



Universiteit Utrecht

The Netherlands in Kosovo: The Dutch Media and their Influence on the Government

MA Thesis

International Relations in Historical Perspective

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15/06/2020

Abstract

This research studies the relations between press and government in the Netherlands. This is examined on the basis of the war in Kosovo and the NATO-operation of bombing Yugoslavia in 1999. Leading up to this war, images were spread quickly, and this could have influenced the decisions made by governments to intervene. This research provides an understanding on how the media was of influence in the nineties, the era of real-time media. Afterwards, the context of this decade and the region is specified. The principle of humanitarian intervention emerged in the nineties and sparked a debate about sovereignty and the interaction between human rights and territorial integrity are explored. Furthermore, this decade meant the end of communism and the breakup of Yugoslavia. A complicated process with wars in which the international community was already involved. The role of the Netherlands in Srebrenica is especially examined.

In 1999, the Netherlands participated in the air-strikes of NATO against Milošević. To determine the possible influence of the media, three Dutch newspapers are looked into. The fluctuation in the number of articles is explored to establish the media attention per week. These peaks in attention are linked with actual events in Kosovo and connected to decisions made by the government in the Netherlands. The proportionality and tone of the articles is further examined to decide whether the newspapers challenged the official policy. This research finds three peaks in articles in these three newspapers. The newspapers mostly use an Albanian perspective and have an increasingly pro-interventionist tone.

The policies of the Dutch government, however, do not seem to change significantly after these three peaks. They can be accused once of making a hasty decision once, but overall other factors seem to have played a bigger role in decisions about Kosovo, like the involvement of bigger states. The legacy Srebrenica and the desire to restore its reputation could also have been a contributing factor. The political influence of the Netherlands was itself marginal in Kosovo. Therefore, this research finds more prove for that the Dutch government made well-informed decisions that were led by others, than for a successful push from the media to intervene in Kosovo.

Abbreviations

ACTORD	Activation Order – NATO’s state of readiness to bomb Yugoslavia
CDA	Christendemocratisch Appèl – Christian democratic party in the Netherlands
CNN	Cable News Network
D66	Democraten 66 – Social-liberal party in the Netherlands
EF	Extraction Force
EU	European Union
G7	Group of 7 influential states
GL	GroenLinks – Green left-wing party in the Netherlands
GPV	Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond – Reformed party in the Netherlands
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
KFOR	Kosovo Force
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
KVM	Kosovo Verification Mission
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NIOD	Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie - the Dutch Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PVDA	Partij van de Arbeid – Labour party in the Netherlands
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
RPF	Reformatische Politieke Federatie – Reformational party in the Netherlands
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe of NATO
SGP	Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij – Reformational party in the Netherlands
SP	Socialistische Partij – Socialist party in the Netherlands
UN	United Nations
US	United States of America
VVD	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie – Liberal party in the Netherlands
YPR	Armoured fighting vehicle

Table of contents

<u>Introduction</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Chapter 1: The Influence of the Media</u>	<u>11</u>
- <u>The Gulf War and the Humanitarian Decade</u>	<u>11</u>
- <u>The CNN Effect: Real-Time Images and Governments</u>	<u>13</u>
- <u>Research Methodology: Quantity and Policy</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>Chapter 2: The Field of Blackbirds</u>	<u>18</u>
- <u>The Battle of Kosovo Polje: Albanians and Serbians</u>	<u>18</u>
- <u>The Nineties: A New International Era and the Breakup of Yugoslavia</u>	<u>20</u>
- <u>Riots and Warnings: Kosovo and NATO</u>	<u>21</u>
- <u>The Virtual War: Airstrikes and Victims</u>	<u>23</u>
- <u>Controversy on International law: Human Rights or Sovereignty?</u>	<u>25</u>
- <u>The Netherlands on the Balkans</u>	<u>27</u>
- <u>The Netherlands in Kosovo</u>	<u>30</u>
<u>Chapter 3: The Netherlands and Kosovo: Newspapers and Politicians</u>	<u>32</u>
- <u>The Peaks of Interest</u>	<u>32</u>
- <u>The Interpretation of Events</u>	<u>37</u>
- <u>Dutch Decision: The Policy Test</u>	<u>39</u>
- <u>The Dutch Debate on Humanitarian Intervention</u>	<u>43</u>
- <u>The Legacy of Srebrenica during the Debate</u>	<u>45</u>
<u>Conclusion</u>	<u>48</u>
<u>Bibliography</u>	<u>52</u>

Introduction

‘Politicians have not learned a thing after Srebrenica.’¹ This was the title of an article of NRC Handelsblad in October 1998. It was an article in the middle of a discussion in the Netherlands what to do with Kosovo, where the Kosovo Liberation Army had taken up arms against the ruling Serbians of Yugoslavia. It was a nasty war and a lot of people died. Images of the war spread fast across Europe and the rest of the world. Some media spoke of a genocide that needed to be stopped at all costs. With Srebrenica fresh in the memory, the Dutch newspapers contributed to this view. Should the Dutch government actually do something or was the traumatic experience in Bosnia a reason not to intervene in Yugoslavia again?

Since March 1999, the Kosovars were supported in their insurgency by NATO and the Dutch actively contributed to the forces. NATO made it into a war that was fought in the air, when they bombed the Serbians intensely for over three months. This was an event of importance, because NATO did not acquire permission from the United Nations Security Council, therefore it could be debated whether this interference was legitimate or not. The significance of this war was mostly its consequences on international relations. The doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) was developed as legitimacy for future interventions. The aftermath was substantial, if one considers that the war itself was globally not without controversy.²

NATO did not have permission, and neither did the Netherlands consequently, as part of the mission. What made the government decide to join either way? The military just had a horrible experience in Bosnia that was fresh in the public memory. For this research, the role of the Dutch press is investigated. In the era of 24-hour real-time global media, emotive images could spread to the public more rapid than ever, and the governments had to respond just as fast. This phenomenon, called the CNN effect, could thus influence decision-making. How did the newspapers influence the public opinion in the Netherlands? Was the way they covered the conflict decisive for Dutch policy or was it of no significance at all? The central research question concerning these underlying questions is formulated as follows:

¹ Schaberg, J. (October 6, 1998). ‘Politici hebben niets geleerd van Srebrenica’. *NRC Handelsblad*. Consulted from <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/1998/10/06/politici-hebben-niets-geleerd-van-srebrenica-7417448-a374725>.

² Wijk, R. (2000). *Pyrrus in Kosovo, of : Hoe het Westen de Oorlog Niet Kon Winnen en Zelfs Bijna Verloor*. Amsterdam: Mets en Schilt. 5.

How did the covering of the war in Kosovo by Dutch newspapers influence the decision of the government to intervene?

The war in Bosnia and especially the case of Srebrenica in 1995 have been discussed at length in the Dutch literature, but the conflict in Yugoslavia was not finished after that. The war in Kosovo is less portrayed, but internationally, there are a number of good books that describe the decision and policies during the war in Kosovo. The book *Understanding the War in Kosovo* from Bieber and Daskalovski really gives the broadest neutral overview of the whole war, its causes and nationalistic complexities, while the book *Disjointed War* by Nardulli tells us the entire military history of the war.³ *NATO's Air War in Kosovo* by Lambeth and *Liberating Kosovo* by Philips on the other hand provide more information about the policies of the West, the NATO and especially the United States.⁴ All these books provide a comprehensive background concerning the Kosovo-war. A book about the specific Dutch involvement has so far not been written, so I will have to rely on the newspapers that I will examine and the official statements, policies and letters of the Dutch government. The history of the Dutch presence in Yugoslavia, concerning the massacre of Srebrenica has been described in all sorts of aspects. The most important conclusions are written down in the investigations made by NIOD and the parliamentary inquiry.⁵

The controversy of this war was already present during the war and is in some of the articles of the newspapers. Directly after the war, military historian De Wijk went to Kosovo and wrote *Pyrrus in Kosovo*.⁶ This book is a description of why the West should never have gone to war in Kosovo and how they could not win this war. According to him, NATO only caused more suffering. This is relevant for this research, because it questions the actual legitimacy of the Dutch decision to join the NATO-mission. Similarly, the contribution of Buckley and Cummings, *Kosovo: Perceptions of War and its Aftermath*, criticizes the intentions of the West.⁷ They highlight the viewpoints of Russia and China, who were left out as part of the United Nations Security Council. Moreover, this war has been described as a virtual war by

³ Bieber, F., & Daskalovski, Z. (2003). *Understanding the War in Kosovo*. London: Frank Cass; Nardulli, B. (2002). *Disjointed War : Military Operations in Kosovo, 1999*. Santa Monica: Rand.

⁴ Lambeth, B. (2001). *NATO's Air War for Kosovo : A Strategic and Operational Assessment*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation; Philips, D. (2012). *Liberating Kosovo : Coercive Diplomacy and U.S. Intervention*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

⁵ Bootsma, P. et al. (2002). *Srebrenica : Het Officiële NIOD-Rapport Samengevat*. Amsterdam: BOOM; Parlementaire Enquête-Commissie Srebrenica (2003). *Missie Zonder Vrede : Eindrapport Parlementaire Enquête-Commissie Srebrenica*. Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers.

⁶ Wijk, R. (2000). *Pyrrus in Kosovo, of : Hoe het Westen de Oorlog Niet Kon Winnen en Zelfs Bijna Verloor*. Amsterdam: Mets en Schilt.

⁷ Buckley, M., & Cummings, S. (2001). *Kosovo : Perceptions of War and its Aftermath*. London: Continuum.

Michael Ignatieff.⁸ It was a war where the Europeans and Americans did all the bombing, but only the Kosovars and the Serbians were dying. There was no real chance of retaliation.

I have found some noteworthy insights about the foreign press coverage of the Kosovo-War. *The Media and the Kosovo Conflict* is a general article, while *The War in our Backyard* by Wunsch Gaarmann focusses on German newspapers.⁹ De Landtsheer describes not only the Dutch, but also the Italian and British press and even compares them in a meaningful way.¹⁰ Hammond and Herman try to tell us something about the real influence of the media during this war in their book *Degraded Capability*.¹¹ Lastly, *The CNN Effect in Action* by Bahador tells us the story of an American point of view, but also tries to embed this in an entire Western story of the nineties.¹²

This book of Bahador is a contribution to the works written on the impact of 24-hour real-time television. The theory of the CNN effect was thought of by Steven Livingston.¹³ He created a method of asserting the influence of the media on policymaking of governments, with respect to the Gulf War. Piers Robinson adopted the theory and focused on humanitarian interventions. He emphasized the relations between sympathising public opinion and the pressured government. Joseph Nye Jr. on the other hand, concentrates on the shortened news-cycle and the impact of images on societies.¹⁴ For this research, I will use the methods of Bahador to look at the press and the war in Kosovo. He illustrates the importance of newspapers by the methodology of the theory.

This research will try to combine certain aspects of the mentioned literature and entangle the influence of newspapers on the basis of the theory of the CNN effect. *The 'Framing' Analysis* by De Landtsheer comes closest to the intentions of this research. She describes the way Dutch newspapers cover the war in Kosovo. She focusses on what sector the articles report about, whether the coverage is positive or negative and if this is in accordance with public opinion. This research will focus on the relation between public opinion, the coverage of

⁸ Ignatieff, M. (2000). *Virtual War : Kosovo and Beyond*. London: Chatto & Windus.

⁹ Wunsch Gaarmann, M. (2015). *The War in our Backyard : The Bosnia and Kosovo Wars through the Lens of the German Print Media*. Berlin: Neofelis Verlag; *The Media and the Kosovo Conflict* (European Journal of Communication, vol. 15 (2000). nr. 3 (sept.)). (2000). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

¹⁰ Landtsheer, C. e.o. (2002). *Een 'Framing' Analyse over de Kosovo-Oorlog in de Nederlandse Pers (Vergeleken met de Britse en Italiaanse Pers)*, (Tijdschrift voor Sociologie, vol. 23(3-4) pp. 403–438.

¹¹ Hammond, P., & Herman, E. (Eds.). (2000). *Degraded Capability : The Media and the Kosovo Crisis*. London: Pluto Press.

¹² Bahador, B. (2007). *The CNN Effect in Action : How the News Media Pushed the West toward War in Kosovo*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹³ Livingston, S. (1997) *Clarifying the CNN Effect : An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention*, Cambridge, MA: The Joan Shorenstein Centre Research on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

¹⁴ Robinson, P. (2002). *The CNN Effect : The Myth of News Foreign Policy and Intervention*. London: Routledge.

newspapers and the decision-making of the Netherlands. Wunsch Gaarmann states that newspapers give us a relevant perspective on government policies. Viewing the war through publications creates a unique narrative. The analysis of the press illustrates the interpretations that were presented to the public. Without hindsight, newspapers inform us about actual debates and information available to the public at the moment.¹⁵ Bahador has described the phenomenon of the CNN effect for the government decision in the United States. It is the intention of this research to investigate whether the influence of the media applies to the Netherlands as well.

