GOVERNMENTAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AND MEDIA FAILURE: HEGEMONY AND THE CASE OF IRAQ

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between the mass media and public opinion regarding foreign policy issues within the analytical framework of "hegemony" as articulated by Antonio Gramsci. Hegemony theory is put forth as an alternative to the dominant thesis that the American news media take an independent stance in relation to political authority. The study further examines the nature of the Bush administration's media communication strategy, and the arguments that were put forth in order to mobilize public support for war in Iraq. The study argues that the administration's framing of the "war on terror" was reproduced, by and large, uncritically in the mainstream media and that this failure to provide a wide range of perspectives significantly contributed to what is likely to become a major U.S. foreign policy disaster in Iraq.

In loving memory of my mother, my friend:

For her unwavering love, support, and encouragement;

and her gentle reminders to keep my "eye on the light at the end of the tunnel".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1: INTRODUCTION

The revelations which have undermined the proclaimed rationales for the U.S. attack against Iraq have also highlighted the failures of the mass media to investigate Washington's claims before the conflict began. Indeed, it is evident that the foundation of the Bush administration's case for attacking the sovereign state of Iraq, in clear violation of international law and the UN Charter, was built on highly questionable evidence and logic. A strong case could be made that the United States would have been unable to generate sufficient public support to go to war had the mass media lived up to its journalistic responsibilities and exposed the shortcomings and distortions in the administration's communication strategy and provided more balanced discussion of alternative responses to military action against Iraq.

There can be no doubt that the U.S. government used the media in an effective way, invoking both patriotism and fear of more terrorism in an attempt to unite the country - and the press - in support of war in Afghanistan in 2001, and Iraq in 2003. There were, of course, exceptions to the mainstream media's acceptance of the rationales for war, and more critical viewpoints could be found at the margins - in the back pages of the <u>New York Times</u>, for example, and in much of the independent media - but by and large the mass media in the United States overwhelmingly reproduced the Bush administration's case for going to war.

Today, all the primary arguments for war in Iraq – WMD's; ties to al Qaeda; and the imminent threat - have proven to be false while new evidence continues to emerge

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exposing the misinformation upon which the administration's policies were based. Perhaps even more important is the growing understanding that the Iraq invasion has led to the alienation of Muslim and Arab opinion worldwide and is producing a new generation of anti-American sentiment; and thus was a disastrous way to deal with the 'war on terror'.[1]

The aim of this study is to contribute to the broader literature on the relationship between the mass media and foreign policy, and to explore the role of television news media before a country decides to go to war. This paper will attempt to understand the nature of the Bush administration's media communication strategy, and the arguments that were put forth in order to mobilize public support for war in Iraq. Specifically, it will explore the relationship between the mass media and public opinion regarding foreign policy issues within the analytical framework of "hegemony" as articulated by Antonio Gramsci. The mass media in this study will be limited to the major U.S. cable and television networks for two primary reasons. One, the power of visual images has long been understood by the government and the media as the most effective way to get a message across. According to ABC news correspondent, Sam Donaldson, both Michael Deaver and David Gergen, two of Ronald Reagan's key advisors, understood "a simple truism about television: the eye always predominates over the ear when there is a fundamental clash between the two."[2] Secondly, according to a Pew Research Study a

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[1] Counter terrorism expert and insider Richard Clarke produced the first sustained critique of the Bush administration's war policies and an overall indictment of its poorly thought out strategy for dealing with radical Islamic terrorism, see Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, (New York, London: Free Press, 2004).

[2] Mark Hertsgaard, On Bended Knee: The Press and the Reagan Presidency, (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1989), 25.

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full 90 percent of Americans turned to television for reports about terrorism and the war

following the devastating attacks of 9/11.[3]

I begin by framing the discussion with an overview of relevant theory concerning

hegemony, including a summary of what the Gramscian theory clearly seems to suggest

about the relationship between government frames and media frames in order to lay the

foundation for ideas to follow. The plausibility of the Gramscian explanatory perspective

is assessed in the final portion of the paper, after first examining the governmental

communication strategy of the administration – including a discussion of both the

possible strategic motivations that were not publicly articulated, as well as the official

frames that were presented to the media. Secondly, there will be an examination of the

frames that were dominant in the mass media during the lead up to the war in Iraq – the

overwhelming reliance on official sources and deference to elite views on foreign policy

will be highlighted. Discussion and conclusions at the end will re-focus on the concept of

hegemony in order to ascertain to what extent it can be used as an explanation for the

lack of responsible reporting in the mass media following September 11, 2001. Only

when the situation in Iraq went from bad to worse did the media in the United States

belatedly adopt a somewhat more sceptical position toward the Bush administration and

its justifications for war. Understanding how and why Americans were led to believe the

administration's rationales for invading Iraq should help us to determine how (or if) the

media can be more vigilant in the future.

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[3] Pew Research Center, "Terror Coverage Boost News Media's Images," (November 28, 2001) online at:
http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=143

2: HEGEMONY THEORY AND THE MEDIA

This section will outline the basic tenets of Gramscian hegemony theory, as an

alternative to the long standing thesis that the American news media take an oppositional

(or even an independent) stance in relation to political authority. The term 'fourth estate'

is used today to refer to the mass media as a powerful 'watchdog' in liberal-pluralist

democracies. Their function according to this perspective is to reveal abuses of state

authority and defend the democratic rights of the public. Indeed, the U.S. media regularly

portray themselves as fearless defenders of the public interest whose job is to provide the

accurate information that an informed population needs in order to foster true democracy.

