

# The foreign policy decision making politics essay



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Politics like any other concept in the social science can be defined in various ways and also politics can be said to be universal meaning politics is very wide. According to Aristotle “ man is a political animal”. To him every human being belonged to a state and no man could be self-fulfilment outside the state.” Individual, when isolated” he said “ is not self-sufficing... But he who is unable to live in society or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself must be either a beast or a god” (Somervill J. and Santoni R. E, 1963, 61, 62). As men find themselves in a society they have to make decision for them self or take decision from other making them act in a political manner. One can say that politics happen in every environment even in the bedroom were the man or the woman has to take certain decisions there.

Many scholars try to define politics in their own way, in the book of Robert Dahl “ Modern political Analysis” (1976, 1-12), Harold D. Lasswell defined politics as who gets what, when and how, to David Easton another scholar of political science said the discipline concerns itself with “ the authoritative allocation of values” whiles Max Weber a German sociology defines politics as a relationship of power, rule and authority.

The common element in these and several other definition of politics and political activity is that they all agree with Aristotle that every society consists of rulers and the ruled. Therefore in every human community there is the present of power, authority or rule.

A policy is typically described as a principle or rule to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes. The term is not normally used to denote what is actually done; this is normally referred to as either procedure or protocol. Policies are generally adopted by the Board of or senior governance body within an organization whereas procedures or protocols would be developed and adopted by senior executive officers. A policy can be considered as a “Statement of Intent” or a “Commitment”. For that reason at least, the decision-makers can be held accountable for their “Policy”. A policy maker is a person with power to influence or determine policies and practices at an international, national, regional, or local level. It can be said to be the actions and inaction of government, what the government planned to do or not to do.

Polity, is used to described a political institution or stuture such as those institution responsible for making the policy or those that the policy pass through before they actual become policies, these include the ministry, department and agancies of a state or government. It can be used to also described a potical system.

The process of making policies is some kind of the activity of the granding mill that is how the granding mill operates. We have the machine were u will but your millet or corn inside it for it to grand and it will come out not as

millet or core but as flour and when it is well not granded u will put it back into the mill again to grand it until you get a well granded flour.

The same apply to policies, here the millet or the corn will be the bill which is influenced mostly by politics and the machinc will be the polity that is the various institution who work on the bill before it becomes a policy and the flour which is the final product will be the outcome that is the policy itself. Just like the granding will machine when the policy is not well done or does not achieve it aim it has to go through the machine again until it suit the country and the people.

In the process of making a policy it is affected by several factors such as interest groups, public opinion, media and so on. These factors can be grouped into two forms that is the internal and external environment. These two forms of the environment affect the outcome of a policy or shape the policy outcome.

## **Foreign policy decision making**

According to Chanan (2002, 2), three main models will be used to built a general model into which the role of the media can be seen. The focus of these models is recognizing the environment as major input of foreign policy decision making processes. In explaining these three models chanan made used of scholarly work.

According Snyder et al. (1969: 203), “ Decision makers act upon and respond to conditions and factors that exist outside them and the governmental organization of which they are a part. Setting has two aspects: external and

internal. .... Setting is really a set of categories of potentially relevant factors and conditions that may affect the action of any state”

These authors describe the internal setting as a human environment composed of culture and population and include public opinion (Snyder et al., 1969: 201; 203). If we adopt a revised perspective on this setting, the media may be a major component of this environment. It can be described as the tool which expresses the non-governmental interpretations and expectations of the various members or groups of the society as described in Snyder’s model (Snyder et al., 1969: 204), as well as a tool to express government policy in state-owned – or dominated – media.

Michael Brecher developed a much more detailed framework for foreign policy decision-making analysis, and he incorporated the media explicitly as “ the communication network within the political system” which enables “ the flow of information about the operational environment to the incumbent elite” (Brecher, 1972: 11; 183-207). Brecher’s framework is environmental in its design, and he believes that: “ The foreign policy system comprises an environment or setting. ... The operational environment defines the setting in which foreign policy decisions are taken. The concept of setting refers to a set of potentially relevant factors and conditions, which may affect a state’s external behaviour. The operational environment thus sets the parameters or boundaries within which decision-makers must act.” (Brecher, 1972: 2-4).

But Brecher, like the other authors, does not incorporate the media explicitly as one of the input variables of the foreign policy decision-making process.

By input variable I mean an external factor, part of the international

environment. Perceiving the media as an input variable means understanding its role in influencing society and politics, in agenda setting and in constructing reality. Brecher and the other scholars of foreign policy see the media in a narrower way, as a channel through which the operational environment “ can have an impact on the foreign policy process.” This impact exists “ only to the extent that it is communicated to the elite. Information may be communicated in a variety of ways: the mass media – press, books, radio, and TV” (Brecher, 1972: 10).

Brecher and Snyder (et al.), and later Papadakis and Starr perceive the media as an internal component of the process, a channel to deliver messages from the diplomatic-political-security environment to the leaders. Such media, as information channels, have a minimal role in influencing leaders and their decisions. The broader perspective, which does not exist in the international relations literature, suggests that the media are part of the external-international environment which influences policy, and perceives the press and TV as external components or sources, as an input variable which drives decision processes as the other external input variables of the environment (i. e., regional power structure, other actors economic capabilities, etc.).

