of the CNN effect theory for scientific purposes. Furthermore, new and more specific topics for further research will be proposed.

## **Chapter 4: the 2004 Southeast Asian Tsunami and the American Response**

On 26 December 2004, an undersea earthquake took place in the Indian Ocean, which resulted in a series of devastating tsunamis. They hit the coastlines of 14 countries and affected five million people, killing 230000 people and making 1.7 million homeless (Brinicombe, 2014). It is claimed to be one of the deadliest natural disasters in modern history (Brown & Minty, 2006, p.5).

The tsunami was widely covered in Western media, and much money was donated by Western national governments as well as by private citizens. Scholars disagree on the reasons behind the enormous media coverage. It is claimed that news channels broadcast and write more on unanticipated crises than on on-going troubles, as they are easier to describe from scientific, social and political points of view (Wynter 2005). Others claim that the timing of the tsunami has been a crucial factor for its major coverage in Western media. As the natural disaster took place on Boxing Day, at the peak of the holiday season, many western tourists had been affected by the tidal wave (Keys, Masterman-Smith & Cottle, 2006, p. 196).

Even though it remains unclear why exactly news media covered this particular topic so widely, it is clear that this amount of media coverage for a natural disaster was unprecedented. US media channels sent an enormous amount of reporters to the area. CNN alone sent 80 reporters and producers to the area to be able to broadcast live 24 hours a day. Furthermore, the tsunami dominated newspapers' front pages in the week following the disaster (Brown & Minty, 2006, p.5).

Apart from media, national governments across the world responded to the tsunamis as well. Official government pledges made up 44% of the total amount of donations for this natural disaster (Telford & Cosgrave, 2007, pp.2-3). Ninety-nine governments responded to the tsunami (Telford & Cosgrave, 2007, p.3). The Bush-administration wanted to take a central position in providing humanitarian aid. The original pledge was 15 million, to which 20 million was added on December 28. Strikingly, this amount was increased on December 31st tenfold to 350 million. Eventually, this number rose to a pledge of 950 million dollars on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2005, thus making the United States government one of the most prominent aid providers for this natural disaster, closely followed by Germany and Japan (White house archives George W. Bush Website, 9-02-2005; Telford & Cosgrave, 2007, p.3). Furthermore, soon

after having raised the pledges, the United States government decided to send military assistance of 12.600 people, 40 cargo planes, 21 ships and over 90 helicopters. This was the most military assistance any country outside of the affected region pledged (BBC News 2005).

This chapter will continue by outlining the influence of US newspapers' coverage of the tsunami on American public opinion by analysing possible reasons for the unprecedented amount of private donations. Furthermore, it will look further into the US government's possible reasons for pledging as much as they did.

#### 4.1 The influence of US newspapers' coverage of the tsunami on American public opinion

Usually, public opinion is a hard variable to measure. On many topics, survey questions need to be answered in order to grasp how the general public experiences political events (Schuman & Scott, 1987, p.958). However, for humanitarian disasters it is possible to measure the general public's view in another way: by analysing the amount of private donations to relief agencies. In the weeks after the tsunami, most well-known relief agencies concentrated their efforts on supporting the tsunami's victims. Thus, private donations to relief agencies in the first few weeks after the tsunami can be considered as donations to the tsunami's victims (Brown & Minty, 2006, p.3). United States' charities received approximately 1.6 billion dollars for the purpose of tsunami relief. This amount of donations for natural disasters abroad was unprecedented, as many US charities reported they received millions in the first month after the tsunami, when they usually receive hundred thousand dollars. Some charities even reported to have raised more in a week than they usually do in a year (Brown & Minty, 2006, p.5).

Previous research has shown that trends in media coverage of the tsunamis closely corresponded with an increased amount of private donations (Brown & Minty, 2006, p.6). One study measured the *New York Times'* and the *Wall Street Journal's* influence on online donations specifically in the first 100 days after the tsunami. It was shown that increasing *New York Times* coverage of the tsunami by 100 words raised American private donations by 3,5% from standard deviations, and an extra 100-word coverage in the *Wall Street Journal* raised donations by 5% from standard deviations (Brown & Minty, 2006, p.6).