They claim to act as a watchdog over government, exposing scandals, untruths, etc.,

without fear or favour. These assertions are usually supported by reference to the

Watergate exposures which helped remove Nixon from office, and the media's critical

news coverage during the latter years of the Vietnam War. Indeed, it was during the late

1960's, near the end of the Vietnam War, that the thesis that the American news media

were transformed from a generally passive institution into one which stood in opposition

to political authority emerged. Since then, this view of the media as critical watchdogs

on government has become a part of mainstream media theory.[4] Samuel Huntington

wrote in a mid-1970's report to the Trilateral Commission that "The most notable new

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[4] For more on the media's self-proclaimed role as watchdog, see S. Althaus et al, "Revising the Indexing Hypothesis: Officials, Media, and the Libya Crisis", Political Communication (1996), 407-421.

source of national power in 1970, as compared to 1950, is the national media."[5] Proud

defenders of the media argue that their job is to be independent of higher political

authority, and as such provide objective investigation according to the values of

professional journalism. Gramscian hegemony theory will be presented as a credible

alternative to this hypothesis and the basic tenets will be explored below.

Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony in part to explain why

revolutionary movements were unable to succeed in Europe in the early 1900's despite

the terrible social and economic conditions of the majority of the people. The appeal of

this concept for many modern scholars is based largely on its ability to explain the

persistence of the political stability of western capitalism. Generally speaking, hegemony

refers to the ability of ruling groups to maintain their domination and popular support

based primarily on "voluntary" acquiescence rather than through fear, economic control,

or direct coercion. More specifically, hegemony is the process by which the values of the

dominant class become the values of society as a whole. These values become

internalized to such an extent that they become "commonsensical" and largely

unquestionable to most of the public. In other words, hegemony is the process that

legitimizes the existing distribution of power, and naturalizes the dominant ideology.[6] In

this context, certain fundamental principles are never questioned – especially those

supporting capitalism, private property, hierarchy, and the state. So long as those

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[5] Cited in Noam Chomsky, "The Carter administration: Myth and Reality," excerpted from Radical Priorities, (1981) online at: http://www.chomsky.info/books/priorities01.htm. For more examples of the 'watchdog' role of the media see Daniel Hallin, We Keep America on Top of the World: Television Journalism and the Public Sphere, (London: Routledge, 1994).

[6] For contemporary literature on media and hegemony, see Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988); Lance Bennett, News: the Politics of Illusion (New York: Longman Press, 2001); Daniel Hallin, The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and Robert Entman, Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

fundamental principles go unexamined by the majority of citizens, limited debate can occur and various positions can be formulated making society appear more open and pluralistic than it really is. In the United States, thought is bounded within a narrow ideological framework, liberalism on the one hand, and conservatism on the other, underscored by the acceptance of democratic capitalism.[7]

There are many agents of socialization which help to maintain the dominant social, economic, and political agenda of privileged groups in positions of power. Educational institutions, religious organizations, the family unit, and others, all play a role in reinforcing the dominant ideology; however it can be argued that none is more influential than the mass media. In order to operationalize the Gramscian hypothesis in this case, some conceptual links need to be made in order to show the relationship between the mass media and the maintenance of a hegemonic perspective on the world that "naturalizes" a war in Iraq. Daniel Hallin, a respected U.S. media scholar, explains the complex relationship between hegemony and foreign affairs reporting by arguing that, first and foremost, the mass media contribute to the maintenance of consent for a system of power. The system of power relevant in this case is the post-World War II capitalist system dominated both politically and economically by the United States.[8] As the leading power in this system, the U.S. has to maintain both the consent of subordinate nations as well as the consent of its own population. The public has to accept the

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[7] For more on Gramsci's theory of hegemony, see Walter Adamson, Hegemony and Revolution: A study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory (London: University of California Press, 1980); Joseph Femia, Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Conscience, and the Revolutionary Process (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and James Joll, Antonio Gramsci (New York: The Viking Press, 1977).
[8] Gerald Haines, senior historian of the CIA, describing U.S. planning in the 1940s stated that the U.S. "assumed, out of self-interest, responsibility for the welfare of the world capitalist system," and that the U.S. must remain both militarily and economically far in the lead. See Gerald Haines, The Americanization of Brazil: A Study of U.S Cold War Diplomacy in the Third World, 1945-1954, (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1989), 45.

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domestic legitimacy of foreign policy elites and the institutions they control, as well as the legitimacy of the international system itself.[9]

Hegemony theory has been prevalent in media studies for the past several decades. Prominent scholars in this tradition include, Stuart Hall, Daniel Hallin, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman. Within critical media studies there are different versions, and different interpretations, of hegemony which are worth brief consideration. Chomsky and Herman are most closely associated with the 'Propaganda Model'. This model acknowledges the ability of governments to influence the output of journalists while also emphasizing the tendency of journalists to perceive global events through the cultural and political lenses of the political and social elites. However it has been argued that this model is more 'top down' and limited than other versions of hegemony in two key ways. Critics of the Propaganda Model argue that it views the media as a tool of an essentially unified ruling elite, who act primarily as a mouthpiece for government propaganda.[10] While the model seems to fit the initial coverage following September 11, it is too static to give any real understanding of variation, change or oppositional forces. Indeed, Gramscian hegemony theory's central claim is that, while the news media normally function to reflect, and even mobilize support for dominant views in society, there are times when they serve the interests of marginalized groups. "Challengers" or counter-hegemonic groups are constantly forming in opposition to dominant groups; therefore consent must constantly be won. In Gramsci's own words, "common sense is

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[9] Daniel Hallin, We Keep America on Top of the World, 70.

[10] For more on the Propaganda Model see Herman and Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent. For differences between hegemony and the Propaganda Model see Daniel Hallin, We Keep America on Top of the World: Television Journalism and the Public Sphere (London: Routledge 1994).

not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself."[11] This explains

why the Bush administration went to such great lengths to manipulate public opinion;

something that would not have been necessary if the media acted simply as a propaganda

arm of the government.

Indexing theory is also in the hegemony family of literature and it accounts for

more debate and division among elites and among society than the Propaganda Model.

The indexing hypothesis was introduced initially by Lance Bennett (1989) and was

further expanded upon through the works of Robinson (2002), and Entman (2004).