The main focus of this research will be on Dutch newspapers. De Landtsheer has written about this in her article, but some more research on this topic needs to be done. Bleich has collected all the articles from *De Volkskrant* about the war in her book '*Bel de NAVO maar*' ('Just Call the NATO').¹⁶ That is very useful, but it is only one newspaper, and has a selected and limited audience. For a comprehensive understanding of the Dutch public debate, more newspapers on the broad political spectrum need to be studied. For this I have chosen three newspapers with many subscriptions in the Netherlands, which are *NRC Handelsblad* (quality newspaper for highly educated middleclass), *Trouw* (formerly a religious newspaper), and *De Volkskrant* (left-wing popular newspaper). The articles in their archives are the most important source for this research.¹⁷

This will not be an analysis of whether the articles written were true or not and whether they were sensational or not. The purpose of this research is to review the communications of the different newspapers. It is an analysis of newspapers and their perceptions of events and public opinion, in combination with its influence on Dutch foreign policy. The period of exploration will be the entire preamble of the Kosovo War from January 1998 until March 1999, when the NATO airstrikes start. De Landtsheer starts her research with January 1999, because her research focusses on the actual coverage of the war. For this research, the articles before the decision to intervene are especially important, because it could indicate an influence of the media.

De Landtsheer created a system with points per event mentioned in articles to establish its positive or negative attitude. This classification of trust and mistrust will not be used in this

¹⁵ Wunsch Gaarmann, *The War in our Backyard*, 12-15.

¹⁶ Bleich, A. (1999). '*Bel de NAVO maar*': *De Oorlog om Kosovo*. Amsterdam: De Volkskrant.

¹⁷ *Algemeen Dagblad* is omitted, because of its orientation on regional news, while *De Telegraaf* (the biggest right-wing, sensational newspaper) did not want to cooperate for this research.

research. Instead, three tests will be used to determine the influence of the media. First, the quantity of articles per week will be analysed. This method is derived from the CNN theory and looks at the proportionality of the attention after certain events in Kosovo. In addition, other tests Bahador used in his book *The CNN Effect in Action* will be adapted. The perspectives in articles and the stance on intervention will be viewed as an extra test for determining whether there is a challenging effect of the coverage of newspapers for the official policies of the Dutch government. This is an addition to the tests described before: the quantitative test will look at the mass of articles written in the Dutch press about Kosovo and the perspectives help to interpret the events. Lastly, the policy substance test regards the actual changes in policy and reviews a link with the peaks in media attention. These three tests will be the main methodology for the analysis in this research.

I will not focus on tipping points in the war itself, but on critical moments for the Dutch government and parliament, by an analysis of the debates in the House of Representatives (Tweede Kamer) with regards to Kosovo and the change of language or policy. These moments of change are essential for the delimitation of this research. For an influence to occur, the period prior to these changes need to show substantial attention of the war in Kosovo and challenging the government policies.

This research is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is about the methodology. The theory of the CNN effect will be explained more thoroughly and embedded in my own methodology. The influence of the media will be placed in the specific context of the nineties and the rise of real-time media. The second chapter is about the war and the Netherlands. The war in Kosovo lasted for only 78 days and consisted mostly of NATO-airstrikes. First, I will give a detailed description of the period preceding the war and the decisions of NATO. The diplomacy, military strategy and politics of NATO will all be covered. After that, I will go deeper into the global context. Not everyone thought it was a logical decision of NATO, and therefore the Netherlands, to get involved in the crisis in Kosovo. On the basis of the discussion on humanitarian intervention, I will show why this was controversial and who criticized the decisions during and after the war. After this I will zoom in on the Dutch contribution to the NATO-mission. I will give a description of the exact amount of Dutch help that was offered by the government and how this policy came about. I will also go into the recent history for the Dutch on the Balkans, with regard to the massacre in Srebrenica.

The third chapter of my research will be an analysis of the Dutch press and government preceding the Kosovo War. First, I will analyse the peaks of media attention in Dutch

newspapers and try to correspond these with the events in Kosovo. I will go into the way they were covered and what perspectives were used in the newspapers. After this, the decisions of government will be analysed with regard to the events that were covered by the media. The discussions on humanitarian intervention within parliament will be central in this part. This part will also dwell upon the legacy of Srebrenica in parliament and in the press. I will end my research with a conclusion, in which the most important findings and suggestions for further research is described.

Chapter 1: The Influence of the Media

It is challenging to determine the influence of the media on policies of the government. A lot of images are shown, opinions are written, and criticism is given. The Dutch government decided to join the NATO-mission in Kosovo, but was the influence of the media amongst the considerations to intervene in the conflict? To establish the effect of media coverage, this research will use a methodology that is based on the theory of the CNN Effect. In this chapter the origins and the functions of the CNN effect will be explored, before the exact methodology of this research is explained.

The Gulf War and the Humanitarian Decade

The way wars were covered by the media has changed since the nineteenth century with the rise of technology. Newspapers, fax, telephones and radio have all had an impact on the reporting of wars. The speed and reach grew wider over the decades of the twentieth century. The last perceptible change of communication came with the entry of social media, but by the time of the war in Kosovo, the world was mostly dependent on televisions for their news supply.¹⁸ At the end of the eighties, the daily journal was replaced with global real-time media as the most important supplier of news. Images of the Tiananmen demonstrations and the fall of Berlin Wall were transmitted globally. Never before had millions of people around the world been able to see the news of the world in such a rapid manner.¹⁹ But this had just been an indication for the images of the nineties. After the end of the Cold War a new world order and fashion of warfare would dominate the news. The hegemony of the United States made the decade of humanitarian intervention possible.²⁰

On January 17, 1991, people around the world could watch live on their televisions how the city of Bagdad was bombed, and the Gulf War started. This is an important war for three reasons. First, it was unique for civilians to be able to watch a war, far away from home, as it was happening on their televisions. But when the broadcasting centre of Iraq was destroyed, most networks were not able to transmit the images of the war directly to people's living rooms

¹⁸ Malcontent, P. (2004) "De CNN-Factor : Humanitaire Interventie en de Macht van de Massamedia" in Hellema, D., & Reiding, H. (eds.). (2004). *Humanitaire Interventie en Soevereiniteit : De Geschiedenis van een Tegenstelling*. Amsterdam: BOOM. P. 135.

¹⁹ Robinson, *The CNN Effect*, 7.

²⁰ Malcontent, "De CNN-Factor", 135-136.

anymore. The Gulf War therefore also marked the uprising of the new Cable News Network (CNN), because they broadcasted from another centre. This was the only network that was able to cover this war for 24 hours a day, live on television, broadcasted worldwide. The speed and the reach of images had never been of greater impact.²¹

Aside from the importance of the spread of images and the new presence of CNN, the war in Iraq seemed to result into the first humanitarian war. After the Gulf War, the Kurdish people in the north of Iraq revolted against the government. This however, turned bloody and the Kurdish people ended up oppressed near the borders of Turkey and Iran. When the United States and a coalition of states intervened in Iraq and created safe havens for the Kurdish people, this was perceived as an unprecedented decision. They violated the sovereignty of Iraq for human rights. With this exceptional measure, president George H. Bush had started the humanitarian decade.²²

But why did the United States intervene in the first place? Was it a coincidence that the first humanitarian intervention happened after the first war that was integrally broadcasted across the globe? Soon after the intervention, it was assumed that the media played a crucial role in pushing the United States into protecting the human rights of the Kurds. Images could influence public opinion rapidly and sometimes politicians were under pressure of making fast decisions. In this case, images of thousands of refugees that could not go into Turkey and had to live in the mountains for the winter were spread. Initially, The United States did not intervene because they could benefit from a united Iraq as counterweight to the influence of Iran in the region. When the media showed more images of the humanitarian disaster and were more critical, US policy seemed to change.²³

According to Piers Robinson however, the influence of the media should not be overestimated. Bush did turn around and intervened, while he was initially hesitant at best, but he did so out of the same policy. He wanted stability in the region and had geostrategic interests as well. Turkey was a NATO-ally and had its own problems with the Kurdish people and did not want to have more Kurds crossing the border. Iran was in a position to profit from the situation. Robinson states that the US-policy of stability had always been certain, but the circumstances had changed. According to him the influence of the media was overrated. The

²¹ Carruthers, S. (2000) *The Media at War : Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century*, New York: St. Martin's Press. Pp. 1-22.

²² Wheeler, N. (2000) *Saving Strangers : Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 141-171.

²³ Robinson, *The CNN Effect*, 63-68.

United States would have intervened, whether the media had reported on the humanitarian catastrophe or not.²⁴

The idea that the media could affect wars was not new. For example, the United States only intervened in the Spanish American War in 1898 after extensive critique of William Hearst in the *New York Journal*. Most historians argue that the power of the media was large enough to stimulate a public reaction and push for intervention in Cuba. The medium was different, but the vocabulary seems to reflect the media of the nineties, because it was about the violence against civilians. This suggests that influence can only be established when it comes to human interest. The public opinion is regularly affected by stories or images of people they can relate to. Victims are real persons and their stories can impress the public. After the end of the Cold War, the foreign policy of the United States was not as certain as it was before. Without the threat of the Soviet Union, the media were able to determine themselves what affairs in the world were newsworthy. Consequently, more human rights issues were broadcasted worldwide, because that was what the public wanted to see.²⁵

The CNN Effect: Real-Time Images and Governments

Perhaps the impact of the media was overstressed in the case of Iraq. Nevertheless, the idea of real-time images influencing governments decisions was established. This phenomenon is henceforth called ‘the CNN effect’. It is a theory that tries to explain how this new real-time media could influence public opinion, and how this public opinion equally influenced the policies of the government. Steven Livingston has defined the CNN effect as ‘the impact of new global real-time media on diplomacy and foreign policy’.²⁶ The images spread quickly from the event to television, it is transcontinental and moreover, the quantity and quality of images is better. It has become easier for ordinary civilians to film events, so everything is broadcasted and there is always news on television. This way the media can put pressure on leaders to make certain decisions. Politicians often want to deny the influence of the media,

²⁴ Robinson, *The CNN Effect*, 64-71.

²⁵ Wieten, J. (2002). *Srebrenica en de Journalistiek. Achtergronden en Invloed van de Berichtgeving over het Conflict in Voormalig Joegoslavië in de periode 1991-1995 : Een Onderzoek naar Opvattingen en Werkwijze van Nederlandse Journalisten*. Amsterdam: NIOD. P. 12; Malcontent, “De CNN-Factor”, 135-142.

²⁶ Livingston, *Clarifying the CNN Effect*, 1-3.

because it would make them look weak. If there is a clear and certain policy, then the media should not have any effect at all.²⁷

The CNN effect has several ways in which it can affect governments. First, it has an accelerant effect. The communication happens faster, so governments have to react just as fast. It could happen that governments would have to respond to events, before knowing all the facts and details, because the pressure would be too big. Secondly, it can have an impediment effect. If sensitive information is leaked via the media, this could obstruct military operations. Disturbing images of victims can also make people question existing policies. Similarly, images of casualties can have a challenging effect, preceding an intervention. In that case the media evokes a government reaction to save or protect civilians. These effects are strengthened when ‘our own people’ are amongst the victims. The public seems to show less willingness to intervene in a foreign country if it includes casualties among their own soldiers. Governments tend to fear images of dead nationals, because of the strong reaction it can provoke with the public. This is called the body bag-syndrome and originates from the war in Somalia in 1994. A dead American soldier was mutilated and dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. After this the American people did not support the mission anymore.²⁸

Another way for the media to influence the government is through the agenda-setting effect. This happens when the media is merely covering a story because of its sensational nature. The media are often quickly distracted when another human rights issue happens in another place. The media thereafter neglects the situation it was previously invested in. It is not doable nor is it a sustainable policy for governments to respond to everything the media or the public wants the government to respond. Finally, there are related effects, like persons deliberately using images from the real-time media to get a certain policy implemented or rejected.²⁹

To establish whether there is a CNN effect, there are certain requirements. Reporters must have access to the area or to films made in the area. Footage made with cell phones by ordinary civilians is enough for a CNN effect. These reporters must produce unexpected emotive images to affect public opinion. When people see images of casualties, victims and mourning survivors, this could trigger a reaction. The framing of the issue after these images reach the West, must challenge official policy. For a CNN effect to occur, the media, and therefore the public, has to disagree with the government.

²⁷ Bahador, *The CNN Effect in Action*, 12-14, 22-24.

²⁸ Malcontent, “De CNN-Factor”, 145.

²⁹ Bahador, *The CNN Effect in Action*, 7-11; Carruthers, *Media at War*, 29.

If these requirements are met, there are several tests to determine the extent of the CNN effect. The quantitative test establishes how much attention the media pays to the problem preceding and following a government decision. The timing is essential, because it indicates whether the governments follows the media or vice versa. Additionally, the coding test analyses the use of language by the government or decision-makers in official documents or statements. A change of language preceding a decision, but following the CNN images, could imply a forthcoming policy. The policy substance test considers the official changes in policy by the government. Finally, in the linkage test interviews or statements by decision-makers are examined to see if they mention the media, the emotive images or the public opinion.³⁰

Despite the focus on television, the role of the newspapers is certainly not played out. Newspapers are important in three ways for an influence on governments. First, while the real-time images are mostly about showing the situation and presenting them as facts, newspapers are the medium that is more able to frame the issues. By writing about images, the newspapers use a certain position, consciously or not. This could influence the public opinion and push governments towards making decisions. This can be examined easily, because the use of language can better be analysed than images on perspectives.³¹

The second and more important role of newspapers is the portrayal of the aforementioned public opinion. The government relies on the media to understand public opinion. The government cannot constantly do a survey among its population for its opinion. Especially at the time of the war in Kosovo, newspapers reported on public opinion more than television did. If a newspaper reports that people are outraged by something, the government has to assume that this statement reflects the public opinion. Therefore, the newspapers were very important in influencing policies of the government. Third, newspapers can conveniently be used to measure the possibility of media influence. Images on television get repeated or embedded in other topics. The number of articles and their perspectives are useful indicators of media influence. Articles in newspaper seldom repeat each other and they present a clear narrative without the benefit of hindsight.³²

The journalist Roy Greenslade states that the role of newspapers is declining and was already doing so in the nineties. He believes that newspapers have a fragmented audience with decreasing attention. The Canadian media analyst Ken Goldstein replied that the influence of

³⁰ Wolfsfeld, G. (1997) *Media and Political Conflict : News from the Middle East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 13-39.