Other research has focused on photographic depictions of the victims of the tsunami in the *New York Times*, rather than the articles' word count. One study

demonstrated that “photographs communicate meanings and construct collective feelings about distant disasters” (Hutchison, 2014, p.6). The study also found that most photographs the *New York Times* used in the first couple of weeks after the disaster depicted the victims as passive and helpless, whereas Western relief workers look strong and almost heroic (Hutchison, 2014, p.15). This triggered a so called “politics of pity” in which western people felt sorry for these victims, and felt as if they could do something to help. This likely contributed to the enormous amount of donations that followed in the weeks after the natural disaster as well (Hutchison, 2014, p.16).

Newspapers are often considered traditional news media. However, it must be noted that newspapers are no longer just available in print. Most prominent newspapers have an online equivalent that covers similar news items yet reach a broader public (Whitaker, Ramsey & Smith, 2013, p.283). The *New York Times*, for example, has had an online equivalent since 1996. Apart from being on the front page of the print version of the *New York Times*, the tsunami also ruled the front page of the website in the week after the Tsunami (Brown & Minty, 2006, p.6). The fact that these online newspapers attract larger publics might also have played a role in the amount of money that was donated, as the tsunami was the first international natural disaster of this scale that was covered by online newspapers.

Apart from these newspapers’ influence on private donations, another factor that has no relation to media coverage has played a role in the unprecedented amount of donations as well. Tax incentives might have triggered the American public to donate more. The original deadline for taxes was December 31<sup>st</sup>, but the Tsunami Aid Tax Relief Act extended this deadline for charitable contributions for tsunami relief until January 31<sup>st</sup> (White house archives George W. Bush website, 7-01-2005). This act ensured that tax rebates for charitable giving for tsunami relief paid between the 1<sup>st</sup> of January and the 31<sup>st</sup> of January were paid a year sooner, thus making it interesting for people to donate more before the new deadline.

This study has shown that newspapers played a significant role in raising the American public’s donations for tsunami relief. This shows that newspapers also played a noteworthy role in forming American public opinion regarding the Southeast Asian natural disaster. *The New York Times’* and the *Wall Street Journal’s* word count on articles on the disaster have proven to have an effect on the amount of money that was donated. The photographs that were used in the *New York Times* have also impacted the

American's private donations for tsunami relief. Because these newspapers also publish online they have reached larger audiences, and thus influenced the amount of private donations even more. Newspapers have thus shown to be influential in forming public opinion. However, another factor played a role in this unprecedented amount of private donations as well; tax incentives made making private donations financially attractive.

#### 4.2 The influence of public opinion on American foreign policy decisions regarding the tsunami

The previous section has pointed out that newspapers' coverage of the event has influenced public opinion by outlining their effect on private donations. However, it must be noted that other factors, such as tax relief, also played a role in the amount that was donated. This section will look at whether public opinion shaped the Bush-administration's agenda setting and foreign policy regarding the areas that were hit by the tidal wave.

As mentioned before, the Bush-administration initially planned on donating 15 million US dollars. However, only two days after the tsunamis hit the coastlines of 14 countries, the initial donation was topped up by 20 million dollars, only to be increased in tenfold, three days later (Weisman & Sanger, 2004). It is difficult to establish which factors exactly contributed to the Bush administration's decision to increase the donations to such extent after only a couple of days, as there is no access to reports on backroom conversations. However, several scholars have researched why the Bush-administration might have decided to pledge such a large amount of money, along with providing the affected areas with as much military assistance as they did.

It is possible that the United States government decided to increase the amount of money for tsunami relief because of the amount of private donations very soon surpassed the initial pledge of 15 million dollars (Athukorala & Resudarmo, 2005, p.6). It is likely that the great amount of private donations influenced the governments' foreign policy regarding the tsunami, as government pledges to affected areas rose steadily. However, scholars have found several other reasons why the Bush administration might have done so.