In a more subtle way, the media may be seen not only as part of the international environment, but also as part of the internal environment of the state. In the state the media are not just information channels, they form a “ communication network” influencing policy from within the state, as well as the party system, interest groups or the socio-economic stratification of society.

A third environmental foreign policy decision-making model was developed by Papadakis and Starr (1987) to analyze the process in small states, but it is relevant to dealing with other states as well. The environment which forms the input for the policy-making process is described as “ a structure of opportunities, risks, and potential costs and benefits, constraining the decision makers” (Russett and Starr, 1992: 21). The authors did not incorporate the mass media into their model, neither as forming part of the societal level of environment, nor as part of the opportunities or constraints internally influencing a government in its foreign policy decision-making process

it should be noted that all these models see the role of the image as an important mechanism in the decision-making process which is also strongly influenced by the media (Brecher, 1972, 11-13; Elitzur, 1986; Vertzberger, 1990). The image is a “ the total cognitive, affective, and evaluative structure of the behavior unit, or its internal view of itself and the universe” (Boulding in Brecher, 1972: 13).

According to Chanan (2002, 6) The media have a twofold role in the environment., they first provide input into the process as an independent variable added to environments described in the former models of Snyder et al., Brecher and Papadakis and Starr. Here the leaders react to the perceived reality as constructed by the press and take it into consideration. The second one is that it is part of the environment which foreign policy makers try to affect or influence by making their decisions. This implies that these leaders who perform in an environment which includes the media take political decisions to solve problems, but at the same time they try to make such

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decisions that will improve their image or develop a campaign that will affect the media dealing with the relevant international events and interactions.

This is he said is the output environment component of the environment.

## **The effect of the media on foreign policies Making**

The effects of the media on foreign policy decision making can be seen in two (2) fold or it is a double-anged saw. At one enged or side the media is seen as an input variable influencing foreign policy decision making process and at the other enged or side it is seen as an output variable, which compels leaders to relate to it in their decisions ( chanan 2002: 7)

One way through which the media effect foreign policy decision making process is through agenda settings. Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton (1971) in their work gave the social role of the media as Status-Conferral function. To Lazarsfeld and Merton ( 1971: 560-561) this role means “ the mass media confer status on public issues, persons, organizations, and social movements. Common experience as well as research testifies that the social standing of persons or social policies is raised when these command favorable attention in the mass media. ... The mass media bestow prestige and enhance the authority of individuals and groups by legitimizing their status”

In trying to look at the role of the media in foreign policy decision process, Bernard cohen (1963) made used of this idea. To Cohen ( 1963: 12-13), “ It is here, in the description of the political environment and the suggestion of the policy alternatives that give the best promise of managing the environment, that we shall find the press playing such an important role in



current thinking about foreign policy. This “ map-making” function of the press is so central to the real impact of the press in the foreign policy field that a few words of elaboration may be appropriate. ....”

Cohen (1963, 177) went on to say that “ For most of the foreign policy audience, the really effective political map of the world – that is to say, their operational map of the world – is drawn by the reporter and the editor, not by the cartographer. ... The press..... may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.”

The last statement is the basis for “ agenda setting approach,” which is mostly related to Maxwell McCombs (1972; 1981). McCombs (1972; 177) stated that, “ While the mass media may have little influence on the direction or intensity of attitudes, it is hypothesized that the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues”

McQuail (1994: 356-357) presented this approach as a four-fold hypothesis:

- Public debate is represented by salient issues (an agenda for action)
- The agenda derives from a combination of public opinion and political choice.
- Mass media news and information reflect the content and order the priority of issues

- This representation of issues in the mass media exerts an independent effect on issue content and on relative salience in public opinion.

The mass media is greatly relied upon to keep the public and government apprised of crucial developments and events on the world stage as they unfold. Most times, the only source of information available to the public is the media and as such, the media forms the basis of views and opinions on world events and issues as it massively influences public opinion thereby setting the agenda for government policy.

The media has become an instrument of power that influences government policies and can surpass national boundaries; the media through agenda setting makes issues somewhat important to the public, and the policy makers to take action (Tumber and palmer, 2004). The rise in the availability of real-time news cause policy makers to react swiftly than before to public opinion. This influence of the media on the public or government could be achieved by either impacting on the public who in turn will put pressure on the governments to make certain decisions considered therefore as an indirect influence on policy making, or by creating an impression on the policy makers themselves thereby prompting them to action.

The media played a role in influencing the war in Iraq. Saddam Hussein's ability to acquire and produce weapons of mass destruction (WMD), his cruel and inhumane acts to his own people, using chemical agents on his people is enough evidence to prove his ability to use WMD on an enemy or opponent (Mazarr, 2007). However, this was not the only reason the United States relied on to take a unilateral decision to invade Iraq and oust the dictator.