Indexing theory argues that the news media have the greatest impact on the policy

process when policy is uncertain. That is to say, that as policy certainty decreases, news

media influence increases, and vice versa. This theory of media influence states that

critical news media coverage in the U.S. occurs only after sections of Washington's

political elite turn against each other.[12] Daniel Hallin incorporates both indexing and

hegemony models into his analysis and suggests that the range of policy information and

debate expands only when elites themselves are in open disagreement allowing

journalists to report the 'different sides' of the debate, *within official circles*.[13]

Hallin argues that the concept of hegemony plays two critical roles in the study of

the media. First, the media have the function of maintaining the dominant political

ideology. At the same time, the concept of hegemony is used to explain the 'behaviour'

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[11] Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 326.
[12] Hallin, The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam, (1986). See also, Hallin's in-depth study of hegemony and indexing models from Vietnam through the Central American interventions in We Keep America on Top of the World, 1994.
[13] Ibid. Robert Entman builds upon hegemony and indexing theories in a promising new model called "Cascading Activation." For more on *when* elite division is most likely to occur see Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

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of the media. In other words, the media themselves are subject to the hegemonic process

and in this way the dominant ideology shapes the production of news and entertainment.

Thus, the media can be expected to function as agents of legitimation, despite the fact

that they are independent of direct political control.[14]

There are various structural factors which limit the media's ability to act as

'watchdogs' on government especially during times of crisis, while everyday routines and

practices also act to constrain the media's investigative potential. Ownership of media

outlets is one key structural factor necessary to examine in order to understand the

process by which nationally broadcast news stations have become compromised by the

corporations that own them. The political and economic interests of media owners and

managers help to account for the media's receptiveness to the corporate economic

agenda. This issue of corporate ownership creates a powerful conflict of interest, just as

a reliance on advertising for revenue strongly affects media coverage. To illustrate:

General Electric, owner of NBC, MSNBC, and CNBC, is one of the largest military

contractors in America, and has long been a core component of the nexus of shared

interests that President Eisenhower called the military industrial complex (MIC).[15]

Eisenhower warned as far back as 1961 that the MIC could hijack U.S. foreign policy for

its own ends. Chomsky and Herman have argued further that the MIC has expanded into

what could be called a military, industrial and Media complex.[16]

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[14] See Hallin, 59.
[15] See Danny Schechter, "Information Warriors" online at: www.mediachannel.org/views/dissector/io.html (January 23, 2002).
[16] For more on media consolidation and its impact over the past twenty years, see Herman and Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent (1988), Ben Bagdikian, The Media Monopoly (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), Douglas Kellner, From 9/11 to Terror War: The Dangers of the Bush Legacy, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003); and Robert McChesney, Rich Media Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

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In addition to ownership Michael Parenti notes the importance of corporate

interconnections. Media are run like other corporations in the U.S. – by boards of

directors composed mostly of individuals drawn from what C. Wright Mills calls, the

"power elite". These directors are drawn from a narrow, high-income segment of the

population (often ex-government officials) who tend to support conservative viewpoints

and aggressive foreign policies.[17]

One of the most established findings in media research, a finding critical to this

study, is that reporters overwhelmingly turn to official sources for political stories and for

framing the policy content of stories.[18] Moreover, most recent research suggests that in

national security stories, the dominance of official sources (especially the executive

branch) is even more pronounced than for the news as a whole.[19] In addition, instead of

developing an independent relationship with the Pentagon, many members of the press

have become dependent on the military for visuals and information.[20] The media's

underlying pattern of deference to foreign policy elites results in largely unchallenged

reporting of elite definitions of political situations; thus the public continues to hear

mainly what elites choose to make public. The fault here does not lie only with the

media; one of the findings from media effects research done over the years is that

individuals presented in a nonpolitical, or information providing role are more likely to

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[17] Michael Parenti, Inventing Reality: The Politics of News Media, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).
[18] For over-reliance on official sources, see H. Gans, Deciding What's News (New York: Random House, 1979); and L.V. Sigal, Reporters and Officials, (Lexington: Heath, 1973).
[19] See Hallin, Manoff, and Weddle, "Sourcing Patterns of National Security Reporters", in Lance Bennett, Taken By Storm, (1990).
[20] For example, the most exciting visuals shown on the networks during the first Gulf War were compiled from the Pentagon's carefully selected videos of 'precision-guided bombs' destroying their targets. See Jacqueline Sharkey, "Will Truth Again Be the First Casualty?" Posted September 21, 2001 online at: www.public-i.org/story_01_092001.htm

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be seen as being 'credible' to the public than those espousing partisan views.[21]   Along

similar lines, regarding the question of who should decide what news is fit to print, the

Pentagon or the press, a Pew Report study concluded that by almost a two-to-one margin

at the beginning of the war in Afghanistan the answer was, the Pentagon. This is not an

atypical attitude when a country has been attacked, but it has significant implications for

democratic debate during times of crisis as it provides administration elites with a

significant advantage to initiate news and frame content in a beneficial manner.[22]

. It is important to note that it is not simply the use of official sources that gives the

U.S. administration so much influence over news content. It is the combination of using

officials as primary sources of authoritative information, with the norms of "objective"

journalism requiring the journalist to pass on official information without comment on its

accuracy or relevance.[23] As Lance Bennett, noted scholar of political communication

observes, in combination with the accepted norm of looking to official sources for

information is the equally important norm that discourages journalists from appearing

biased by taking sides or appearing to interpret information. Bennett argues that,

"foreign policy information is heavily structured by elite cues, official information and

the policy options considered viable by insiders."[24] Even when debates spin out of

official control, most notably in the form of public protests, 'information boundaries'

reserve the final word in news to journalist's well-cultivated official sources, at the top of

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[21] This suggests a chicken and the egg dilemma in that the practice of turning to official sources for authoritative information in itself provides symbolic recognition of their legitimacy. See Daniel C. Hallin We Keep America on Top of the World: Television Journalism and the Public Sphere (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 49.
[22] For findings see: "Press Coverage and the War on Terrorism", Mark Jurkowitz, Boston globe reporter's comments, (February 22, 2002) online at: http://www.brookings.edu/comm/transcripts/20020227.htm
[23] Hallin 1994, 50.
[24] Lance Bennett, 27-28.