³¹ Bahador, *The CNN Effect in Action*, 32-35.

³² Bahador, *The CNN Effect in Action*, 5, 33-35.

television seemed to grow, but that this was in fact still due to the influence of newspapers. According to Goldstein, most stories on television are based on stories in newspapers, because that is still the place where actual journalism is done. They do the research and create the stories. This could be called an indirect influence of newspapers.³³

Research Methodology: Quantity and Policy

The basis of the CNN effect is that images are spreading fast and globally. It can therefore be assumed that the images of CNN can just as easily be seen in the Netherlands as in the United States. To assess the impact the media in the Netherlands had concerning Kosovo, this research focusses on newspapers. As stated, these will be *NRC Handelsblad*, *Trouw*, *De* and *De Volkskrant*, three influential newspapers in the Netherlands. These Dutch newspapers will give a good overview of the interest the Dutch public shows in the issues of Kosovo. The attention for Kosovo has certainly fluctuated between January 1998 and March 1999.

The methodology for this research is partially derived from the CNN effect. The quantitative test is central in this research. The number of articles dedicated to Kosovo is a good indication of the Dutch attention for the war in Kosovo. The amount of attention given by each newspaper per week will be accumulated to see how much attention the Dutch newspapers generated for Kosovo over the course of the fifteen months preceding the Kosovo war. The fluctuation will be analysed and linked with the events in Kosovo. The weeks with a remarkable number of articles will be analysed on their perspective on the war and their position on a possible intervention.

The quantitative test is linked with the policy substance test. There will be a number of moments with above average media attention. This paper researches whether these moments coincide with the moments the policies of the government were changed. The decisions of the government will be analysed on the basis of their information sent to parliament. The moments of media attention and government decisions will be compared and analysed. In addition, an overview will be given of the debate on humanitarian intervention in Dutch parliament.

³³ Greenslade, R. (June 21, 2011). 'How newspapers, despite decline, still influence the political process'. The Guardian. Consulted from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2011/jun/21/national-newspapers-newspapers>.



Figure 1: Dutch newspapers. ANP-picture from Het Parool (June 30 ,2009). 'FD Groeit, Het Parool is stabiel'.

Chapter 2: The Field of Blackbirds

The status of Kosovo has been disputed for centuries. Albanians and Serbians both claim the land to be the cradle of their nations. Their differences have inevitably led to conflicts and bitterness. This chapter considers the history of Kosovo, from 1389 until Milošević. In the nineties, he was the protagonist of multiple wars in the Balkans. Slovenia and Croatia commenced the break-up of Yugoslavia and seized the attention of international powers. The war in Bosnia thereafter was a bloody one and certainly made an impact on how the West wanted to handle the threat of a new humanitarian disaster in Kosovo. The preamble and the course of the NATO air war in Kosovo is set out in order to understand the controversy of the war. The chapter ends with a description of the Dutch contributions to the wars in Bosnia and in Kosovo.

The Battle of Kosovo Polje: Albanians and Serbians

In 1999, Kosovo was a province of the Federal Republic Yugoslavia. It was part of the republic of Serbia and had lost its autonomous powers. At the same time, ninety percent of the population was Albanian.³⁴ They wanted independence, but the Serbian government was determined to maintain control over the relatively small province. It only had two million inhabitants and is as large as the three northern provinces of the Netherlands. Why does this region seem so important to both ethnic groups?³⁵

The significance of Kosovo traces back to the twelfth century, when the medieval empire of Serbia expanded to the territory of Kosovo. Led by emperor Stefan Dusan, Serbia had become a large and powerful empire. He transformed Kosovo into the political, economic and cultural centre of Serbia. The empire struggled for power on the Balkan with the upcoming Ottoman Empire. This came to a dramatic climax in 1389. The Ottomans had already conquered a substantial part of the Serbian lands, but prince Lazar resisted them for the last time. He fought the Ottomans near Kosovo Polje on the Field of Blackbirds, where both prince Lazar and the Turkish sultan Murad did not survive. The battle itself was indecisive and the resistance seemed

³⁴ Thomas, R. (1999). *Serbia under Milošević: Politics in the 1990's*. London: Hurst & Company. P. 45.

³⁵ Wijk, *Pyrrus in Kosovo*, 14.

to pay off, but it was the beginning of the downfall of Serbia. The Ottomans captured all of the Balkans.³⁶

The importance of Kosovo for the Serbians is both in the pride of prince Lazar's resistance and that Kosovo was the heart of their empire in their golden age. This is also when the myth originated about an Albanian plot to take over Kosovo demographically, by pushing out Serbians. The myth assumes Albanians were fighting on the Ottoman side in the battle, when in reality Albanians were split and fighting on both sides. Nevertheless, a lot of Serbians were forced to move northwards after the Ottomans took over, while Albanians could move into Kosovo. But the establishing of an ethnic minority was a gradual process. It was only in the late 18th century when the Serbians were first outnumbered by the Albanian population.³⁷ The Albanians, however, claim their descendance on the Roman Illyrians and say the land was theirs, before the Serbians ever arrived. After the conquest of the Ottomans, Islam spread to the Balkan and most Albanians converted. This is an important divergence between the Albanians and the Serbians, because they practice the Serbian Orthodox religion. Moreover, the seat of the Serbian Archbishopric is located in Pec. This old town in the north of Kosovo is a holy place for Serbian Orthodoxy.³⁸

Kosovo returned under the rule of Serbia after the Balkan Wars in 1913. In the twentieth century, periods of oppression from both sides alternated each other. However, the power relations turned after World War II, when Kosovo became a province of Serbia in communist Yugoslavia. Albanians were increasingly using violence against Serbian civilians, to express their disagreement with the status of Kosovo. Tito tried to ease the situation by granting the province more autonomous powers. The Albanians though wanted Kosovo to be a republic and protested in 1981. Unemployment was high and Kosovo was at that moment the poorest region of Yugoslavia and perhaps of all of Europe. The discontent was quelled by the Serbian authorities.³⁹

When Slobodan Milošević rose to power, he attached much importance to Kosovo as the historic link of Serbia to the empire of Stefan Dusan. He dreamed of a Great-Serbia, or a strong Yugoslavia led by Serbia. In 1989, 600 years after the battle of Kosovo Polje, he

³⁶ Daskalovski, Z. (2003). "Claims to Kosovo: Nationalism and Self-Determination" in Bieber, F., & Daskalovski, Z. *Understanding the War in Kosovo*. London: Frank Cass. P. 12.

³⁷ Daskalovski, "Claims to Kosovo", 13-17; Jelavich, B. (1991). *History of the Balkans vol. 2* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P. 1, 84, 273.

³⁸ Detrez (1990). *Kosovo : De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Antwerpen: Houtekiet. P. 12, 140; De Wijk, *Pyrrus in Kosovo*, 26.

³⁹ Guzina, D. (2003) "Kosovo or Kosova - Could it Be Both? The Case of Interlocking Serbian and Albanian Nationalisms" in Bieber, F., & Daskalovski, Z. *Understanding the War in Kosovo*. London: Frank Cass. Pp. 30-32.

stimulated Serbians to protest against repression. Milošević organised a grand remembrance of the battle and had himself standing next to the portrait of prince Lazar. It was a symbol for his desire to recreate a Serbian empire. The same year he withdrew the status of autonomous province. In the following years, Kosovo would have to give up many privileges. This time the Albanian population felt that they had to resist an illegal occupier.⁴⁰



Figure 2: Slobodan Milošević makes his speech at Kosovo Polje, June 28, 1989. Picture from: Moens, T. (April 25, 2012) 'Past and Politics : Geschiedenis als Wapen in Joegoslavië. Universiteit Gent. Consulted on May 30, 2020 from <https://www.ipg.ugent.be/nl/node/257>.

The Nineties: A New International Era and the Breakup of Yugoslavia

In the beginning of the nineties, the Cold War had ended, and the Soviet Union was breaking up. The United States were the only remaining superpower and a new world order was forming itself. It was a period of uncertainty wherein European States preferred stability on their continent. Change could be dangerous for the status-quo. Communism was falling apart, and the people of Yugoslavia would notice some big changes as well. Without the uniting force of communist regimes, nationalism came up and peoples stood up to their regimes.⁴¹

In Yugoslavia, this process started in Slovenia and Croatia. Both republics declared themselves independent in 1991. By then, Milošević had full control of Serbia and practically of Yugoslavia. He controlled the army and waged war against the renegade republics. The war against Slovenia was over after ten days, because Milošević wanted to focus on Croatia. The

⁴⁰ Thomas, *Serbia under Milošević*, 45; De Wijk, *Pyrrus in Kosovo*, 26-28.

⁴¹ Glaurdic, J. (2011) *The Hour of Europe : Western Powers and the Breakup of Yugoslavia*, New Haven: Yale University Press. Pp.47-61.

main difference between the two republics was that Croatia had a substantial Serb population.⁴² He let Slovenia go to focus on the Serb inhabitants of Croatia. The war in Croatia was far bloodier as well. Both sides tried to gain territory on the other ethnic groups and used violence.⁴³

The West still considered the independence of Croatia illegitimate and preached stability. The United States wanted the European states to solve this issue, because it was their backyard. The attitude of non-interference began to change once violence spread to the republic of Bosnia. This was a complicated republic with many Serbs, Muslims and Croats living amongst each other. Violence erupted amongst the groups and the media even reported ethnic cleansings and genocide.⁴⁴ The European Union tried to mediate the negotiations and the United Nations send troops. They established 'safe areas' for the protection of civilians. They painfully could not prevent Serbs from killing a group of 8000 Muslims. They were in the safe area of Srebrenica, but the Serbs could get to them anyway. This war came to an end in 1995, after the West started bombing the Serb military targets to stop the humanitarian disaster that was going on. In the American town of Dayton negotiations started and the West mediated between Yugoslavia, Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia. They came to an agreement for Bosnian independence, with a Serb part within the republic. The people of Kosovo were not allowed to participate and felt left out of these negotiations.⁴⁵

Riots and Warnings: Kosovo and NATO

In the meantime, Milošević had not forgotten about Kosovo. After the abolishment of the autonomous status, he withdrew more Albanian rights. In 1990 the government and parliament of Kosovo were dismantled. After Milošević deprived them of their power, he made them illegal. On top of that, he prohibited all Albanian institutions, like newspapers or cultural societies. The use of the Albanian language in the educational system was also forbidden. But these measures only strengthened Albanian nationalism. The Albanians silently boycotted Serbian shops and created new institutions. There was an illegal parliament and illegal

⁴² In this research I use the term Serb for Serb people living outside of Serbia. Because the Serbians considered Kosovo to be part of Serbia, the Serbians in Kosovo are being referred to as Serbians.

⁴³ Glaurdic, *The Hour of Europe*, pp. 174-226; Mulchinock, N. (2017) *NATO and the Western Balkans : From Neutral Spectator to Proactive Peacemaker*. Cork: Palgrave MacMillan. Pp. 69-83.

⁴⁴ Poulton, P. (1992) *The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict*. London: Minority Rights Group. P. 61

⁴⁵ Guzina, "Kosovo or Kosova - Could it Be Both?", 41; Philips, *Liberating Kosovo*, 13-30.

elections. Ibrahim Rugova of the Democratic Liga was chosen to be the president. He preached a policy of pacifism and non-violent resistance to the Serbian oppression.⁴⁶

The Kosovars were very disappointed in the Dayton agreement of 1995. It was an opportunity to improve their situation, but the international community decided to focus on Bosnia. They needed Milošević to sign the agreement and thought this would be impossible if Kosovo was included in the agreement. The Kosovars took this as a lesson, that the West would not notice them, unless they would use violence. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) gained followers and many Kosovars believed Rugova's pacifism was not the right way to establish independence. The KLA was founded by Albanian émigré's and smuggled weapons to Kosovo through Albania. They started attacking Serbian policemen with a hit-and-run tactic and violence would increase over the years. The Serbian authorities considered them to be terrorists and retaliated regularly.⁴⁷

Fighting intensified at the end of 1997 and the first open battles occurred in March 1998. The North Atlantic Council expressed its profound concern about the situation in Kosovo and the United Nations Security Council accepted resolution 1160. The UN called upon both sides to stop the fighting. In the following months NATO sent troops to the neighbouring countries Albania and Macedonia and official planning started for a possible air operation. In June NATO even performed a grand exercise in the air. They wanted to show Milošević their force and willingness to intervene. In August NATO's secretary-general Javier Solana changed his use of language and seemed to hold Milošević responsible for the violence in Kosovo.⁴⁸

The KLA had won a lot of territory, but the Serbian army had struck back harshly. In their search for the terrorists whole villages were destroyed and some civilians got killed. The Serbians accused them of helping and hiding the terrorists. NATO declared this policy unacceptable, because it used the terrorists to oppress an entire minority. In Europe, Spain and the United Kingdom had threats of terrorists as well and they did not return with strikes on civilians. The way Yugoslavia treated its own civilians was going too far. Furthermore, the West feared that violence in Kosovo could spread to the neighbouring countries. Montenegro, Macedonia and Greece all had numerous Albanian populations. The stability of the region was once again at stake.⁴⁹ After a new UN resolution, the United States sent their ambassador Richard Holbrooke to negotiate with Milošević. Milošević agreed to allow the deployment of

⁴⁶ Lambeth, *NATO's Air War for Kosovo*, 5-15.

