

# The Preference of Media Press in Britain and British Policy in Iran's Nuclear Crisis

Yusril Ihza Kirana and Baiq Wardhani

*International Relations Department, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Airlangga*

**Keywords:** Iran, Britain, CNN Effect, Foreign Policy, Media.

**Abstract:** The year 2013 to 2015 is a crucial year for Iran, this is because in that year Iran was in negotiations with six major power states that consists of England, France, Germany, the United States, Russia and China. Britain is one of the most influential countries in initiating and facilitating the existing negotiations. The position of the British government which from the beginning supports the negotiation and diplomacy between Iran and other major power states is not all in line with what the media say. Media in a democratic country, like Britain, plays a big role, especially after the information reformation marked by the internet and the rapid dissemination of information. In observing the process of formulation of British foreign policy, the author refers to the theory of CNN effect which as a pioneer of thought that the media can influence government policy. The author will try to draw conclusions from media activities from 2013 to 2015 and relate them to existing theories.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

By the end of 2013 diplomats from Iran and six major powers, namely P5+1, which contains five permanent members of the UN security council plus an additional state, the United States (US), Britain, Russia, France, China and Germany agreed to initiate a meeting related to Iran's nuclear program (Farahmand, 2016). This is the result of an increase in Iranian nuclear development activities since 2002 when the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) discloses the development of a secret nuclear program, involving the construction of a uranium enrichment plant at Natanz and a heavy water reactor in Arak (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2005). The talks between P5+1 and Iran aim to ease tensions between Iran and those countries, especially after the United Nations, European Union (EU) and the United States impose sanctions that result in Iran suffering considerable losses on its country's economy. The EU issued a regulation 961/2010 that governing the freezing assets of the Iranian people, trade embargoes, and licensing systems of goods related to the proliferation of activities or weapons delivery systems (Londonpandi, 2010). The rules issued by the European Union acts as a reaction to the separated by the UN towards Iran. While the US enacts Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability

and Divestiture Act 2010 (CISADA) and US Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) to impose sanctions on: 1. Support the export of refined oil products (RPP) to Iran, or provide RPP (solar, petroleum, aviation fuel, etc.) and support Iranian exports of the need for crude oil; 2. Facilitating the domestic production of pure oil products in Iran, which would compensate the US for knowing the parties directly and significantly supporting or producing Iran's domestic oil (Londonpandi, 2010).

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Agreement (JCPOA) ending in 2015 resulted in a feasible solution. The agreement requires Iran to redesign and reduce its nuclear facilities, as well as accept the necessary protocols with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In fact, Iran gets relief from sanctions given before by the UN, the European Union and the United States with the release of millions of dollars in petroleum revenues and asset freeze (Security Council, 2015). The success of the negotiations conducted by P5+1 is not separated from the three major countries of the European Union at that time that consists of Britain, France, and Germany. This is especially happen because of Britain, French, and German are the pioneers of Iran's joint negotiations with the establishment of E3. The crisis in Iran becomes important for the EU because the EU is Iran's second-largest oil importer after China, and became an

important trading partner for Iran as a major importer with a value of 14.5 billion Euros and exports reached 11.3 billion Euros (iitrade, 2012).

Among EU countries that have interests related to import and export with Iran, Britain ranks the lowest. In practice, however, Britain was one of the E3 members who initiated talks with Iran. Unlike France and Germany which have promising import and export interests with Iran, the motives of the British initiating and facilitating negotiations with Iran are not as strong as other countries.

One of the explanations that can be used to explain British motives to initiate and facilitate negotiations with Iran can be seen through the public and the media level of analysis. In this case the public and the media in Britain have sufficient power to influence London's foreign policy, no other because of Britain is a country that upholds democratic values. Particularly because Britain is famous for the fierce parliamentary debate and domestic political dynamics filled with ups and downs. As argued by Radityo Dharmaputra (2017), public opinion will be more influential in democratic countries than in non-democratic countries.

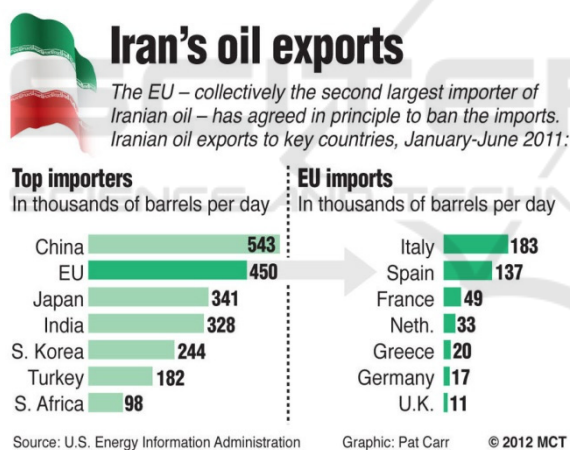


Figure 1. Iran's Oil Exports.