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which is the president, followed by top administration officials, and key members of congress. In what Bennett calls a relatively 'closed information flow' there is little ground for evaluating policies or holding officials accountable.[25]

To set up the discussion that will follow it is useful to develop a working hypothesis regarding what Gramsci's hegemony theory would suggest about the media coverage following September 11, 2001. Hegemony theory would argue that the mainstream media, as part of the dominant class, would act as agents of legitimation, including the legitimation of existing distributions of power, and function in a way that maintains the range of debate between narrow ideological boundaries. Gramscian hegemony theory argues that there are certain fundamental principles that are simply not questioned in the U.S. mainstream media, including the state, hierarchy, and capitalism as mentioned above. More specifically, with respect to foreign policy and America's perceived role in the international arena, there are further fundamental principles that are rarely questioned in the mainstream media. These include such consensus beliefs as: American foreign policy is motivated primarily by a benevolent concern with democracy and human rights; the state only acts violently in self-defence; and America is a strong force for good, surrounded by allies.[26] These are important principles that have become internalized by the American public, and the mass media, and hegemony theory would argue that whatever critical coverage existed during the lead up to the Iraq war would not extend to these "common sense" beliefs. In this way hegemony sets the terms of debate

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[25] Ibid.
[26] See Milan Rai, War Plan Iraq: Ten Reasons Against War on Iraq, (London, New York: Verso, 2002), 190. See also Robert McChesney, "September 11 and the Structural Limitations of US Journalism," in Journalism After September 11, Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan, eds., (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) for more on the limited range of debate.

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for legitimate opposition to the administration's rationales for war which will be explored

in some detail below.

3: THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOLLOWING SEPTEMBER 11TH, 2001

Why Iraq?

There are various speculations regarding the strategic motivations behind the Bush administration's focus on Iraq following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001. The publicly stated rationales involved Iraq's link to terrorism and possession of weapons of mass destruction; however, there are other rationales which warrant mention.

There is significant evidence that the administration's interest in the Middle East, as well as the desire to invade Iraq, began well before the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Indeed, the U.S. interest in the region can be traced as far back as the early 1940s as the Roosevelt administration first established an American presence toward the end of the Second World War. This interest was manifested in 1953 by the CIA's role in the coup that overthrew the Mossadegh government of Iran.[27] This interest took on a new urgency in the wake of the OPEC oil crisis of the 1970s when the United States and the Middle East were involved in a struggle over both price and control. Though not feasible at that time, dominance in the Middle East was very attractive to a small, pro-military group of Washington insiders. These "neoconservatives," played important roles in the Defense Departments of Presidents Ford, Reagan and Bush Sr., and in conservative think tanks throughout the 1980s and '90s. Today these influential strategists occupy several key posts in the White House, Pentagon, and State Department. Principal among them

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[27] See Chomsky and Herman, Manufacturing Consent, (1988); and for a summary of the declassified CIA document on the coup, see http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB28/summary.pdf

are: Dick Cheney, current US Vice-President; Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld; Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz[28]; Richard Perle, past-chairman and still-member of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board that has great influence over foreign military policies; and William Kristol, editor of the Weekly Standard and founder of the powerful, neo-conservative think-tank, Project for a New American Century (PNAC).[29]

PNAC was formed in the spring of 1997 and its overarching goal was the expansion of the U.S. military and American influence around the globe. It exerts significant influence over foreign policy making in Washington in large part due to its founders and affiliates who, in addition to Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz, include: the president's brother, Jeb Bush; Richard Armitage, now Deputy Secretary of State; Robert Zoellick, now U.S. trade commissioner; and Lewis Libby, now Cheney's top aide. The group appeared to place a strong early emphasis on Iraq. In a letter signed by Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and others, to President Clinton in 1998, PNAC wrote: "We urge you to... enunciate a new strategy that would secure the interests of the U.S. and our friends and allies around the world...That strategy should aim, above all, at the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime from power."[30] In 2000, a report drawn up by PNAC was circulating in the Bush administration entitled: "Rebuilding American Defense: Strategies, Forces and Resources for a New American Century." The document spelled out a plan for U.S. global hegemony based on American military dominance and control

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[28] Wolfowitz served as Defense Secretary from 2001-2005; he has recently been unanimously confirmed to head the World Bank. See Tony Allen-Millsen, "Wolfowitz Flies into World Bank Storm", The Sunday Times, (March, 2005), at: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2089-1533086,00.html
[29] See Project Censored's 2005 top story, "The Neoconservative Plan for Global Dominance", online at: http://www.projectcensored.org/publications/2004/1.html
[30] For full text see www.newamericancentury.org/iraqclintonletter.htm

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of global economic markets, including the preservation of a "favourable balance of power in the Middle East and surrounding energy producing region."[31]

Critics of this position argue that the economic explanation is far too simplistic and offer alternative strategic motivations behind the interest in Iraq. Gwynne Dyer, in a recent book entitled, Future Tense: The Coming World Order, admits the oil explanation does "hold a certain amount of water given the strategic obsessions of the neo-conservatives and the Bush administration's close, almost symbiotic relationship with the U.S. energy industry." However, he stresses that "nobody would invade an entire country out of the blue for such remote or paltry reasons, and the seemingly bigger reasons - 'security of oil supplies' or keeping the oil price down - simply do not make sense."[32] Rather, Dyer argues that the overarching motive uniting the administrations was the desire to "preserve Pax Americana" and "a unipolar 21st Century". Support for this position can be found by looking back to the radical 1992 "Defense Planning Guide" authored by Lewis Libby and Paul Wolfowitz which called for permanent American military pre-eminence over all of Europe, Asia and the Middle East and argued for the need to use pre-emptive force against states suspected of developing weapons of mass destruction.[33] This was reiterated by PNAC's 2000 vision statement which began: "The United States is the world's only superpower, combining preeminent military power, global technological leadership, and the world's largest economy… America's grand strategy should aim to preserve and extend this advantageous position as far into the future as possible… Yet no moment in international politics can be frozen in time; even a