⁴⁷ Ignatieff, *Virtual War*, 12-13.

⁴⁸ Nardulli, *Disjointed War*, 13-14.

⁴⁹ Ignatieff, *Virtual War*, 14-21.

the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) on the ground. The KVM had to observe the humanitarian situation and check the compliance to the resolution. But after the fighting continued, NATO proclaimed the Activation Order (ACTORD). This meant that NATO was in a state of readiness to start bombing Yugoslavia. Both sides were warned that NATO was willing to intervene, but now the air force was preparing for the actual operation.⁵⁰

After another Serbian attack on the village Račak, where at least 40 civilians lost their lives, NATO sent an ultimatum to the fighting parties. The KLA and the Serbians had to come together for peace negotiations or NATO would start bombing. These negotiations started on February 6 and took place in the French town Rambouillet. The Albanian and Serbian delegations did not meet, but negotiated through the contact group of British, American, Russian, German, Italian and French diplomats. The demands of the delegations were irreconcilable and both parties did not want to sign it. The KLA did not want to disarm and longed for independence through a referendum. The Serbians could not accept this and did not want international troops on its territory to maintain the peace. Both parties thought they had a good chance of winning this war and were not satisfied with this settlement. After more than a month of negotiating the Kosovar delegation finally signed the agreement, because they were promised that ‘the will of the people’ would be taken into account. The Serbians did not sign the agreement. Milošević was fully aware of the consequences, but had to resist NATO-power, like a modern-day prince Lazar.⁵¹

The Virtual War: Airstrikes and Victims

When NATO extracted the KVM, it was a clear sign that the bombings were about to begin. On March 24 the first airstrike landed on Serbia. General Secretary Javier Solana formulated NATO’s objective, when he announced that the military action was “directed towards disrupting the violent attacks being committed by the Yugoslav army and Special Police Forces and weakening their ability to cause further humanitarian catastrophe”. The first phase of bombing was targeted at military objects. The Yugoslav air defence system and the control rooms needed to be dismantled, and the Yugoslav air force needed to be destroyed.⁵²

⁵⁰ Nardulli, *Disjointed War*, 15-16.

⁵¹ Dauphinee, E. (2003) “Rambouillet : A Critical (Re)Assessment” in Bieber, F., & Daskalovski, Z. *Understanding the War in Kosovo*. Pp. 99-120. London: Frank Cass. Pp. 102-105.

⁵² Gowan, P. (2000). “The War and its Aftermath” in Hammond, P., & Herman, E. (Eds.). (2000). *Degraded Capability : The Media and the Kosovo Crisis*. London: Pluto Press. Pp. 40-42; Nardulli, *Disjointed War*, 21-24;

Even though the Serbians used outdated equipment, its defence was hard to break through. Their weapons were mostly Soviet arms from the seventies, of low quality, but unpredictable to NATO. This forced the NATO-fleet to fly high in the sky. The fact that no pilots died during the war, was perhaps because of the body bag-syndrome. Governments were afraid of possible damaging images and minimalised the risk. The pilots had to remain over 15000 feet to avoid any risk. The Yugoslav troops were spread in very small groups, which made them especially hard to target for the NATO-pilots. The altitude of their planes led to less risk for themselves, but it increased the risk of missing its target and hitting a civilian object.⁵³

The option of the deployment of ground troops was therefore quickly refuted by multiple governments. The United States particularly thought that it could have disastrous consequences for the public opinion if soldiers on the ground were killed by Yugoslav weapons. Instead of the ground option, NATO increased the bombing of Yugoslavia in April and broadened its targets. Buildings with both civilian and military functions could be bombed now. This meant that bridges and factories were being destroyed as well. More civilian casualties occurred. A civilian train was hit, and even refugees were mistaken for Yugoslav troops. The media widely reported the deaths of 16 civilians in a television station, because it was an attack at the freedom of press. Nevertheless, NATO had warned Milošević, who probably anticipated the media attention and sacrificed the employees. He knew that images were the best way to defeat the superior power of the West.⁵⁴

When not enough progress had been made in May, the British wanted to explore the ground option. A formal plan did not exist, but more troops were sent to Albania and Macedonia. Milošević must have felt the threat and increasing probability of ground troops in Kosovo. On top of that threat, he lost the support of Russia. Even though Russia was critical of the NATO mission, the government needed good relations with the West at this point and could not afford to risk a serious conflict with NATO. Russia negotiated with NATO on behalf of Milošević. For their credibility, Milošević could not capitulate, but NATO could not negotiate with Milošević. Russia functioned as middleman and secured a deal.⁵⁵

It was signed on June 9 and the war officially ended. The Yugoslav forces had eleven days to leave Kosovo. After that, the multinational task force KFOR (Kosovo Force) went into the country. They would lead the stabilisation in the country, where the KLA had to be disarmed

⁵³ Nardulli, *Disjointed War*, 28

⁵⁴ Daalder, I. & O'Hanlon, M. (2000). *Winning Ugly : NATO's War to Save Kosovo*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press P. 97; Ignatieff, *Virtual War*, 191-196; Nardulli, *Disjointed War*, 23, 36-37.

⁵⁵ Daalder & O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 158-160; Nardulli, *Disjointed War*, 40-43.

as well. The environment needed to be secured for refugees to return home. KFOR helped with humanitarian aid, public safety, the border monitoring and the removal of mines. Today, KFOR is still present in Kosovo for the stabilisation of the country, including 8 Dutch soldiers.⁵⁶



Figure 3: People trying to clean the debris after the war. Picture from *De Volkskrant* (June 10, 2016) 'Einde aan de bommenregen', Jelica Novakovic.

Controversy on International law: Human Rights or Sovereignty?

NATO was founded as a defensive alliance, but this was its first offensive action and it was a success, according to them. The alliance reported no casualties and it ended with the withdrawal of Serbian troops from Kosovar territory. NATO could argue that it had won, but at the same time a lot of civilians died during this war. Estimates say 15.000 lost their lives, most them Albanian. While the war was fought in the air, the victims were on the ground. After NATO issued ACTORD, their threat was not turned into a new UN resolution. Russia and China were likely to veto such a resolution and therefore NATO did not attempt to persuade the Security Council. Especially Russia which has a historic bond with the Serbian people, and the Russian

⁵⁶ Gowan, "The War and its Aftermath", 45-48; Clark, W. (2001) *Waging Modern War : Bosnia, Kosovo and the Future of Combat*, New York: PublicAffairs. Pp. 375-403.

people would not support an intervention. China considered the NATO bombings illegitimate as well. To them, this was a violation of the Yugoslav sovereignty.⁵⁷

This was part of the biggest controversy around Kosovo. The question was whether human rights were more valuable than a country's territorial borders. Many states considered Kosovo an internal Yugoslav issue, that the government should deal with itself. The West had a different perspective. They based themselves on the Geneva Convention of 1949, which states that civilians should be protected for ethnic cleansings and genocides. If a government is not able to protect its citizens or is the aggressor itself, it is the duty of other nations to intervene and protect them.⁵⁸ This is also captured in the Charter of the United Nations. Chapter VII (Action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches to the peace and acts of aggression) states that the Security Council can call upon states to comply to provisional measures in order to prevent an aggravation of the situation. The right to intervene is established in article 42:

*'Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of the United Nations.'*⁵⁹

As stated in chapter 1, the concept of humanitarian intervention emerged in the nineties after the Cold War. The West got involved in protecting human rights without the consent of the state. The traditional peacekeeping missions were with consent from states and had a more neutral character. Western states claimed ethical motives for intervening in other states. Missions appeared for compelling compliance and peacekeeping, but also for alleviating suffering. Critics pointed at the hypocrisy of using military forces for human protection purposes. When a third party enters a conflict, the situation grows more complicated and there

⁵⁷ Eysink, S. (2004) "Een Omstreden Interventie : De Casus van Kosovo" in Hellema, D., & Reiding, H. (eds.). (2004). *Humanitaire Interventie en Soevereiniteit : De Geschiedenis van een Tegenstelling*. Amsterdam: BOOM. Pp. 220-223; Wheeler, N. (2012). "Reflections on the Legality and Legitimacy of NATO's Intervention in Kosovo" in Booth, K. *The Kosovo Tragedy : The Human Rights Dimension* (2012). London: Routledge. Pp. 155-156.

⁵⁸ Weiss, T. (2016). *Humanitarian intervention : Ideas in Action*, Cambridge: Polity Press. Pp. 25-27.

⁵⁹ The United Nations (June 26, 1945). *Charter of the United Nations, Chapter VII (Action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches to the peace and acts of aggression), article 42*. San Francisco.

is a risk of more deaths. The West however, considered it his duty to protect human rights globally.⁶⁰

After the war in Kosovo, the Western vision on humanitarian intervention was even adopted by the United Nations as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).⁶¹ Russia, China and many other states mistrusted the intentions of the West when they intervened in other states. The Western states would allegedly use the humanitarian motive to accomplish their own goals in international politics. A humanitarian intervention often ends with a regime change and perhaps this was the reason to intervene from the start. Some sceptics suspected that the Kosovar signing of Rambouillet was solely orchestrated as a justification for the airstrikes. Russia and China could therefore not permit NATO to intervene in Yugoslavia. They abused the humanitarian situation in Kosovo to violate the sovereignty of Yugoslavia, an internationally recognised independent state.⁶²

In the beginning of May, a bomb of NATO accidentally hit the Chinese embassy. This strengthened the opinions of the opponents of war. According to them, this was not just an incident, civilians were being hit continually. The bombing lasted for 79 days, much longer than anticipated, and civilian targets were hit regularly. The amount of people who lost their home tripled over the course of the war. Critics questioned the methods of the operation and its proportionality. Was it ethical to bomb bridges and factories? The infrastructure does not solely have a military function, civilians use it as well. Milošević used the NATO bombings as an excuse for the displacement of Albanians. He claimed that they were fleeing NATO instead of his army. Because of the absence of an UN-mandate, the press in the West was critical too. The activity of NATO in Kosovo had cost 14 billion dollars and the damage in Kosovo itself was 200 billion dollars. The victory that NATO claimed, came at a high cost.⁶³

The Netherlands on the Balkans

To understand the Dutch debate about joining a NATO-mission in Kosovo, it is important to consider their earlier presence on the Balkans. Since 1992, UN peacekeeping troops had been

⁶⁰ Pape, R. "When Duty Calls : A Pragmatic Standard of Humanitarian Intervention" *International Security* 37(1) (2012), pp. 41-80; Weiss, *Humanitarian intervention*, Pp. 26-29.

⁶¹ International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (2001), *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre).

⁶² Akbarzadeh, S. & Saba, A. "UN Paralysis over Syria: The Responsibility to Protect or Regime Change?" *International Politics* (May 2018), pp. 1-15; Eysink, "Een Omstreden Interventie : De Casus van Kosovo", p. 226.

⁶³ Eysink, "Een Omstreden Interventie : De Casus van Kosovo", pp. 224-227; De Wijk, *Pyrrus in Kosovo*, 223.

stationed in the republic of Bosnia, where Serbs were fighting Muslims and Bosnian Croats. The town of Srebrenica was predominantly Muslim, but it was located in a Serb area with a lot of fighting. Muslims of surrounding villages all fled to Srebrenica and it became a Muslim stronghold in the region. When French troops worried about the humanitarian situation in the town, they declared it to be a safe area, a term that was not defined in international law. After the French and the Canadians left, the UN had to find new troops to defend the area against the Serbs. Eventually, the Netherlands decided to send a battalion to Srebrenica at the beginning of 1994.⁶⁴

This was a laborious mission from the beginning. The Muslim population was starving and had to do a lot of fighting. The Dutch troops, called Dutchbat, did not maintain a good relationship with the Muslims or with the Serbs. The Serbs thought that the disarmament of Muslim troops did not go fast enough, while the Muslims accused Dutchbat of helping the Serbs. By encouraging the disarmament within Srebrenica, they would help the ethnic cleansing of the area. The Dutchbatters themselves became discouraged when they realised that their help was not appreciated. On top of that, they were not adequately prepared for operating an UN-mission. Counterintuitively, they had to be as visible as possible, while they had to stay out of the conflict.⁶⁵

This was hard for Dutchbat when the situation escalated in July 1995. The Serbs attacked the enclave and overtook the Muslims. Dutchbat was told only to use force defensively, so they were not able not reclaim lost territories. They were overwhelmed and lost most of the enclave in a couple of days. The commander of the battalion Thom Karremans called the UN and NATO for air support a couple of times. The air support never came, because it had to be in self-defence. Powerlessly, Dutchbat had to give up Srebrenica. In the following days, some Muslims tried to flee, and women and children were evacuated, but 8000 Muslim men were executed by the Serbs. It was the biggest mass murder since World War II.⁶⁶

The international consequences were big, and the world was outraged about this genocide. Soon, questions were asked about what Dutchbat could have known about the executions or what they could have done to prevent it. A French minister even called them cowards. In the Netherlands, a parliamentary inquiry was conducted, but the whole government

⁶⁴ Blom, J. et al. (2002). *Srebrenica : 'Een Veilig Gebied', Reconstructie, Achtergronden, Gevolgen en Analyses van de Val van een Safe Area*. Amsterdam: BOOM. Pp. 920-942; Bruggen, van der, J. & Have, ten, W. (2016). *De Val van Srebrenica : Luchtsteun en Voorkennis in Nieuw Perspectief / Verkenning door het NIOD Instituut voor Oorlogs-, Holocaust en Genocidestudies*, Amsterdam: BOOM. Pp. 16-17.