Therefore, in this paper, media and public are used to explain the domestic environmental dynamics of a country that capable of influencing the formation of a foreign policy. Referring to Morgenthau's writings (in Holsti, 1992), the public no longer only responds to domestic phenomena alone but the public is also increasingly aware of the phenomenon abroad. Brecher (in Naveh, 2002) also says that the public and the media are influential in the foreign policy-making process, but this influence is only present when communicated to the elite through press, books, radio, or TV. The author chose to focus more on the role of the media and the two main approaches,

bottom-up and top-down, in addition to see that the British media were highly credible media. The author will use the thematic content analysis research method from several British media related to the British reaction with nuclear proliferation in Iran. The author will use The Independent and The Guardian as a data source and limit the study period from 2013 to 2015. The Independent and The Guardian are chosen because they are the most credible and dominant electronic media in the UK. While 2013 to 2015 is chosen because the year 2015 is considered a crucial time where negotiations between P5+1 with Iran meet the bright spot and succeed with JCPOA agreement.

## 2 THE ROLE OF MEDIA PRESS IN FOREIGN POLICY MAKING

Basically, public have an important and influential component in the process of formulating a country's policy (Snyder in Naveh, 2002). But the fact that public opinion is formed from news issued by the media shows that the media is also influential in the formulation of a country's policy. The positive response to the argument comes from a liberal-democratic approach which says that the formulation of foreign policy existing in a democratic country is more peaceful than in a non-democratic state. This is because the public plays a constructive role in limiting policies made by policymakers (Kant and Bentham in Holsti, 1992). In contrast to liberal-democratic, realists who are basically skeptical of public contribution in the effectiveness of foreign policy formulation assume that the public is a vulnerable element that leads to instability if it has too much influence. This is because according to Morgenthau (in Holsti, 1992), the formulation of foreign policy can't depend on the support of public opinion in which the policy direction preferences are emotional rather than rational. Although realist and liberal-democratic views differ in view of public opinion, what can be known is that public opinion is unwilling to influence policy formulation so that the role of media as forming public opinion also plays a considerable role.

Press and the media -newspapers, television, radio, online media- play a very central role in communicating to the public regarding what is or has been happening in the world. In cases where the public has no ownership or direct experience of related the situation at that time, there will be a growing dependence on the media that has informed them. This does not directly mean that the media tells

what to think and to do, but the public will tend to absorb media messages uncritically (Philo et al, in Happer and Philo, 2013). This led to Jonathan Mermin (in Dharmaputra, 2017) argument that there are two possible explanations for how the media act: 1. The media acts independently and tells the story of the journalistic independent initiative; 2. Journalists turn to politicians and official government officials to decide on the news to be released. The two possibilities of this media that prove realist arguments are skeptical of public and media contributions in the process of foreign policy formulation. What Mermin describes is about the top-down and bottom-up approach previously mentioned by the author. The first possible media action leads to a bottom-up approach in which the media play a major role in shaping policy, while the second possibility is more top-down, that the government able to regulates and even manages the media as a tool to legitimize their policies.

Media behavior that is considered to deviate from the initial goal of media formation, disseminating information, as described by Jonathan Mermin, discussed further by Chanan Naveh (2004) by dividing the role of media into three namely: 1. Media as an environment; 2. Media as a foreign policy environment creator; 3. Media as an output environment. Media as an environment means that in a media business has a criterion as a political communication regime in a country which is not just a communication channel and information gate but also profit-oriented that can sometimes be governed by the government. As a foreign policy environment, the media is useful to determine the setting and framing agenda that can increase the legitimacy of a policy. While the media as a result of an environment, is important to know that the process of media management behind the scenes is about who is responsible and what methods that they used. Therefore, the relationship between state and media more broadly can be analogous to a meeting between authoritarian and libertarian patterns (Mundt in Naveh, 2002). On one side, the media has the original purpose of voicing and informing a story, which is highly libertarian in nature. But the state has the power to manage the existing management process that considerably as authoritarian.

Piers Robinson (2002) in his article entitled The CNN Effect makes the table (see table 1), on the relationship between the media and the state. The relationship between the media and the state according to Piers Robinson is explained through the terms of CNN effect, which arises because of the success of the media, in this case is CNN, in

Table 1.