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[31] The 2000 plan is available at www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf, p. 5.
[32] Gwynne Dyer, Future Tense: The Coming World Order, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2004), 138.
[33] Key excerpts from the 1992 draft can be found online at:
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/iraq/etc/wolf.html

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global *Pax Americana* will not preserve itself."[34] This vision was further solidified in

President Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) which posited a global order

based upon the indefinite expansion of U.S. military and economic primacy.[35]

Richard Clarke, President Bush's advisor on terrorism until he resigned in March,

2003, also maintains in his book, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror,

that the plan to attack Iraq pre-dated the 9/11 attacks. He states that as early as the day

after the attacks, instead of discussing plans to prevent follow-on attacks by Al Qaeda,

the DOD's focus had already shifted to Iraq. In his own words:

> I expected to go back into a round of meetings examining what the next
> attacks could be, what our vulnerabilities were, what we could do about
> them in the short term. Instead I walked into a series of discussions about
> Iraq. At first I was incredulous that we were talking about something
> other than getting Al Qaeda. Then I realized with almost a sharp physical
> pain that Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz were going to try to take advantage of
> this national tragedy to promote their agenda about Iraq. Since the
> beginning of the administration, indeed well before, they had been
> pressing for a war with Iraq.[36]

However, Clarke argues that there is rarely a single reason why a nation decides to go to

war, and puts forth five rationales attributed to Cheney, Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld, and

President Bush which were reportedly discussed in relation to Iraq. The first was to

"clean up the mess left by the first Bush administration" in 1991, and finally remove

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[34] PNAC www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf

[35] This silver thread of unilateralist 'primacist' impulse runs through the DPG (Defense Planning Guide, 1992), PNAC (2000) and the NSS (2002). In the last chapter of the NSS the document stated that the U.S. government would "build and maintain our defenses beyond challenge", enabling the military to "dissuade future military competition" in this way attempting to prevent all future peer competitors from even attempting to match American capabilities. See George Bush, The National Security Strategy of the United States (Washington: The White House, 17 September 2002), 2, 30-31. Online at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html

[36] Richard Clarke, Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror, (New York, London: Free Press, 2004), 30. Clarke also served as counter terrorism advisor for Clinton, and held high level posts going back to the Reagan administration.

Saddam Hussein from power. The second was to eliminate the threat Iraq posed to Israel thereby improving the U.S. ally's strategic position in the region. The third was the goal of creating an Arab democracy that could serve as an example to other friendly Arab states such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The fourth was that a military presence in Iraq would allow for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Saudi Arabia where they were a source of anti-American sentiment destabilizing to the regime. The last rationale Clarke cited was the goal of creating another friendly source of oil for the U.S. market.[37] It is Clarke's belief that all of these motivations played a role, the largest concern being the long-term instability of Saudi Arabia.

It is important to stress that these possible strategic motivations behind the invasion of Iraq were rarely articulated publicly. Instead, the administration attempted to link the invasion of Iraq to the larger 'war on terror', and this was where strategic communication and initial frames would be especially important in garnering public support.

Framing the Debate

Governmental communication strategy requires the framing of events in a way which promotes particular perceptions and interpretations that are congruent with the administration's agenda. According to Robert Entman, framing entails "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution".[38]

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[37] Ibid, 265.
[38] Robert Entman, "Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame After 9/11," Political Communication, (2003), 417.

Governments have a long tradition of trying to sell images of foreign policy to the media who then repackage them for distribution to the general public. The administration's appeal to patriotism and their attempt to co-opt the media were both historically typical initiatives for a government bent on war. President Truman in the 1950's appealed to top newspaper editors to back the Cold War with a "campaign for truth" in which "our great public information channels" (the media as referred to by Dean Acheson) would enlist.[39] John MacArthur, editor of Harper's, argues that, from building consensus to launching a war, foreign policy must involve both the balance of military calculations, as well as the use of 'strategic communications techniques' in order to manage the media and thereby establish hegemony over public discourse. These include sophisticated public relations and news management aimed at public diplomacy, or the selling of foreign policy at home.[40] This argument that public opinion matters in foreign policy making has not always been taken seriously. In fact, in the 1960's it was the elite model of foreign policy which was made popular by Bernard Cohen and best expressed by the catchphrase, "to hell with public opinion".[41] However, Mattelart argues, due to recent advances in communication technology, including the rapid pace of information flow, public opinion's potential influence on foreign policy making has increased significantly. The bottom line, according to Mattelart, is that "massive audience intervention by way of the television screen has become a strategic item of war in the

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[39] See Danny Schechter, "Information Warriors", (January, 2002), online at: www.mediachannel.org
[40] Cited in Lance Bennett, "The News about Foreign Policy" in Taken by Storm, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1994), 17.
[41] Bernard Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

post-modern age."[42]   In short, what is clear about the foreign policy world today is that

public information management, and the initial framing of key issues, is a fundamental

part of the policy process. The Bush administration's media strategy including such

techniques as specific word choices, deliberate withholding of information, and careful

attention to timing, was a calculated attempt to dominate the terms and limits of public

discussion.