⁶⁵ Bootsma, *Srebrenica : Het Officiële NIOD-Rapport Samengevat*, 133-180; Faber, M. (2002). *Srebrenica : De Genocide Die Niet Werd Voorkomen*. Den Haag: Moretus. Pp. 43-65.

⁶⁶ Parlementaire Enquête-Commissie Srebrenica, *Missie Zonder Vrede* 157-229.

had already resigned in 2002 before it was complete. Prime Minister Kok took responsibility for everything that went wrong in Srebrenica after an examination by NIOD (the Dutch Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies). The rapport concluded that Dutchbat was sent to a safe area, a vague term that was not defined by the UN, with an unclear mandate. Nobody seemed to know whether they were allowed to use force to protect themselves, the population, the enclave or just the status quo. There was no exit-strategy and there was a lack of intelligence from the Canadians, who were there previously, and from the other allies during the mission. On top of that, due to miscommunications and complicated procedures, Karremans had an unjustified confidence that air support would help them. Overall, Srebrenica was a traumatic experience for the Dutch politics, and it had hurt its reputation.⁶⁷

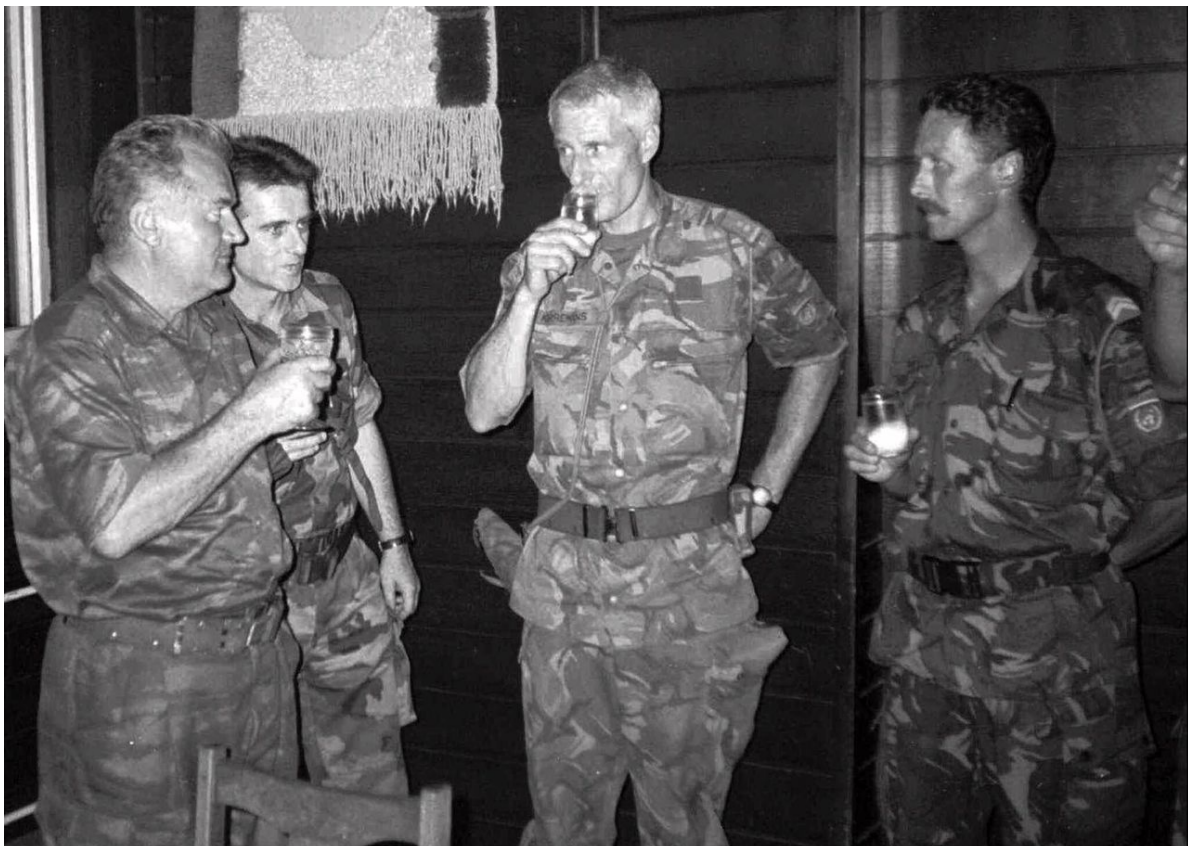


Figure 4: Thom Karremans with Ratko Mladic, the Serb General. Picture from NRC Handelsblad (June 7, 2010) “Ze hielpen bij de genocide”.

⁶⁷ Blom, *Srebrenica*, 3136-3145; Bootsma, *Srebrenica*, 289-291.

The Netherlands in Kosovo

The decision to join a possible NATO-operation in Kosovo was made on October 4, 1998. The results of that decision could not have been foreseen exactly, but it would come to mean that the Netherlands would be entangled in a war in Yugoslavia. The Netherlands contributed seriously to the military operation. In this section, the specific consequences of the Dutch decision to join NATO and the KVM are enlightened.

On December 4, 1998 the Netherlands had decided to join the KVM and send thirty verifiers and a patrol plane to Kosovo. The Extraction Force (EF) was strengthened by a Dutch engineering company and a helicopter detachment. Including the medical personnel, around 260 Dutchmen were stationed in Macedonia in January. They built refugee camps and provided humanitarian aid. After the war started, the EF was transformed into KFOR in April and the Dutch troops were placed under French command.⁶⁸

When operation Allied Force began, the Netherlands participated with 16 F-16's, 3 P3C Orion-helicopters, two frigates and a submarine. 8 of the F-16's were still in Italy as part of a patrol mission over Bosnia and were joined by the other half. Initially, they had the function of protection the NATO-formation, but on March 29 the Dutch F-16's dropped their first bombs. On April 22 four more F-16's were sent to support the mission. The F-16's were equipped with material for reconnaissance photos. The Dutch F-16's took their last bombing flight on June 10 and patrolled afterwards. They returned to the Netherlands on June 25.⁶⁹

As much as 65 percent of the bombs in the Kosovo War were dropped by American planes, by far the biggest share. France contributed for 8 percent, while the United Kingdom and the Netherlands both accounted for 5 percent of the bombs. For a relatively small country, this was a big military contribution. Nonetheless, the Netherlands played no role politically. They were not part of the Contact Group concerning Kosovo and they were not represented in the G7-meetings. Others determined the policies and the Netherlands could only follow. Other countries held several press conferences during the war, but Dutch Prime Minister Kok did not feel the need to do this as well. All the NATO-units were combined under the rule of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). The American general Clark decided what to do militarily. If the Dutch government did not agree, the only thing they could do, was withdraw

⁶⁸ Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie, "NAVO-verificatiemissie en Extraction Force (EF)" *Ministerie van Defensie* (May 14, 2010).

⁶⁹ Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie. "Nederlands Aandeel in Operatie Allied Force" *Ministerie van Defensie*, <https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/historische-missies/missie-overzicht/1999/operatie-allied-force/nederlands-aandeel>, consulted on May 9, 2020.

from the entire operation. The political influence of the Netherlands during the war was therefore very limited.⁷⁰



Figure 5: A Dutch helicopter shoots some flares in the mountains of Kosovo. Picture from Picture from Militaire Beeldbank, Ministerie van Defensie, https://nimh-beeldbank.defensie.nl/foto-s/detail/7bef2f4b-9e3a-259b-afdb-ea6e3c05cd46/media/508a3d33-fd01-cc64-e368-85273c5834ab?mode=detail&view=horizontal&q=kosovo&rows=1&page=21&fq%5B%5D=search_s_mediatype:%22Foto%27s%22

⁷⁰ De Wijk, *Pyrrus in Kosovo*, 18-20, 232.

Chapter 3: The Netherlands and Kosovo: Newspapers and Politicians

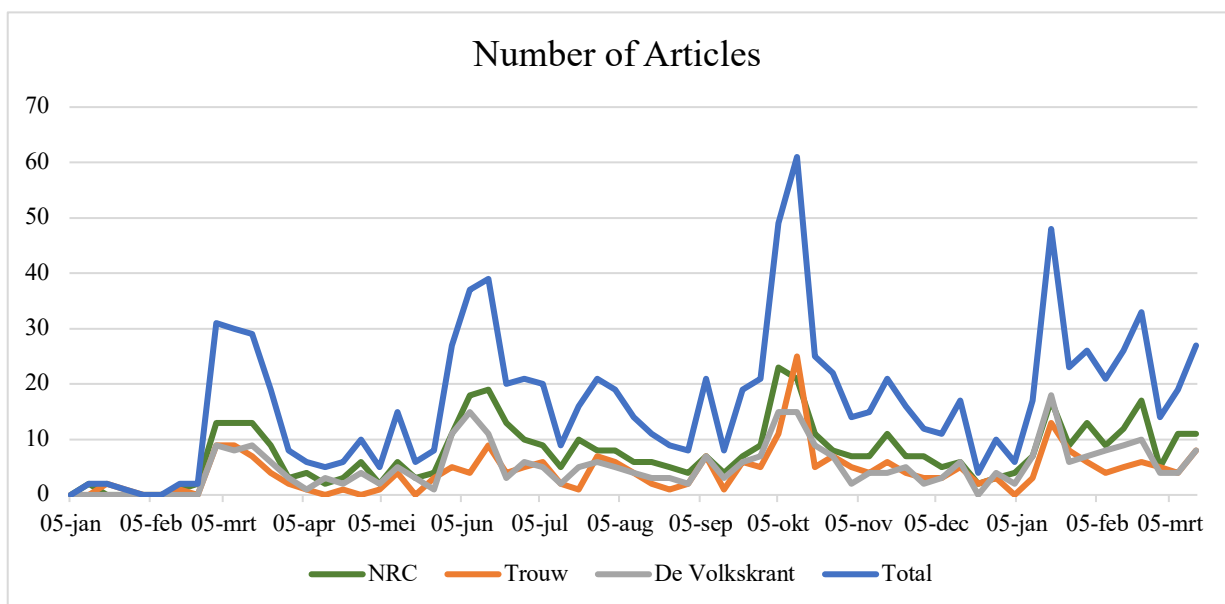
The conflict in Kosovo gained attention in the course of 1998, but it was not consequent. In this chapter the relations between press and politics in the Netherlands are examined. Figure 5 shows the number of articles per week dedicated to Kosovo in *NRC Handelsblad*, *Trouw* and *De Volkskrant*. The fluctuation in attention is more or less comparable for all three newspapers. In general, four clear peaks can be distinguished. These peaks correspond to the following events in Kosovo:

1. The Drenica massacre of February 28, 1998 and its subsequent incidents.
2. The NATO-operation ‘Determined Falcon’ in mid-June 1998.
3. The Gornje Obrinje massacre of September 26, 1998 and the resolution 1199 of the United Nations.
4. The Račak massacre of January 15, 1999.

After Račak, the attention remained high, with peaks during the first weeks of the Rambouillet peace talks and the week preceding the actual intervention. The three massacres occurred unexpectedly and surprised both newspapers and policymakers. The second peak and the peaks after Račak were stimulated by institutional decisions of NATO or the UN.

The Peaks of Interest

Figure 5: Number of articles per week in Dutch newspapers that were dedicated to Kosovo.



The first time the West and the Dutch newspapers showed any interest in Kosovo, was after a series of incidents in the Drenica region. On February 28, four Serbian Policemen were killed by KLA. The Serbian control had been challenged in this region for several months and the authorities had to respond. The police raided some villages and searched for the rebels. The Albanians reported 24 executions in the first 24 hours after the incident. Four days later, a KLA founder and fifty members of his family were killed in a battle in a small village, after Serbian policemen were attacked again. In the first days, reports of refugees reached the West, but the region itself was secluded for journalists. On March 8, however, the Serbians organised a tour for foreign journalists to the Drenica region to claim the victory over the KLA-terrorists. This turned out to be a misconception, because the journalists focused on the destroyed houses and frightened Albanians.⁷¹

The Dutch newspapers reported of the brutal killings of Albanian people by Serbian policemen. The reporters told the story mostly from an Albanian perspective. They spoke of shocking massacres and an oppressed Albanian population. Some articles tried to expose both sides by explaining the conflict, but most focused on the Albanian majority that was ruled by a Serbian oppressor. The Serbian narrative that the Albanians were terrorists, was only sporadically mentioned. Some articles remained neutral in the conflict, but most articles used a clear Albanian perspective. The use of language was positive about their battle and portrayed the Albanians as victims and the Serbians as ruthless killers.⁷²

The second peak in articles can be attributed to Operation Determined Falcon. In the beginning of June, NATO decided to hold an air exercise. Because this is three months after the initial peak of media attention, it cannot be said that the media was of influence on this decision. NATO and the governments had enough time to make an informed decision. During the exercise, the planes flew mostly above Albania and Macedonia, but it was a clear threat to Milošević that NATO would not back down.⁷³ This time the government did not respond to

⁷¹ Wunsch Gaarmann, *The War in our Backyard*, 43-45.