Level of elite consensus	Media-state relationship	Role of the media
Elite consensus	The media operate within 'sphere of consensus' and coverage reflects elite consensus on policy (Hallin 1986)	Executive manufacturing consent: the media remain uncritical and help build support for official policy
Elite dissensus	The media operate within 'sphere of legitimate controversy' (Hallin 1986) but overall coverage does not favour any side of the elite debate	The media reflect elite dissensus as predicted by Hallin (1986) and Bennett (1990) but remain noninfluential
Elite dissensus but policy certainty within executive	The media operate within 'sphere of legitimate controversy' (Hallin 1986) but coverage, overall, becomes critical of government policy	Although coverage pressures government to change policy, policy certainty within executive means that media influence is resisted
Elite dissensus plus policy uncertainty within government	The media take sides in political debate and coverage becomes critical of government. The media are now active participants influencing elite debatem	'The CNN effect': in conditions of policy uncertainty, critical media coverage provides bargaining power for those seeking a change in policy or makes policymakers feel pressured to respond with a policy or else face a public relations disaster. Here the media can influence policy outcomes

influencing the policy of the United States (US). Robinson said that the media succeeded in "selecting and highlighting" some events or issues and then making connections between them raised interpretations, evaluations and/or solutions. In his hypothesis, Robinson argues that CNN effect theory is a theory where media is an agent in political control, which can only be used in certain conditions. Robinson believes that the opinion expressed by Mermin regarding the possibility of media behavior is bound to happen. Therefore, in conclusion, Robinson (2002) concludes that the CNN effect, in

this case the media, can have a major influence in the formulation of a country's foreign policy when the state has no clear policy toward a phenomenon or issue. Instead, the media will have a substantial role when the state does not have a definite policy, in which case the media uses agenda setting and framing to influence the policies of a country.

Although there are some criticisms of the role of the media in the formulation of foreign policy, as Thune (2009) says in his article entitled "Beyond the CNN effect Towards a constitutive understanding of media power in international politics" that there is a missing link in the media LoA in explaining the formulation of foreign policy of a country. Thune compared CNN's headline news with another credible media for five days and NRK (Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation) both resulted in the same thing -attack in Afghanistan- while NRK also show the same thing but with slightly different focus. From this it can be seen that there is a big question as to whether the focus of global news really exists, and whether the focus is truly universal and homogenous? This is what the author wants to discuss to prove whether the media still has an influence on the formulation of government policy of a country apart from the fact that there is no certainty about the homogeneity and universality of news globally. Similar to Thune, Gilboa (2004) considers that there is still no certainty about the CNN effect which the government loses control of its foreign policy so that the media directs the policy. But Gilboa also still considers that more interdisciplinary research is needed through theory, models, and concepts from both the science of communication and the science of international relations.

In the case of Britain resulted in the Ofcom report, a telecommunications company appointed by the British government that regulates broadcasting in the Britain. The report shows that newspapers and radios are still needed. But by using online news that increased from 15% in 2002, to 27% in 2007, and 41% in 2012 in the UK, it shows that people generally use the Internet for news purposes are very high (House of Lord, 2014). It is the setting how the media in the Britain can make British foreign policy. In this case the British response from 2013 to 2015 against Iran's nuclear proliferation.

### 3 RESPONSE PREFERENCE OF THE BBC AND THE GUARDIAN REGARDING IRAN'S NUCLEAR CRISIS

The Guardian is one of the most popular press media in the Britain with a high interest in reading. In 2013, The Guardian often shows the news that put forward the need for a positive response in the form of negotiation and diplomacy as an effort to resolve the nuclear crisis that occurred in Iran. The news can be seen in the opinion column written by Hans Blix under the title "Iran nuclear deal will make the world a safer place" published on November 27, 2013 (The Guardian, 2013). The Guardian also released news of David Cameron's talks, the Prime Minister of Britain at that time, with Hassan Rouhani, the Iranian President, who is seen as rising hopes of a deal with Iran. The headline is "Iranian concession and Cameron phone call raise nuclear deal hopes" which was released on November 19, 2013.

Instead, The Independent media tends to preach negative news to Iran's treaty when compared with The Guardian. On February 25, 2013, The Independent published an article entitled "Time running out for talks with Iran" (The Independent, 2013). In the period September-October 2013, The Independent issued an article containing coverage of Israel's opinions on Iran. It shows the pessimism that The Independent showed to Iran's talks. The interesting thing is that on November 19, 2013, when The Guardian issued positive news about the progress of negotiations with Iran, The Independent released an article entitled "US and Israel's come to blows over Iran nuclear program" which shows how The Independent looks negative against Iran. The year 2013 concludes with news of the failure of talks held in Geneva where both media reported the news.