For instance, in the weeks after 9/11, the question "Why do they hate us?" was

commonly asked.   In George W. Bush's first speech to the nation, he laid the foundation

for a communication strategy that would steer the public towards the administration's

preferred framing of the 'war on terror' that was soon to begin. Rather than encourage

any meaningful discussion of the question above, Bush provided a simple, emotionally

charged answer: "America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for

freedom and opportunity in the world".[43] Bush defined the event as "an act of war" and

identified its clear cause as an "enemy" that was "evil". Dick Cheney, Colin Powell, and

other officials used these same words repeatedly in the days and months following 9/11.[44]

Repeating the words *war* and *evil*, as the President did (twelve and five times

respectively) in his State of the Union speech on January 29, 2002, was one part of the

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[42] Armand Mattelart and Michele Mattelart, "On New Uses of Media in Time of Crisis", in Media Crisis, and Democracy: Mass Communications and the Disruption of Social Order, Marc Raboy and Bernard Dagenais (eds.), (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 177. For more on mass media's effect on public opinion see Ronald Hinkley, People, Polls, and Policy Makers: American Public Opinion and National Security, (New York: Lexington Books, 1992).

[43] Bush's address, September, 2001, CNN website online at: http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/11/bush.speech.text For more on the media's practice of framing complex policy situations in personal and emotional terms see Shanto Iyengar, Is Anyone Responsible: How Television Frames Political Issues, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[44] David Domke points out that a notable aspect of the administration's communication strategy included an unprecedented pace of televised national addresses between September 11 and May 1 – more than a dozen. See, God Willing: Political Fundamentalism in the White House, the War on Terror and the Echoing Press, (London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2004), 19.

Bush administration's strategy of framing the attacks in an attempt to unite the country

behind its solution: a *war* against terrorism, and ridding the world of *evil* by invading

Afghanistan and Iraq.[45] As media scholar Robert Entman points out, there were of course

other ways in which the administration could have interpreted and responded to the

attacks, but they chose to present this unambiguous and emotionally charged frame to the

public.[46] This was a useful way to define what had happened in order to lay the

groundwork for public support of a war. Bush further simplified his position by stating:

"You're either with us, or you're with the terrorists."[47] By doing so, an artificial

dichotomy was created whereby one could not even suggest the possibility of legitimate

grievances without being deemed sympathetic to bin Laden's reactionary ideology. The

peace movement said nothing that remotely justified the killing of innocent Americans -

quite the opposite - yet they were consistently portrayed as anti-American or on the side

of the terrorists, by both the administration, and by most of the mainstream media. In the

days and years to come, the "attack on Freedom" became a consistently repeated and

effective pro-war mantra.[48]

Again, this is a useful strategy to garner support for war, but it leaves little room

for critical thinking about alternative reasons the U.S. may have been attacked, thus

eliminating the need for discussion of alternative responses.[49] This is significant

especially because nearly all of the evidence undermines the Bush administration's

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[45] President Bush, State of the Union Address, January, 29, 2002 White House website:
http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html
[46] Robert Entman. "Cascading Activation", 416.
[47] Transcript of President Bush's address September 20th 2001 online at:
http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/
[48] See Rahul Mahajan, The New Crusade: America's War on Terrorism, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002).
[49] For suggestions about logical responses that would have improved relations with the Middle East rather than ignite future generations of hatred toward the U.S. see Richard Clarke, Against All Enemies, 247-287.

framing of the rationales for the 9/11 attacks. The respected historian Howard Zinn

argues that the troops stationed in Saudi Arabia, U.S. support for Israel, and the decade of

sanctions placed against Iraq are the issues that come up again and again in the press of

other nations.[50] Even when Bin Laden was invoking religious symbolism and Islam, it is

clear from interviews with Robert Fisk that he was also outraged over the military

presence in Saudi Arabia and U.S. policies in Israel and Iraq.[51] One of Michael

Scheuer's main motivations for writing his book, Imperial Hubris, was to expose one of

the most dangerous misperceptions in the Bush administration and their message to the

public. This is that Bin Laden's war against America has nothing to do with "freedom,

liberty, and democracy, but has everything to do with U.S. policies and actions in the

Middle East."[52]

Moreover, the evidence provided by al Qaeda experts such as Richard Clarke and

Michael Scheuer provides a strong case that invading Iraq as a step towards fighting the

'war on terror' was the worst possible move the administration could have made.[53]

Clarke states that "nothing America could have done would have provided al Qaeda and

its new generation of cloned groups a better recruitment device than our unprovoked

invasion of an oil-rich Arab country."[54] A recent report released by the National

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[50] Howard Zinn, Terrorism and War (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002).
[51] Robert Fisk. "Osama bin Laden: The Godfather of Terror?", The Independent, (15 September 2003), 7.
Furthermore, whatever considerations were in the fanatical mind of bin Laden or his network, his broadcast
statements contained no mention of resentments towards American democracy or freedom. The
propaganda points in al Qaeda's recruiting video have to do with U.S. domination of the region, not with
the internal organization of American society.
[52] Michael Scheuer is a long time Al Qaeda specialist, and author of the book Imperial Hubris: Why the
West is Losing the War on Terror (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's Inc., 2004), x.
[53] Although Clarke doubts that anyone had the chance to make a case to Bush that attacking Iraq would
make America less secure and strengthen the terrorist movement, certainly not from his tight circle of
senior advisors. See also Michael Scheuer, who argues that "The United States of America remains bin
Laden's only indispensable ally." in Imperial Hubris, xv.
[54] Clarke, 246.

Intelligence Council (NIC), including the analysis of 1,000 U.S. and foreign experts, confirms Clarke's position. David Low, NIC officer, states that Iraq now provides terrorists with "a training ground, a recruitment ground, the opportunity for enhancing technical skills", and according to NIC Chairman, Robert Hutchings, "At the moment," Iraq "is a magnet for international terrorist activity."[55] Scheuer argues that it was the administration's fundamental failure to fully understand the nature of the terrorist threat from al Qaeda, combined with 'hubris', which led the U.S. into a war which currently has no end in sight. He also argues that regardless of U.S. motivations behind the war in Iraq, information regarding the way in which bin Laden supporters and the broader Islamic world would interpret the U.S. invasion – as an unprovoked and unjustified attack against Islam - could easily be drawn from the public library, and the Internet.[56] Because this information was readily available it begs the question: why did the mainstream U.S. media not investigate the administration's claim that attacking Iraq would make America more secure and less vulnerable to future terrorist attacks when the evidence suggested the reverse? This point will be returned to after examining further publicly articulated rationales for targeting Iraq in connection with the broader 'war on terror'.