⁷² AFP, AP (March 2, 1998) 'Servische politie doodt zeker 16 burgers in Kosovo'. *De Volkskrant*. Consulted from <https://www.volkskrant.nl/mensen/servische-politie-doodt-zeker-16-burgers-in-kosovo~b7e70e52/>; Postma, R. (March 5, 1998). 'Tanks tegen dorpen; Kosovo: grote militaire acties tegen Serviërs'. *NRC Handelsblad*. Consulted from <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/1998/03/05/tanks-tegen-dorpen-kosovo-grote-militaire-actie-van-7390156-a221955>. Reuters, AFP, ANP (March 6, 1998). 'Servische politie gaat opnieuw tekeer in dorpen Kosovo'. *De Volkskrant*. Consulted from <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/servische-politie-gaat-opnieuw-tekeer-in-dorpen-kosovo~bdb48f5e/>; Reuters, AFP, AF (March 2, 1998) 'Servische politie slaags met etnische Albanese in Kosovo'. *De Volkskrant*. Consulted from <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/servische-politie-slaags-met-etnische-albanese-in-kosovo~ba8972b3/>; Reuters, AP, AFP (March 3, 1998). 'Servische politie treedt hard op tegen Albanese betogers'. *Trouw*. Consulted from <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/servische-politie-treedt-hard-op-tegen-albanese-betogers~b18bf6b0/>.

⁷³ Daalder & O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 23.

reports of the media, but the media responded to a policy of NATO. Therefore, the articles written in this period are of less relevance. This operation roughly coincided with the emergence of a Dutch armoured fighting vehicle in Kosovo. The YPR-vehicle was captured from the Dutch by the Serbs in Srebrenica. The newspapers paid a lot of attention to this and the politicians were outraged as well. When the vehicle turned up in Kosovo, it reminded the Netherlands of its inability to prevent a genocide in Bosnia.⁷⁴



Figure 6: The Dutch YPR-vehicle that was spotted in Kosovo. Picture from Militaire Beeldbank, Ministerie van Defensie, <https://nimh-beeldbank.defensie.nl/foto-s/detail/25275e65-c254-8efd-6f0c-a1ccc1ab27f6>.

At the end of the summer, the Serbians had reclaimed a substantial part of the territory that was conquered by the KLA. On September 26, the village of Gornje Obrinje was attacked by the Serbians and 36 civilians were killed. Amongst them were elderly, women and children. Three days afterwards, journalists were able to enter the village and film the destroyed houses and dead bodies. They interviewed victims and surviving relatives. They were mourning and could describe how they had found their family members. It seemed as if a 95-year old disabled man

⁷⁴ Foreign editorial (June 5, 1998). 'Serviërs rijden in Kosovo in op Nederlanders veroverde tank'. *De Volkskrant*. Consulted from <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/serviërs-rijden-in-kosovo-met-op-nederlanders-veroverde-tank~b7a7e308/>.

was burned alive. The relatives also described how unarmed mothers and children were brutally murdered.⁷⁵

The Dutch newspapers reported of the shocking killings in Gornje Obrinje. They paid attention to Albanian refugees and the humanitarian situation in Kosovo. Most of the articles in the week of October 5, however, were about the threat of a NATO-intervention. The possibility of bombing Yugoslavia was described extensively. The articles dealt with the division in Europe and the reaction of Milošević. The position of Russia was also depicted, because a NATO-action could start an international conflict. The articles described both the necessity of an intervention and the political complications that would come with it. Three days before the massacre in Gornje Obrinje, the UN adopted resolution 1199, concerning Kosovo. This institutional event added to the number of articles in this week.⁷⁶

The third influential event in Kosovo was the massacre in Račak on January 15, 1999. After some KLA-ambushes and battles, the village of only 400 people was attacked and 45 persons died. The Serbian authorities claimed that it was the result of gunfights with the KLA terrorists, but Albanians said that their relatives were heartlessly executed. This attack was special because the images spread quickly around the world. The next day, journalists were already present and reported of atrocities. They filmed dead bodies and crying civilians. In one trench, 17 or 18 bodies were found on top of each other. The Kosovo Verification Mission was also present that day. The head of the mission William Walker was photographed next to a decapitated body. He publicly blamed Serbia and Milošević for this massacre. After this, Walker was banished by Milošević.⁷⁷

The Dutch newspapers expressed their disgust about the slaughter in Račak of unarmed Albanians. They reported the international reactions of condemnation and the need for a NATO-intervention. The feud between Walker and Milošević was widely reported, with

⁷⁵ Bahador, *The CNN Effect in Action*, 83-84.

⁷⁶ AFP, Reuters, AP (October 5, 1998). 'Servië maakt zich op voor aanvallen NAVO'. *De Volkskrant*. Consulted from <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/servie-maakt-zich-op-voor-aanvallen-navo~b5312fa8/>; Foreign editorial (October 8, 1998). 'Russen overwegen actie tegen Navo'. *Trouw*. Consulted from <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/russen-overwegen-acties-tegen-navo~b3e3a3e4/>; AP (October 5, 1998). 'Rusland geeft Serviërs flinke steun in de rug'. *Trouw*. Consulted from <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/rusland-geeft-serviërs-flinke-steun-in-de-rug~b38054da/>; Foreign editorial (October 6, 1998). "'Druk op Joegoslavië is misdadig"; Milošević zwicht niet voor de NAVO'. *NRC Handelsblad*. Consulted from <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/1998/10/06/druk-op-joegoslavië-is-misdadig-milosevic-zwicht-niet-7417420-a242038>; Foreign editorial (October 9, 1998). "'Besluit aanval binnen dagen"; Albright: tijd van Milošević vrijwel om'. *NRC Handelsblad*. Consulted from <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/1998/10/09/besluit-aanval-binnen-dagen-albright-tijd-van-milosevic-7417863-a255677>; Foreign editorial (October 8, 1998). 'Westen verdeeld over NAVO-actie tegen Servië'. *De Volkskrant*. Consulted from <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/westen-verdeeld-over-navo-actie-tegen-servie~b59a66fc/>.

⁷⁷ Ignatieff, 59-60. Wunsch Gaermann, 193-195.

emphasis on the unwillingness of Milošević to negotiate fruitfully with an international delegation. According to the Dutch newspapers, it was the attitude of Yugoslavia that made a NATO-intervention inevitable. Milošević was playing with lives and refused to do any concessions. The West was running out of patience with him and the newspapers did no longer think that a political solution could avoid an air war in Kosovo.⁷⁸



Figure 7: William Walker, other verifiers and journalists walk past a dead body in Račak. Picture from Albanian Daily News (January 15, 2020). '21 Years Since Racak Massacre'. <https://www.albaniandailynews.com/index.php?idm=38691&mod=2>

⁷⁸Foreign editorial (January 18, 1999). 'Weer crisis over Kosovo na bloedbad; Navo stuurt twee top-generaals naar Milošević met eis in te binden'. *Trouw*. Consulted from <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/weer-crisis-over-kosovo-na-bloedbad-navo-stuurt-twee-top-generaals-naar-milosevic-met-eis-in-te-binden~ba24cd44/>; Foreign editorial (January 19, 1999). 'Milosevic tart Navo; veiligheidsraad veroordeelt bloedbad in Racak'. *Trouw*. Consulted from <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/milosevic-tart-navo-veiligheidsraad-veroordeelt-bloedbad-in-racak~bf6761d3/>; Foreign editorial (January 20, 1999). 'In Kosovo bieden alleen humanitaire acties uitkomst'. *NRC Handelsblad*. Consulted from <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/1999/01/20/in-kosovo-bieden-alleen-humanitaire-acties-uitkomst-7431595-a479985>; Koning, P. (January 18, 1999). 'Na de slachting in Racak telt de OVSE de lijken'. *NRC Handelsblad*. Consulted from <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/1999/01/18/na-de-slachting-in-racak-telt-de-ovse-de-lijken-7431312-a995134>; Reuters, AFP, AP (January 19, 1999). 'Hoofd waarnemersmissie Walker moet weg; Joegoslavië stuurt aan op confrontatie'. *De Volkskrant*. Consulted from <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/hoofd-waarnemersmissie-walker-moet-weg-joegoslavië-stuurt-aan-op-confrontatie~b5c0bc6f/>; Tempelman, O. (January 19, 1999). 'Machteloze waarnemers; patiënt Kosovo ligt op sterven'. *De Volkskrant*. Consulted from <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/machteloze-waarnemers-patient-kosovo-ligt-op-sterven~b5adc5b4/>.

The Interpretation of Events

To determine the influence of the media, one has to look at the proportionality of the media attention after the three massacres and the share the massacres had in the overall number of deaths in the examined period. This research includes 63 weeks, which means that each week accounts for 1,59%, and the three weeks of the massacres combined account for 4,76%. This means that the death toll percentage of 7,8% was significantly higher than on three average weeks. In an average week, Dutch newspapers would write 16,84 articles about Kosovo. In the first week after each of the massacres, the newspapers wrote 42,67 articles on average, more than double what could be expected. If we look at the first two weeks after the incidents, 80,67 articles were written per incident, in contrast to the 33,68 that were expected. Combined, 22,74% of the articles were dedicated to the three massacres, while the period covers only 6 weeks or 9,52%. Dutch media attention more than doubled after all three incidents, while the number of casualties did not. Each week, 31,75 persons were killed on average and every week, 6,35 villages were destroyed or attacked. In three ordinary weeks in Kosovo, 95,24 persons would have died, while in the three massacres 156 persons died. This doubling factor of 1,6 does not correspond to the factor of 2,5 for the number of articles. One can conclude that the Dutch newspapers paid disproportionate attention to these three massacres.

Figure 8: Massacres as percentage of deaths and attacked villages in Kosovo, January 1, 1998 – March 21, 1999.⁷⁹

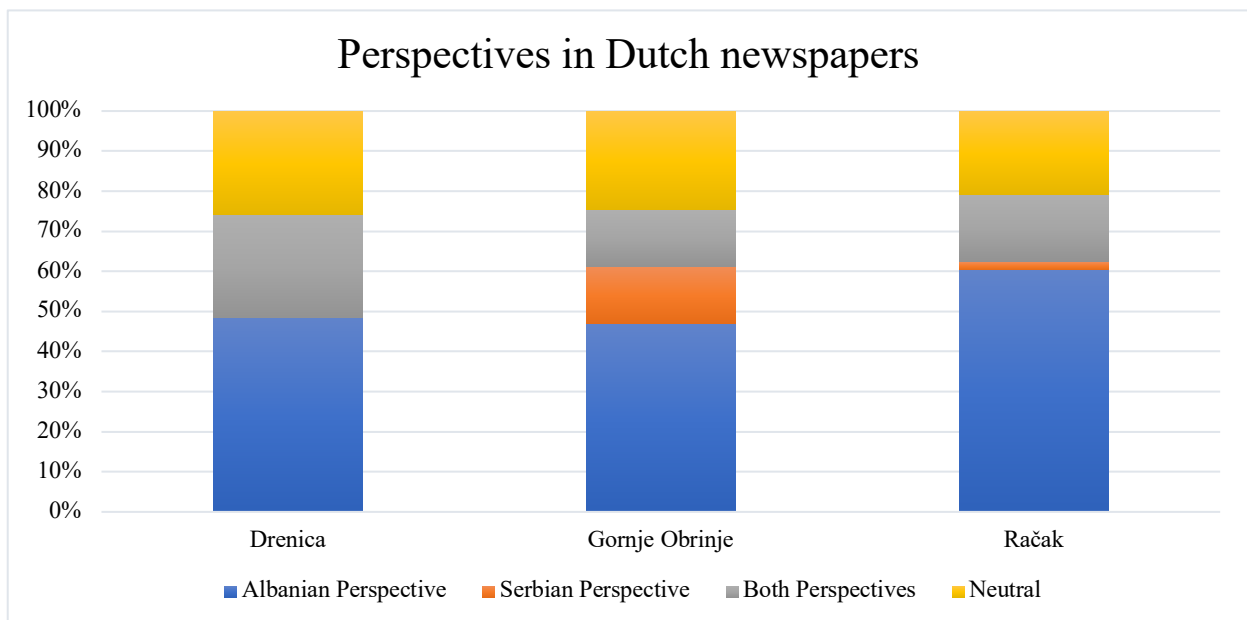
	Kosovo Civil War	All Three Massacres	Percentage
Total Kosovo Albanians Killed	2000	156	7,8%
Total Villages Attacked / Destroyed	400	8	2%
Total Number of Articles in Dutch Newspapers	1064	128	12%

Influence over a decision from the government can not only be established by a quantity of articles, the tone of the journalists matter as well. The Dutch newspapers used a predominantly Albanian perspective. This means that they are portrayed as unarmed victims and the Serbians

⁷⁹ Bahador, *The CNN Effect in Action*, 90.

police troops as aggressors and killers. When both perspectives are used, it is usually to describe the historical situation of Kosovo or enlighten the view of both parties on conflicts and situations. When the Serbian perspective is addressed in Dutch newspapers, it is frequently about the bond with Russia or the political consequences of a NATO-intervention in Serbia. Figure 9 shows the perspectives in the Dutch newspapers in the first week after the three massacres. The most striking is that the Albanian side covered more than 60% of the articles after Račak. But a significant change over the course of the incidents cannot be perceived. The Serbian perspective after Gornje Obrinje consists of some articles, mostly exploring the stance of Russia, that was backing Milošević. Altogether the perspective of Dutch newspapers did not change substantially after the three massacres.