On December 29, George W. Bush first spoke publically about the tsunami. In this speech, he mentioned that the United States established a regional core group with Japan, Australia and India to coordinate relief efforts, and that he hoped more nations

would follow (AP archives, 2015, 0:42-1:03). This shows that the Bush-administration wanted to take a central position in humanitarian relief for the tsunami's victims. Some scholars believe this prominent position in tsunami aid has to be seen in the same context as the War on Terror. After the Iraq invasion, global opinions of the United States declined steadily (Motter, 2010, p.510). However, the United States' government was in need of allies to execute the war (Motter, 2010, p.511). The central position of the US government in tsunami relief can be seen as a way of using soft power to accomplish its global ambitions, by showing the world its actions in the international community are based on humanitarian principles (Motter, 2010. P.513). By trying to take a central position in tsunami relief, "America's generosity was on global display, demonstrating to the world that it intervenes on the international stage because, according to Bush, "America cares deeply about suffering people around the world"" (Motter, 2010, p.508). Furthermore, Collin Powell, who was Secretary of State, commented on the increase of US government donations: "I think it does give to the Muslim world and the rest of the world an opportunity to see American generosity, American values in action", thus emphasising that the tsunami might give the United States the opportunity to confirm its position as ideological hegemony (Motter, 2010). Thus, the US' position in tsunami relief can be seen as an indirect way to legitimize US incentives for war (Motter, 2010).

Other research that backs the claim that the war on terror and the US' leading role in tsunami relief should be seen in the same context, argues that the Bush-administration tried to take a stance against the United Nations as the main organ in humanitarian relief (Walker, 2005). Not all members of the United Nations Security Council approved of the US invasion of Iraq. Moreover, Kofi Annan, who was the United Nations' Secretary General at the time, stated in a BBC world interview in September 2004: "I have indicated that it [the Iraq invasion] is not in conformity with the UN Charter from our point of view, and from the Charter point of view it was illegal" (UN News Centre, 2004). By means of taking a prominent position in coordinating the tsunami relief, the United States' government tried to usurp the position of the United Nations as a humanitarian relief coordinator. What happened is described as "a diplomatic jostling match [between the US government and the UN] to decide who would take responsibility and possibly credit, for the reconstruction effort" (Walker,



2005, p.9). This competition for moral superiority might also have been a reason why the United States' government decided to increase the donations as much as they did.

Remarkably, Condoleezza Rice, who back then was a nominee for the position of Secretary of State, made a remark mid-January 2005 implying the United States government might have had diplomatic advantages from the natural disaster: "It [the tsunami] was a wonderful opportunity to show not just the US government, but the heart of the American people. And I think it has paid great dividends for us" (Keys, Masterman-Smith & Cottle, 2006, p.196). Even though this statement raised many an eyebrow, as she describes one of the deadliest natural disasters as "a wonderful opportunity", this yet again shows that there might have been diplomatic reasons for the Bush administration to donate as much as they did. Furthermore, the fact that the Bush administration decided to change its standard fiscal policy for private tsunami relief donations also implies that the government was in favour of the enormous amount of private donations. This can be linked to Rice's statement as well, that the tsunami "showed the heart of the American people" which might have given the American government diplomatic benefits too. Thus, tax relief does not solely show an influence on private donations, but it also shows the American government thought it convenient that its citizens donated much money, which implies governmental ulterior motives.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed to answer the question how the extent to which the CNN effect influences foreign policy can be indicated. In chapter 3, limitations to the CNN effect theory and academic debates regarding the theory were defined. A case study on newspaper influence on American foreign policy regarding tsunami relief was conducted as a means to attempt to signify newspaper influence on foreign policy. A newly drawn-up definition of the CNN effect was used as a model to indicate the degree of influence newspaper articles from the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* had on the Bush-administration's foreign policy regarding the areas that were hit by the disaster. In this newly established definition, the CNN effect was defined as the influence that media, both new and traditional, have on public opinion, which in turn influences foreign policy makers' agenda setting and thereby influences foreign policy.