Further Rationales for War: Iraq's Ties to al Qaeda, WMD's, and the 'Imminent Threat'

Regardless of the actual motivations of the Bush administration there appeared to be three key justifications for the war in Iraq which were repeated often to the American

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[55] See Dana Priest, "Iraq New Terrorist Breeding Ground: War Created Haven, CIA Advisors Report, Washington Post, (January 14, 2005), online at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A7460-2005Jan13.html and for full report, see NIC: "Mapping the Global Future" online at: http://www.cia.gov/nic/NIC_globaltrend2020.html

[56] See Scheuer, Imperial Hubris, (p 9-14) for an in-depth analysis of the way in which the Islamic world perceives American foreign policy in the region.

public: Iraq had ties to Al Qaeda; Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction; and Iraq constituted an imminent threat both to its neighbours and to America. This communication strategy zeroed in on attempting to further justify an invasion of Iraq, by implicitly and explicitly linking the attack on Iraq to the larger 'war on terror'.

The rationale put to the public that the administration had a genuine concern with the issue of counter-proliferation in so-called 'rogue states' has some merit. The National Security Strategy does formally commit the U.S. to a policy of counter-proliferation, while clearly incorporating anticipatory self-defense or preemptive actions to be taken even at the mere emergence of potential threats.[57] The argument according to this perspective is that the United States could justify the attack against Iraq by categorizing it as an act of self-defence. Because of the new threats faced by the U.S. in the wake of September 11th, it is argued that a more appropriate understanding of the right of self-defence under international law should be extended to include the authorization of pre-emptive attacks against *potential* aggressors.[58] There is considerable scepticism among legal scholars about the legitimacy of this attempt to unilaterally rewrite international law but that discussion remains beyond the scope of this paper. The focus will return to the three most prevalent rationales for war expressed by President Bush and his senior advisors when making the case for invading Iraq - all of which have since proven to be false.

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[57] Joseph Rotblat, "The Nuclear Threat is Real – But from the US, Not Iraq", Global Anti-Americanism (Winter, 2003), 73.

[58] Michael Byers, Professor of Law at UBC Liu Centre, argued this policy was aimed at "effectively closing down dangerous regimes before they become imminent threats" and thus represented a usurpation of the Security Council's role in global affairs. For more discussion of the Bush Doctrine of pre-emption see http://www.crimesofwar.org/expert/bush-intro.html

The Bush administration based its justification for war first and foremost on there

being weapons of mass destruction in violation of UN Security Council Resolutions. In

the months leading up to the war in Iraq, Americans and the world were repeatedly told

by the Bush administration that Iraq possessed massive quantities of prohibited chemical,

biological, and nuclear weapons, as well as dozens of long-range ballistic missiles; and

that they were capable of delivering this deadly arsenal to Iraq's neighbours, thereby

threatening international peace and security. Furthermore, if these alleged weapons were

to fall into the hands of an anti-American terrorist organization, this would directly

threaten the security of the American homeland.[59]

In a statement by Bush made on October 7th, 2002, on the eve of the congressional

vote to grant the president authority to wage war on Iraq, he warned:

> We know that the regime has produced thousands of tons of chemical
> agents, including mustard gas, sarin nerve gas, VX nerve gas...every
> chemical and biological weapon that Iraq has or makes is a direct violation
> of the truce that ended the Persian Gulf War in 1991. Yet, Saddam
> Hussein has chosen to build and keep these weapons despite international
> sanctions, UN demands, and isolation from the civilized world.[60]

On January 28th, 2003 in a State of the Union Address President Bush further stated:

"Our intelligence officials estimate that Saddam Hussein had the materials to produce as

much as 500 tons of sarin, mustard and VX nerve agent" and "upwards of 30,000 munitions

capable of delivering chemical agents... ."[61] Donald Rumsfeld even asserted, "We know

where they are. They are in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad and east, west, south and

[59] For more on weapons the Bush administration claimed Iraq had see Scott Ritter, Frontier Justice:
Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Bushwhacking of America, (New York: Context Books, 2003).
[60] George Bush October 7, 2002 full speech can be found online at:
http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A56050-2002Oct7?language=printer
[61] http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.htm 1

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north somewhat".[62]   According to a report compiled by the Committee on Government

Reform in March, 2004, President Bush, Vice President, Cheney, Defense Secretary

Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell, and National Security Advisor,

Condoleezza Rice made 81 such statements about Iraq's nuclear activities, and 84

statements about Iraq's chemical and biological weapons capabilities in over 125 separate

appearances between March 2002, a year before the invasion, and January 2004.[63]

All current evidence shows that this information was false, and there were no

weapons of mass destruction. Charles Duelfer was the leading American expert on the

issue, having spent over ten years working on Iraqi WMD analysis for the U.S. and the

UN. In 2002, he stated clearly that he believed there were no remaining large or

threatening stockpiles in Iraq. In October, 2004, Charles Duelfer's official report to

Congress, based on the 15 months work of the CIA-linked Iraq Survey Group (ISG), re-

confirmed that Iraq had no stockpiles of WMDs, it had no weapons to give to al-Qaeda,

and it had no viable programs to resume making weapons.[64] Yes, Iraq had them in 1992,

and it was this dated information that the Bush administration gave to Congress and the

American public – not any reliable current estimations. Even the CIA's publicly released

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[62] ABC news broadcast, "This Week with George Stephanopoulos", March 30, 2003.