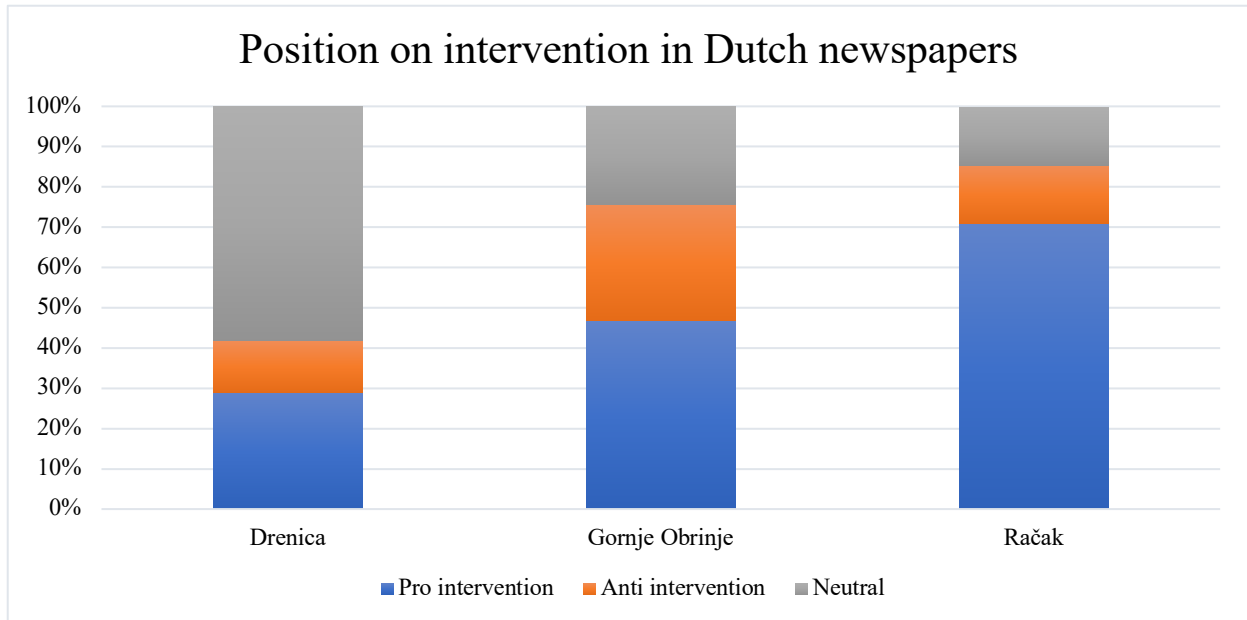
Figure 9: Perspectives in Dutch newspapers after the three described massacres in Kosovo.



The position on a possible intervention in Dutch newspapers did change. After the Drenica massacre, most articles in Dutch newspapers solely described the slaughter in the region. The possibility of an intervention was mentioned in 42% of the articles, of which 29% was positive about it. After Gornje Obrinje, NATO activated ACTORD and an intervention seemed more like a probable solution to the conflict. The number of articles advocating an intervention increased, but a lot of articles depicted the political consequences of a war as well. The articles refuting an intervention, focused on the role of Russia and possible civilian casualties. In the week after the massacre in Račak, the newspapers seemed convinced that a NATO-operation was unavoidable. 85% of the articles mention the possibility of an intervention and 71%

advocates an intervention. It can be concluded that the Dutch newspapers challenged the government to join an intervening mission.

Figure 10: Position on intervention in Dutch newspapers after the three described massacres in Kosovo.



Dutch Decisions: The Policy Test

At the beginning of 1998, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs had expressed its concerns about the situation in Kosovo. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Hans van Mierlo believed the relations with Yugoslavia could only be normalised if the Serbian authorities would give more autonomy to Kosovo and respect to the Albanian majority. He emphasized that he wanted a comprehensive policy by the European Union. Yugoslavia was an isolated country and should be approached with care to prevent an escalation of the situation. The EU in cooperation with the US, had regular conversations with the Yugoslav authorities about the situation in Kosovo. Further trade treaties were only possible after normalisation between Yugoslavia and the Albanians. Both parties should put down their arms. The EU wanted Kosovo to regain an autonomous status within the borders of Yugoslavia.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Woltjer, E. (February 17, 1998). *Verslag van een Algemeen Overleg (January 22)* [Letter of government]. Consulted from <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/parlementair>.

After the Drenica massacre, the EU made a statement to condemn both the terroristic means for political goals as the violent repression of peaceful protests. They insisted on a new dialogue between Milošević and Rugova, the withdrawal of Serbian police-units and the admittance of the OSCE to the Drenica region. The EU asked the UN to establish an arms embargo for the whole of Yugoslavia. The Netherlands endorsed this statement but worried about the growing support for the KLA at the expense of Rugova, because Milošević refused to improve Albanian rights. The Dutch position on the autonomous status of Kosovo did not change after the incidents in the Drenica region. Van Mierlo mostly worried about the situation, because the violence could spread to the neighbouring countries and disrupt the entire region. He noticed how quickly the Serbians wanted to bury the bodies and ‘clean’ the Drenica area. Further measures against Milošević were not ruled out.⁸¹ The first peak in articles does therefore not seem to have sparked a different policy from the Dutch government. The policy of threatening sanctions in a broad international context did not alter substantially from the policy that was followed before the first peak of media attention occurred.

This policy was invigorated in June when NATO started the Operation Determined Falcon. The situation had worsened, and negotiations were quickly broken off by both parties. The Netherlands believed Milošević would only yield to real pressure and attributed a great role to NATO for stability and a peaceful solution. The air exercise coincided with the exploration of further military options, both in the air and on the ground, at the insistence of the Netherlands. Van Mierlo was positive about a Dutch military contribution. NATO demanded the withdrawal of police troops, the return of refugees and unlimited access for humanitarian organisations and international monitoring. NATO also worried about the growing violence by the KLA.⁸² As stated before, this time the peak of media attention followed the institutional decisions of government and NATO. The Dutch government thus did not respond to the newspapers, but the other way around.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs informed his parliament again on September 4 that there had been several bloodbaths in Kosovo in the meantime. On some weekends, over a hundred people died, like on July 19. As can be seen in figure 5, this was not reported widely in the media, as the attention for Kosovo had diminished. But the inability to reduce violence in Kosovo worried the NATO-ministers. They realised more Albanian civilians had been killed,

⁸¹ Mierlo, H. (March 13, 1998). *De Situatie in voormalig Joegoslavië* [Letter of government]. Consulted from <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/parlementair>.

⁸² Mierlo, H. (July 24, 1998). *De Situatie in voormalig Joegoslavië* [Letter of government]. Consulted from <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/parlementair>.

but NATO declared that both sides complicated the monitoring of the humanitarian situation. Because the winter was approaching, some European countries wanted to send refugees back to Kosovo and create zones with intensified international presence. The Netherlands was hesitant about this policy, because it would create the illusion of safe havens, like in Srebrenica. Milošević refused to cooperate on the retrieval of refugees. In the meantime, the contact group had not been assembled for some time, and the UN had not come to a resolution yet.⁸³

The situation changed after resolution 1199 and the Gornje Obrinje massacre. The Dutch government considered this resolution to be a mandate for a humanitarian intervention if Milošević would not adhere to it. When NATO threatened Milošević with air strikes, the Netherlands declared on October 4 that it was willing to join that mission. Only the party SP did not want to participate in a possible intervention.⁸⁴ This might seem like a hasty decision for the Dutch government and parliament. Perhaps the decision has been made quickly, but it seems like this cannot be attributed to any influence of the media. The second peak appeared in the week of October 5, after the decision to join the NATO-mission had already been made. Perhaps the government anticipated a peak of media attention, but this cannot be substantiated.

After the elections, Jozias van Aartsen had become Minister of Foreign Affairs in August. He agreed with ACTORD under the conditions that NATO was unanimous, and a majority of its members contributed. The Netherlands could only agree to join the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM), after certain requirements had been met. Van Aartsen wanted to make sure a legal basis was provided in a new UN resolution (1203) and the participation of the US and Russia were of great importance. The effective regulation for the safety of the verifiers was arranged in the establishing of the Extraction Force (EF).⁸⁵

The Netherlands received some criticism internationally for the late decision. Thirty other countries had decided to join the KVM before the Netherlands did, a country that normally participates in interventional missions. However, a part of Dutch parliament was still not convinced that it would be safe to send verifiers to Kosovo. The parties VVD, CDA, SP, GPV, SGP and RPF all showed doubt about the security of the mission. In particular SP thought that the decision was made prematurely, and that the Netherlands should only join if a credible force was established by NATO. Minister Van Aartsen countered that the government had considered

⁸³ Aartsen, J. (September 4, 1998). *De Situatie in voormalig Joegoslavië* [Letter of government]. Consulted from <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/parlementair>.

⁸⁴ Boer, J. (November 5, 1998). *Verslag van een Algemeen Overleg (October 8)* [Letter of government]. Consulted from <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/parlementair>.

⁸⁵ Aartsen, H. (November 10, 1998). *De Situatie in voormalig Joegoslavië* [Letter of government]. Consulted from <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/parlementair>.

it extensively, before joining the KVM. The EF was set up, after the Netherlands asked for it. He said this was about the credibility of the Netherlands and its dedication to international peacekeeping. Eventually all parties, except SP accepted the Dutch contribution to KVM and EF.⁸⁶ The newspapers reported on the government's struggle to convince all parties but did not use a strong opinion on the participation in KVM and EF. But overall, the unconvinced parties were portrayed as the delaying factions, and the articles leaned towards a position that was pro-KVM.⁸⁷

After Račak, the government remained to inform parliament about the situation in Kosovo and the negotiations in Rambouillet. The parliament thought it should have the last say before actual air strikes would happen in Yugoslavia. In fact, the Netherlands had already effectively made the decision on October 4, when they supported ACTORD. They had given control to NATO and general Clark. The parliament endorsed the NATO-decision to bomb, but the actual decision had been made on October 4. The influence of the media is therefore probably negligible. Most articles were written after that. Since the Dutch government had stressed from the beginning of 1998 that it was important to them to have a broad international coalition, this was in October probably still the biggest factor. They could safely accept resolution 1199 as a mandate for action, because they were convinced that a significant number of influential states had already done so. This seems to have been more important for the Dutch government than some challenging articles in newspapers.

⁸⁶ Boer, J. (December 11, 1998). *Verslag van een Algemeen Overleg (November 12)* [Letter of government]. Consulted from <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/parlementair>.

⁸⁷ Domestic editorial (December 17, 1998). 'Kamer stemt in met waarnemers voor Kosovo'. *De Volkskrant*. Consulted from <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/kamer-stemt-in-met-waarnemers-voor-kosovo~b9a7eab0/>; Domestic editorial (December 5, 1998). 'VVD om: toch Nederlandse waarnemers naar Kosovo'. *Trouw*. Consulted from <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/vvd-om-toch-nederlandse-waarnemers-naar-kosovo~bcb816af/>; Hoekema, J. (November 19, 1998). 'Nederland mag niet ontbreken bij vredesmissie naar Kosovo'. *NRC Handelsblad*. Consulted from <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/1998/11/19/nederland-mag-niet-ontbreken-bij-vredesmissie-naar-7423535-a1113507>.



Figure 11: Jozias van Aartsen, at the time the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Picture from *Het Parool* (January 11, 2018). 'Van Aartsen: Meer actie tegen antihomogeweld'.

The Dutch Debate on Humanitarian Intervention

Throughout 1998, the Dutch parliament had a discussion about humanitarian interventions and sovereignty. The first debate about international interference in Kosovo took place on March 18, after the Drenica massacre and after the first peak in media attention. Milošević refused any mediation in the conflict, because it was an internal Yugoslav affair. The Dutch parliament saw it differently. Valk (PvdA) declared that this was no longer an internal affair, because the Serbians grossly violated human rights. He thought Milošević was responsible and more sanctions should be imposed by the European Union to curb him. Other parties agreed with him and plead for more troops in Macedonia. The Minister Van Mierlo also agreed with Valk that a matter of autonomy for a region could not be considered as an internal affair, but as a matter the international community should be concerned with. The shape and extent of the autonomy would be up to the Yugoslavs themselves.⁸⁸

The first negotiations after Drenica were in April and they were without international mediation. The international community accepted that, because Rugova accepted it himself. Milošević felt strengthened in his policy because he had held a referendum in Serbia on April

⁸⁸ Woltjer, E. (April 15, 1998). *Verslag van een Algemeen Overleg (March 18)* [Letter of government]. Consulted from <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/parlementair>.

23. A vast majority voted that foreign representatives could not be a part of the solution in Kosovo. But if the dialogue would fail, Van Mierlo believed that Milošević would have to accept international interference. He particularly desired him to allow the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) to investigate the humanitarian situation in Kosovo.⁸⁹

The discussion about Yugoslavia's sovereignty came up again on October 1, after the UN accepted resolution 1199. Multiple parties questioned whether it provided any legal basis for military intervention. The resolution came under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and it confused some Dutch parliamentarians. The resolution did not explicitly mention the option of a military intervention but would consider further action and additional measures to restore peace and stability in the region, if the Yugoslav and Kosovar authorities would not comply to the demands of the resolution.⁹⁰

Verhagen (CDA), Van Middelkoop (GPV), Vos (GL) and Blaauw (VVD) endorsed the opinion of the government that a military operation was inevitable if Milošević were to continue the violence, but also asked whether this resolution was enough. They also stated that NATO should not go to the region if a clear mandate by the UN is absent. Van Bommel (SP) went a step further and thought it was a bad idea to send troops to Yugoslavia at all, as long as NATO did not have a clear idea of the objective, duration and scope of the mission. The government interpreted resolution 1199 as a well-defined legal basis for a possible future operation. According to them, NATO was permitted to intervene if Milošević would not comply to the resolution. Valk (PvdA) agreed with the government that no further resolution was necessary.⁹¹

A week later, the parties were more benevolent towards the possible military intervention. As long as ground troops were not considered a serious option at this moment, all parties, except SP could back the government's interpretation of resolution 1199. The ground troops were especially a problem, because the US had made clear that it would not join such an operation. However, parties did point out that Russia and China had a different interpretation of the resolution and would not support a NATO-operation. Minister van Aartsen replied that Russia and China knew what they were signing because the resolution was based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Van Bommel still thought the resolution was not a legal basis for NATO-action. He valued Yugoslavia's territorial integrity and did not want to support the KLA, that

⁸⁹ Mierlo, H. (June 8, 1998). *De Situatie in voormalig Joegoslavië* [Letter of government]. Consulted from <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/parlementair>.