Firstly, these *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal's* influence on public opinion was analysed. Several previous studies showed that coverage in the online and print editions of the tsunami in both newspapers increased the amount of private donations that the American public made. Thus, these newspapers can indeed be perceived as increasing the American public's involvement in this natural disaster. However, it turned out media coverage was not the sole factor that contributed to this increase in donations. Tax incentives for people who donated to tsunami relief agencies were established, which can be seen as another important actor in the increased involvement of the American public in tsunami relief. Thus, this part of the case study has shown that newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* have influenced public opinion significantly. However, media coverage cannot be perceived as the sole actor behind the unprecedented private donations for tsunami relief.

In the second part of the case study, possible reasons why the American government decided to increase their initial donation to such an extent were explained. The fact that private donations soon surpassed the government's original pledge is stated as a factor that might have contributed to the enormous increase. However, other factors, such as the decreasing global opinion of the US after having invaded Iraq, along with the United States' desperate need for allies in the Iraq war, might have given the American government an impulse to show itself to the world as a superior humane actor in world politics by being a major contributor to tsunami relief. Moreover, the central position the United States took in coordinating humanitarian relief can be seen as an

attempt to usurp the United Nation's relief coordinating function after they openly criticized the US' invasion in Iraq. Furthermore, a quote by one of the Bush-administrations' members suggested that the tsunami was a great opportunity for the US, which paid them great dividends. This yet again indicated the United States probably had diplomatic motives to take such a central role in facilitating tsunami relief. Additionally, the fact that the government decided to soften its fiscal policy regarding private tsunami donations implies the convenience of these private donations for enhancing the administration's foreign policy goals.

This case study has highlighted that the newly established definition of the CNN effect does not seem to be capturing the complexity of media influence on foreign policy making, even though it combines the most prominent features of the most used CNN effect theories.

It has been shown that the first part of the definition, in which the influence of new and traditional media on public opinion took a central position, seems to be correct at first sight. It has become clear that newspapers have had influence on private donations, which indicates that not just broadcast media, but more traditional media such as newspapers have adapted to modern times and influence the public as well. However, tax relief has turned out to be another factor that influenced these charitable donations by the American public.

The second part of the definition, in which public opinion in turn influences foreign policy makers' agenda setting and thus influences foreign policy, has been even more problematic to confirm. Firstly, this study could not differentiate between foreign policy makers' agenda setting and foreign policy, as the events followed up on each other in a very short period of time. Moreover, this study has highlighted that multiple factors could have played a role in the administrations' foreign policy decisions regarding the areas that were affected by the tidal wave. Diplomatic and political reasons for the US government to donate a large sum of money, and send much military support have been outlined. Public opinion could not have been the sole argument for the government to pledge as much as they did, as many factors were most likely to be taken into account when drawing up foreign policy. To find out which of these possible reasons were decisive factors in forming foreign policy, it is necessary to have access to reports on backroom conversations between Bush-administration officials. Therefore,

indicating the extent to which public opinion influenced foreign policy is not possible, unless scholars have access to often highly classified materials.

Thus, the attempt to indicate the extent to which the CNN effect influences foreign policy, by following the model of the new definition of the CNN effect, has shown to be problematic as so many other factors apart from media coverage seem to have played a role in foreign policy making. However, this study has pointed out that a relation between newspaper coverage and public opinion seems to be present. Therefore, future research could look further into the extent to which media influences public opinion when it comes to foreign natural disasters. This could even be considered a CNN effect on its own. Also, to contribute to the historiographical debate about the CNN effect even further, it is interesting to research how newspapers influenced public opinion on natural disasters abroad before the onset of broadcast television and internet media, and see if there are significant differences. Furthermore, this study already outlined previous research that looked into newspaper influence on public opinion regarding the tsunami. What they all lack, however, is a multidisciplinary approach. The CNN effect theory is used in several fields of research, thus, it would be interesting to conduct research on this topic that looks into the issue from multiple scientific angles. Future research into the role of the media in forming public opinion on natural disasters abroad could combine communication studies, media studies, sociology and psychology approaches in order to increase the ability to grasp to what extent media influence public opinion.

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