Certainly, the media played an important role in conveying the message to the public. It easily used information concerning Saddam Hussein atrocities to prompt US public opinion and defend President Bush's stand to wage war against Iraq. The congress of the United States was also influenced by the information transmitted by the media as the resolution to go to war with Iraq was deliberated in front of millions of viewers.

The president's decision to go to war was justified by the media through the messages communicated to the public. Although it could be argued that the decision was already made in advance, but the media was used to capture successfully the deliberations of the US congress. The media made sure that the American public saw and heard continuously about the evil to be confronted so as to enhance the safety of the world.

### Framing

The media construct reality with another tool, called framing. This technique is important, since any political conflict centers on the struggle over interpretive frames (Wolfsfeld, 1993, xiii; Wolfsfeld, 1997a, 13-30, 31-35, Scheufele, 1999, 103-122). In this process, the media transform the nature of events through "formats," which constitute ideological or value perspectives in which the media focus on "story lines," symbols, and relevant stereotypes (Entman, 1991; Entman and Rojecki, 1993; Entman and Page, 1994; Iyengar and Simon, 1994, 171). The evidence indicates that individuals' views of national issues are altered by the way in which television news frames them (Iyengar, 1994, 141). Therefore, in the competition over media frames some relevant factors should be analyzed,

such as the ways in which political actors are referred to; and nuances of the use of language (e. g., in headlines) (Roeh and Nir, 1993, 178-180; Wolfsfeld, 1997a, 49). Finally, framing is the process in which the media create the images that reflect and filter reality in the foreign policy decision-making processes.

### The media as an output environment

We are now going to look at the media as an output variable. We are going to see the role of the media as part of the environment which foreign policy makers try to affect or influence when making decisions. To Chanan (2002; 8) this means that leaders who perform in an environment which includes the media make political decisions to solve problems, but at the same time try to make decisions that will improve their image or develop a campaign that will affect the media that deal with the relevant international events and interactions.

### The media management

How do the leaders (and their media advisors) join foreign-policy decisions with considerations that take into account the media environment? How do they try to affect the media to reflect a favorable attitude, or to frame their side of the story in an international conflict? This is achieved by “media management” (MM), defined with the common term spin.

The processes of utilizing the media are varied and apply to national as well to foreign policies (Gergen, 1991; Ben Eliyahu, 1993; Cook, 1998; Kurtz, 1998; Paletz, 1998; Pfetsch, 1998). These policies can range from initiating

coverage to government-arranged censorship; from classifying information and data to pooling journalists (see figure 4).

Moreover, journalists may be restricted in their movement, accredited selectively, or favored by leaders according to their “ positive-supportive” coverage. Administrations and governments who need the media to cover their political activities and their foreign policy should promote “ give and take” relations with the press.

### **Who is in Charge?**

In managing the media covering decision-making, governments use professionals, public relations specialists or

marketing professionals. These professionals work together with the ministerial level and alongside the spokespersons in charge of media relations in the relevant offices. Furthermore, they consider allowing these spokespersons and even some of the professionals to be present at the decision-making process. The optimal method is allowing them to be involved in the processes and contribute their professional input.

MM or “ spin” techniques are used on the diplomatic front to promote peace processes, as well as in times of conflict and war. When foreign policy decisions are made, or peace policies are adopted, governments may accompany these policies with threefold PR strategies toward the media.

Foreign policy officials (and their media advisors) can disregard or ignore the press (e. g., not convey any message to the media); they can try to develop a “ spin” (as explained earlier); or they can adopt a policy that is only media-

oriented (e. g., only publishing public announcements without any “ real” political action).

By choosing any of these options, a government influences the media by regulating the flow of information. It is trying to affect the political environment through the media while competing with the opposing political powers, who try to influence the media as well. When governments succeed in taking control of diplomatic events and enjoy a high degree of public consensus, the news media become supportive, and the role of the PR professionals is intended to preserve and promote this support. But when a government loses control over the political-diplomatic process, the media become independent and critical (Wolfsfeld, 1997a, 25; Wolfsfeld, 1997b, 30-34). In this “ negative” political environment, the role of MM professionals is more complex, and they try influence the media to change their attitude and be less critical, more understanding and even supportive.

In the diplomatic-cooperative arenas of international relations, leaders use the media to keep options open and at the same time to build consensus (Ben Eliyahu, 1993; Cook, 1998; Kurtz, 1998; Paletz, 1998; Pfetsch, 1998). Here, the media, by setting policy agendas and stimulating popular support for policies, provide tools for leaders to assert control. Moreover, a leader’s staff can utilize the media to deliver specific messages to specific audiences (Gergen, 1991, 55-56; O’Heffernan, 1991, 62-67, 105-112; O’Heffernan, 1994, 242). In addition, the media’s role as a promoter of public debates on policy issues can be used as a tool to gain support and tilt public opinion (Hindell, 1995; Powlick and Katz,

1998, 29-61; Weiman, 1994, 291-307).

In order to achieve the best results in these processes, leaders and their MM professional advisors may use various diplomatic channels with regard to the media. They can decide to keep diplomatic interactions secret, hidden behind closed doors or made public (Gilboa, 1998a, 211-225; Gilboa 1998b, 56-75) and work with the media accordingly.