In 2014 the two news agencies did not have the option of seeing how the British government had issued official policy by re-opening diplomatic relations between Britain and Iran after several years earlier had declined (The Guardian, 2014). The Guardian entitled "The UK and Iran agree to re-establish direct diplomatic relations", then on November 8, 2014 The Guardian again showed the importance of diplomacy and negotiation by issuing the news under the title "Iran foreign ministry: diplomacy the only way to solve nuclear tangle".

In 2014, The Independent is not much issuing articles, but an article on November 23, 2014 titled "One day to go until Iran nuclear deadline" indicates that The Independent urges the government to

immediately resolve the talks between Iran with the P5+1 (The Independent, 2014). British government policy to improve diplomatic ties between Iran and Britain with the opening of the Iranian embassy in Britain has little effect on the media. The media still voiced their interests. It was done by the Independent who often crossed the government's policies.

On July 14, 2015, P5+1 states and Iran agreed to sign JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action). They are forcing Iran to halt nuclear proliferation project and the P5+1 will responded it with the dismissal of embargo and sanctions given earlier. After July 14, 2015, the author noticed some changes in news patterns published by The Independent. On 16 July 2015, both The Guardian (2015) and The Independent (2015) wrote a story about the British Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, and the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, that exchange comments in a meeting that highlighting the sharp differences between Israel and the world power related to the nuclear deal with Iran. The Guardian wrote the headline "Netanyahu and Hammond spar over Iran nuclear agreement" while The Independent wrote the headline "Iran nuclear deal: British Foreign Secretary barbed exchanges with Benjamin Netanyahu's remarks over the pact on visit to Israel".

After the approval of JCPOA, there are two significant events: 1. Iran's domestic condition; 2. Test of ballistic missiles conducted by Iran. The British government's response in the second incident is clear to condemn the ballistic missile test, but it does not change the British position within JCPOA and assumes that JCPOA is the best solution to take (gov.uk, 2015). The media reaction to the two events are, The Guardian (2015) responded well to the first event showing the support of Iranian domestic politicians against JCPOA by writing an article titled "Iranian parliament passes bill approving nuclear deal", while The Independent did not issue articles related to the event. Meanwhile, in response to the second event, both The Guardian and The Independent carried the news that criticized the actions of the Iranian mission trials. But the difference that can still be seen is how the solution implied from the headlines of the two news agency, The Guardian is still consistent with diplomacy and negotiation while The Independent has an uncertain position and tend not to have a definite solution.

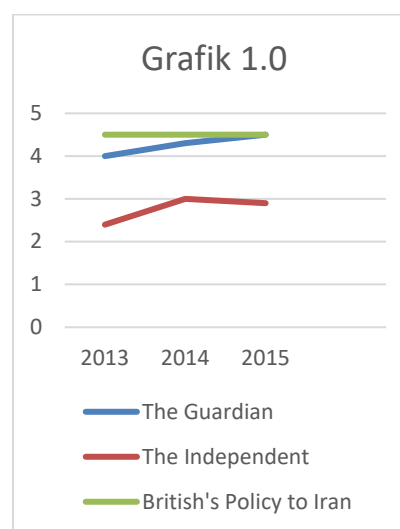


Figure 2.

Table 1.0 shows how the level of preference of The Guardian and The Independent have and compared with British policy towards Iran. Britain showed a desire for diplomacy and negotiations against the Iranian government to achieve regional peace and stability. The media's response to the issue was not able to have a major impact on the policies issued by the British government. The author was able to draw two possibilities against what happened between The Guardian and The Independent. The first possibility is that The Guardian follows the second pattern of media as mentioned by Mermin (2004, in Dharmaputra, 2017) that the media only follow what the government prefers, so that the news issued from The Guardian can be called as coming from the British government. While the second possibility is The Independent who follow the pattern of media behavior according to Mermin's first pattern that following the journalistic initiative that put forward the news idealism. This eventually made The Independent became the opposition to the policy of the British government. The author believes that this media role is the result of the firmness of the British government in issuing policies. Although the media are setting an agenda setting or framing, as The Independent does, the government has justified its policies.