⁹⁰ Security Council of the United Nations (September 23, 1998). *Resolution 1199*.

⁹¹ Boer, J. (December 4, 1998). *Verslag van een Algemeen Overleg (October 1)* [Letter of government]. Consulted from <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/parlementair>.

was fighting for independence. An air operation would inevitably lead to civilian casualties and a ground war, that would further disrupt the region. He did not want the Netherlands to be dragged in a war, like what had happened in Bosnia. The other parties did not agree with him and thought the Netherlands should take its responsibility. Hoekema (D66) referred to Bosnia as well and stated that it made clear that Milošević would only respond to bombs.⁹²

The shift some parties made over the course of just one week could perhaps be explained by the media attention in that week. On the other hand, the vote had been on October 4 and most articles were written in the week of October 5. During the first debate on October 1, most parties probably had not read the actual text of resolution 1199, because they referred to the possibility of an unclear mandate. No one spoke at the time of resolution 1199 itself as an unclear mandate. The media could have played a role, but the parties probably made up their minds before the actual peak in attention occurred.

The Legacy of Srebrenica during the Debate

The parliamentarians also mentioned the war in Bosnia regularly in the debate on Kosovo. The traumatic experience in 1995 was still very present in the Dutch politics of 1998. Jan Marijnissen (SP) led a workgroup that researched whether a parliamentary inquiry was necessary to examine the Dutch policies during the war in Bosnia. Marijnissen was also very present in the debate on Kosovo, because his party was the only one opposing the NATO war. He thought that the Netherlands once again passed too light-heartedly by the objections about a military effort abroad. Emotional involvement in a conflict makes rational decisions impossible. The SP believed that Srebrenica showed us that foreign actors only complicate conflicts and that it's a Dutch illusion to think that we can solve all the problems in the world.⁹³

Koenders (PvdA) entered the debate by saying that he did not think the West usually rushed into interventions. On the contrary, the political will is often lacking to do the right thing and help civilians in foreign countries. Marijnissen said that the experience of Srebrenica was

⁹² Boer, J. (November 5, 1998). *Verslag van een Algemeen Overleg (October 8)* [Letter of government]. Consulted from <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/parlementair>.

⁹³ Tweede Kamer (December 2, 1998). *Het wetsvoorstel Vaststelling van de begroting van de uitgaven en de ontvangsten van het Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (V) voor het jaar 1999 (inclusief het deel Ontwikkelingssamenwerking) (26200-V)* [Letter of government]. Consulted from <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/parlementair>.

still haunting the Netherlands and we should not meddle ourselves in a Yugoslav war again. The historical lesson was that we cannot solve their problems. Koenders replied that he had learned a different lesson from Srebrenica. We can only intervene with a broad international alliance and with strong force. Without adequate power, there is no point in intervening. Koenders, the government and the other parties except for the SP thought that NATO's force was strong and credible enough this time.⁹⁴

The newspapers also frequently referred to Srebrenica in 1998-1999. This emerged after the Dutch YPR-vehicle turned up in Kosovo. Verhagen (CDA) called this 'of unheard brutality'. Joris Voorhoeve, the Minister of Defence, even suggested that the 'same Serbian "butchers of Srebrenica" were now active against the Albanian population in Kosovo'.⁹⁵ The newspaper *Trouw* reported that the situation in Kosovo concerned the Dutch people. It states that 'the Dutch conscience wants to do something with Kosovo', because of the history in Srebrenica.⁹⁶ The historical lessons of Marijnissen and Koenders are represented as well in the Dutch newspapers. Some articles state that NATO had not learned a thing in three years, because it still had not intervened. Other, but fewer articles said that the political West was rushing into a war once again and the politicians should listen to soldiers who have been to the Balkans.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Tweede Kamer (December 2, 1998). *Het wetsvoorstel Vaststelling van de begroting van de uitgaven en de ontvangsten van het Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (V) voor het jaar 1999 (inclusief het deel Ontwikkelingssamenwerking) (26200-V)* [Letter of government]. Consulted from <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/parlementair>.

⁹⁵ Parliamentarian editorial (June 10, 1998). 'Voorhoeve: Slachters Srebrenica zijn mogelijk actief in Kosovo'. *Trouw*. Consulted from <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/voorhoeve-slachters-srebrenica-zijn-mogelijk-actief-in-kosovo~bffa7a7b/>

⁹⁶ Bezemer J. (June 27, 1998). "'Nederlands geweten' wil iets met Kosovo'. *Trouw*. Consulted from <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/nederlands-geweten-wil-iets-met-kosovo~b274bc35/>

⁹⁷ Nysingh, E. (October 9, 1998). 'Kosovo in schaduw Srebrenica'. *De Volkskrant*. Consulted from <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/kosovo-in-schaduw-srebrenica~b0bf8044/>



Figuur 12: Jan Marijnissen debaterend in het parlement. Afbeelding afkomstig van SP.nl <https://www.sp.nl/nieuws/2008/04/bijdrage-jan-marijnissen-aan-debat-over-fitna-en-kabinetsreactie-erop-video>

Conclusion

Over the years, the media has proven to be able to have an influence on decisions made by the government. In the nineties, this was perhaps more than ever. With the arrival of television and especially real-time media, emotive images could spread fast around the world and affect the public opinion. The speed and scope of news could pressure governments into making hasty decisions. Newspapers were able to frame events in a contemporary narrative, display a public opinion and take a certain stance towards the government's policies. In this way, newspapers had their own way of affecting decisions made by the government. The nineties could also be described as the humanitarian decade. After the end of the Cold War, the foreign policies of the West were more focused on human rights stories. Intervening was no longer about traditional geopolitical reasons. Through the media, the public was most concerned about relatable stories and peoples. The NATO-war in Kosovo could be considered a humanitarian intervention. Therefore, the central question of this research was:

How did the covering of the war in Kosovo by Dutch newspapers influence the decision of the government to intervene?

The war in Kosovo was a complicated and a controversial one. Both Albanians and Serbians made a claim to the territory through historical links and a clear answer to the crisis was not available. With the rise of Milošević, nationalism and oppression, the situation aggravated. In the context of the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Albanians in Kosovo tried to improve their position and gain independence. The West seemed to have supported the independence claims of other states, so it is understandable that the Kosovars thought they had a chance.

But the involvement of the West was not self-evident. The participation in the conflict in Bosnia had not resulted in the clean solution that was hoped for. This was especially true for the Netherlands. Their experience in Srebrenica could be labelled as traumatic for the Dutch military. It could be argued that the experience in Srebrenica could have been a discouraging factor for the politicians in the Netherlands to intervene in Kosovo, but it did not. On the contrary, politicians seemed eager to restore the Dutch reputation of fighting the good cause. On the other hand, the politicians were hesitant to send ground troops to Kosovo. The only way was through air strikes. Perhaps this was due to the body bag-syndrome, combined with the experience in Srebrenica.

The new era of humanitarian intervention came with some difficult questions about sovereignty. Human rights were considered more important than ever, but was this enough justification for an intervention in a foreign state? States tried to balance between the principle of territorial integrity and doing the right thing. For Yugoslavia, the conflict in Kosovo was an internal issue and it was of no concern to the international community. The West thought it was their duty to do something if the human rights of the Albanian population were violated. The Netherlands was perhaps extra anxious about the worsening situation in Kosovo, because it had experienced in Srebrenica the dramatic way a conflict could escalate. As stated before, this only strengthened the will of the Netherlands to act in Kosovo. At the time, all parties, except for the SP, were convinced that UN resolution 1199 was enough to use violence if necessary. It was decided in October that this was a mandate for a possible future intervention. The parliament was fully aware that Russia and China had a different interpretation of resolution 1199. The parliamentarians backed any air actions from NATO. Only the SP seemed to value Yugoslavia's sovereignty over the humanitarian situation there.

The parliament was much more critical when the discussion was about sending Dutchmen to the ground in Kosovo. They were quite clear about the undesirability of ground troops, but the parliamentarians were hesitant about sending unarmed verifiers as well. They wanted to be sure of the legal basis for it and of the safety of their men. The Netherlands even received international criticism for the late decision to join the verification mission. The Netherlands could not be accused of making a hasty decision on that matter.

If the media were to be of any influence on the Dutch decision to join NATO in intervening, it must have been in the periods directly following the three massacres of Drenica, Gornje Obrinje and Račak. These were the three events where the peak of media attention was not provoked by a decision of the government or NATO, but by something that happened in Kosovo. However, the newspapers were not unbiased. Over the course of the events, the Dutch newspapers were increasingly using an Albanian perspective, but this did not change significantly, because the Albanian perspective had been more dominant since the first coverage. From the beginning, the Serbian perspective was not represented a great deal in the articles. What did change over the course of a year was the interventionist tone of the articles. The percentage of articles that could be described as pro-intervention doubled between Drenica and Račak. From this could be concluded that the newspapers did try to challenge the government to intervene in Kosovo.

After Drenica, the Dutch government wanted to be tough on Milošević, but only in the context of a broad coalition, preferably the European Union. Van Mierlo expressed concerns

and threatened with sanctions, but the policies did not actually differ very much from before the massacre. What did happen in the beginning of June was the large air exercise from NATO above Albania and Macedonia. I do not believe the media was of influence on this decision, because it happened three months later. In the meantime, the media attention had considerably diminished. It can therefore be said that NATO (and the Dutch government) had enough time to think about the conflict and did not rush into this exercise.

The period after the Gornje Obrinje massacre is perhaps the only time that the Dutch government could be accused of making a hasty decision. Within a week, the parliament had almost unanimously decided to participate in a possible NATO air operation. This was partially because the UN had already accepted resolution 1199 and the Netherlands considered this to be a mandate for an intervention in Kosovo if the humanitarian situation asks for it. The media attention after Gornje Obrinje could have been a last push for the Dutch parliament to join an intervention. On the other hand, the parliament was under the impression that an international coalition was willing to back this plan, so they could calmly do so as well, because they had stressed earlier that this was an important factor to the Netherlands.

The massacre in Račak provoked much outrage for Dutch parliamentarians and they called for renewed pressure on Yugoslavia. In terms of actual policy though, nothing really changed. They still wished for the autonomous status of Kosovo through negotiations with the threat of NATO air attacks on the background. The decision for this policy has practically been made on October 4, after Gornje Obrinje. The international outrage after Račak led to the ultimatum, the negotiations in Rambouillet and consequently the actual intervention of March 24. These were all, mainly international developments. For the Dutch government, this all stems from the decision made on October 4, 1998.

Generally, it seems as if the influence of the Netherlands itself was small. They contributed relatively much to the actual mission but did not affect the military decisions. In the decision to intervene, it seemed important for the Dutch government that the United States and other states were involved first. They pursued a hard course in pressuring Milošević but waited with actual decisions until other bigger states had decided to do so. This is also shown by the Dutch unwillingness to deliver ground troops to Kosovo. The argumentation was mainly concerned by the American reluctance to send ground troops. In the beginning of 1998, the Dutch government had already expressed that action could only take place in a broad international alliance. This advocates against the influence of the newspapers, because the government had already acknowledged the influence from foreign actors.

The late decision to join KVM was exemplary for the conditions under which the Netherlands were able to join any mission in Kosovo. The government only wanted to act under a broad international coalition and was one of the last countries to participate. The influence of the media can also be disproven by the fact that the Dutch government did inform parliament about other incidents with bloodshed. Those were incidents that were not widely reported in the Dutch newspapers. This suggests that the government had a comprehensive understanding of what happened in Kosovo in 1998 and was not overwhelmed by sudden media attention.

These suggestive conclusions expose the limitations of my research. I have focussed on only three newspapers, which could be expanded. Furthermore, it is difficult to decide whether there is a connection between a quantity of articles and political decisions. I could not know the motives of journalists and politicians with certainty. It could be helpful to interview prominent figures from journalism and politics in 1998-1999 about whether they perceived the coverage as a pressure to intervene. Further research also needs to be done on the images that Dutch media showed on televisions. In the nineties, most people relied on televisions for news and information and therefore the influence of images can be bigger than that of newspaper articles. Television influence is also more difficult to determine, but it could be useful in the discussion about media influence.

Overall, I believe the influence of the newspapers was very limited in the Netherlands. This does not mean that the media did not play a big role in rallying an international coalition, but the Dutch participation in the NATO mission was not primarily caused by Dutch newspapers. They did use an Albanian, interventionist tone, but for the government the tone of other states was more significant. The Dutch government and parliament placed more value on the restoration of its reputation after Srebrenica, and on a broad international support base than on the attention in the media. The government did express its outrage after the media reported on the massacres, but little actually changed with regard to the policies concerning Kosovo. They mostly took informed decisions that were led by international organisations.

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