## 4 CONCLUSION

The role of the public and the media in Britain has its own relevance in the process of formulating the existing foreign policy. By taking two examples of

media in Britain, the author tries to find a correlation between news preferences that emerge from the media with the British government's foreign policy over time. The author gives a separate assessment of which news contains positive values on government policy and which gives negative value. Based on the CNN effect theory and possible media behavior in the formulation of a country's foreign policy, the author succeeded in drawing two possibilities against what happened to the media in the UK. In a democratic country like Britain, the media has a rather special place in influencing parliamentary policies. But in the case of Iranian proliferation, the British media have not contributed greatly in regulating let alone changing the policies of the British government.

The first possibility is that The Guardian follows a second pattern of media that only follows what the government prefers, so the news issued from The Guardian comes from the British government. While the second possibility is The Independent that following the journalistic initiative that put forward the news idealism that made The Independent as opposition in the policy of the British government. In this paper, the author take two media samples as the object of research so it can not be used as a standard to generalized media in Britain. The author also has a deficiency in giving positive or negative values in news headlines due to unclear parameters.

## REFERENCES

- Catherine Happer, Greg Philo. 2013. The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change [online] available at: <https://jspp.psychopen.eu/article/view/96/37> [accessed on December 15, 2017].
- Dharmaputra, Radityo. 2017. Explaining the Levels of Analysis in Foreign Policy: Domestic Variables (Public Opinion). Mata kuliah: Analisis Kebijakan Luar Negeri (Presented on October 18, 2017)
- Dharmaputra, Radityo. 2017. Explaining the Levels of Analysis in Foreign Policy: Domestic Variables (Public Opinion). PPT Mata kuliah: Analisis Kebijakan Luar Negeri (accessed on December 16, 2017)
- Gilboa, Eytan, 2005. "Global Television News and Foreign Policy: Debating the CNN Effect", *International Studies Perspectives*, (6), pp. 325-341.
- Henrik Thune, 2009. Beyond the CNN effect Towards a constitutive understanding of media power in international politics [https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/15140/Materie\\_195\\_Thune.pdf?sequence=1](https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/15140/Materie_195_Thune.pdf?sequence=1)
- Holsti, Ole R., 1992. "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Challenges to the Almond-Lippmann Consensus", *International Studies Quarterly*, (36), pp. 439-466.
- HOUSE OF LORDS Select Committee on Communications 1st Report of Session 2007-08 The ownership of the news . [online] available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldselect/ldcomm/120/120.pdf> [accessed on December 15, 2017].
- HOUSE OF LORDS Select Committee on Communications 1st Report of Session 2013-14 Media plurality , available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldselect/ldcomm/120/120.pdf> [accessed on December 15, 2017].
- Iitrade.com, 2012, Oil price falls as Iran allows nuclear probe. [online] available at: <http://www.iitrade.ac.in/kmarticle.php?topic=Oil%20price%20falls%20as%20Iran%20allows%20nuclear%20probe> [accessed on December 15, 2017]
- International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2005. Iran's Strategic Weapons Programmes: A net Assesment, London: Routledge, 2005, 16.
- Mohammad Rohani Farahmand, 2016. Explaining the Iran nuclear deal A Case of Mutual Agreement After a Decade of Gridlock
- Naveh, Chanan, 2002. "The Role of the Media in Foreign Policy Decision-Making: A Theoretical Framework", *Conflict & Communication Online*, 1(2), pp. 1-14.
- Robinson, Piers, 2012. "The role of media and public opinion", in, Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield & Tim Dunne, *Foreign Policy, Theories . Actors . Cases*. Oxford; pp. 168-187.
- Security Council, 2015. UN Resolution 2231/2015. [online] available at: <http://www.un.org/en/sc/2231/> [accessed on December 15, 2017]
- The Guardian, 2014. Iran foreign ministry: diplomacy the only way to solve nuclear tangle. [online] available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/08/iran-diplomacy-nuclear-solution-us> [accessed on December 16, 2017].
- The Guardian, 2015. Iran deal 'adoption day': US approves conditional sanctions waivers. [online] available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/18/iran-deal-adoption-day-conditional-sanctions-waivers> [accessed on December 16, 2017].
- The Independent. 2013. Search result on Iran Nuclear Deal 2014 tangle. [online] available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/search/site/iran%2520deal%25202013> [accessed on December 16, 2017].
- US AND EU TRADE SANCTIONS LEGISLATION. 2010. SUMMARY OF DEVELOPMENTS [online] available at: <https://www.londonpandi.com/downloads/25022011101126.pdf> [accessed on December 15, 2017].
- The independent. 2014. Search result on Iran Nuclear Deal 2014 tangle. [online] available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/search/site/iran%2520deal%25202014> [diakses pada 16 Desember 2017]