[63] Iraq on the Record: The Bush administration's Public Statements on Iraq, United States House of
Representatives, (March 16, 2004), at: www.reform.house.gov/min

[64] Full report can be found at http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2002/Duelfer.pdf The report also
offered as an explanation for intelligence failures that Saddam's government was bent on portraying itself
as having a WMD (or near WMD) capability for deterrent purposes, and that their deceptions 'worked'.
David Kay, Duelfer's predecessor, originated this argument but also maintained that the intelligence
community's understanding of Iraq's WMD program between 1991 and 2003 was far from complete and as
such was "always bounded by large uncertainties and had to be heavily caveated." See his October 7
statement online at http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/10/02/kay.report/. What is clear is that the
administration failed to mention any of these uncertainties and thus misrepresented the threat of WMD's to
the public. See the Congressional Report on the U.S Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence
regarding the administrations exaggerations of (bad) intelligence online at:
http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/library/congress/2004_rpt/iraq-wmd-intell_ron-wyden.htm

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analysis concluded that there was little risk of Iraq using WMD's against the U.S. *unless* the U.S. attacked them.[65]

Another key component of the administration's case for war was the claim that Iraq was supporting Al Qaeda.[66] These claims were also disputed by many intelligence officials, yet Bush, Cheney, Rice, Rumsfeld, and Powell, regularly failed to mention the doubts or weaknesses in their case. According to the report conducted by the Committee for Government Reform, they made 61 misleading statements concerning the strength of the Iraq-Al Qaeda connection in 52 separate public appearances.[67] In the famous "Top Gun" speech on the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln, the President claimed that the invasion of Iraq was just one battle in the 'War on Terrorism' that began on September 11. After repeatedly hearing remarks such as that, it is not difficult to understand why 70 percent of the American people believed that Saddam Hussein had attacked the Pentagon and the World Trade Center in 2001.[68] If there had been concrete evidence of Iraq giving funds or safe haven to al Qaeda before the invasion, one would assume that the administration would have produced it.[69] The definitive word regarding the lack of Al Qaeda connection came from the Congressional 9/11 Commission in a 2004 report that

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[65] Congressional Record, October 7, 2002, at http://www.fas.org/irp/news/2002/10/dci100702.html If the administration really did believe that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, then according to the CIA, invading was the most irresponsible and dangerous action the U.S. could have taken.

[66] However, there is significant evidence that the administration was largely uninterested in the topic of terrorism by al Qaeda prior to the September 11th attacks. Richard Clarke testified that he had "urgently" called for a meeting to discuss the al Qaeda threat with the Principals Committee on January 25th, yet it took until September 4th 2001 for him to finally get one. In addition, Clarke, CIA director George Tenet, and deputy director John McLaughlin all agreed that there was no evidence of any active Iraqi terrorist threat against the U.S. at the time of the invasion. See Clarke, Against All Enemies, 237.

[67] "Iraq on the Record: The Bush administration's Public Statements on Iraq", United States House of Representatives March 16, 2004. online at: www.reform.house.gov/min

[68] See Dana Milbank and Claudia Deane, "Hussein Link to 9/11 Lingers in Many Minds", The Washington Post, (September 6, 2003; p.A01), online at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&contentId=A32862-2003Sep5&notFound=true

[69] Ironically, there was evidence that Iran provided safe haven to Al Qaeda before and after 9/11, while Saudi Arabia provided them with funding. See Clarke, Against All Enemies, 270.

stated "We have no credible evidence that Iraq and al Qaeda cooperated on attacks against the United States".[70] President Bush finally conceded in September, 2004, that "we have no evidence that Saddam was involved with the 11 September attacks".[71]

The final impression the administration conveyed to the public was that Saddam Hussein represented an "imminent threat" to his neighbours and to America thereby presenting a sense of urgency to the situation. On October 2, 2002, Bush clearly stated that "the Iraqi regime is a threat of unique urgency... it has developed weapons of mass death"[72] On November 20, 2002, Bush stated "Today the world is...uniting to answer the unique and urgent threat posed by Iraq."[73] Other similar statements were repeated by Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell and Rice, despite the fact that Director of the CIA categorically stated on February 5 2004 that the U.S. intelligence community "never said there was an 'imminent' threat."[74] According to Mel Goodman, a veteran CIA analyst who now teaches at the National War College: "There was never a clear and present danger. There was never an imminent threat. Iraq - and we have very good intelligence on this - was never part of the picture of terrorism."[75]

In total, the report conducted by the Committee for Government Reform found 237 specific misleading statements about the threat posed by Iraq including the portrayal

[70] See 9/11 Commission Report to Congress at: http://www.9-11commission.gov/

[71] See "Bush Rejects Saddam 9/11 Link" at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3118262.stm and Richard Clarke, Against All Enemies, 268. Incidentally, there was an al Qaeda affiliate group terrorist training camp in Northern Iraq (controlled by Saddam's opponents) which was known to the Bush administration, however rather than bomb it after the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration chose to wait eighteen months instead. See Clarke, 270.

[72] White House, President, House Leadership Agree on Iraq Resolution (October 2, 2002).

[73] President Bush Speaks to Atlantic Youth Council (November 20, 2002).

[74] CIA, Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet at Georgetown University (February 5, 2004).

[75] Andrew Gumbel, "Case for War Confected, Say Top US Officials," (November 9, 2003). http://www.independent-media.tv/item.cfm?fmedia_id=3628&fcategory_desc=Under%20Reported; also see the Congressional Report on the U.S Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence online at: http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/library/congress/2004_rpt/iraq-wmd-intell_ron-wyden.htm

of Iraq as an urgent or imminent threat; overestimating Iraq's nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons capability; and dubious statements regarding Iraq's support of al Qaeda during 125 public appearances.[76] These misstatements were repeated over and over again by the president and his administration when drumming up support for the 'war on terror'.

Given the range of motivations suggested for the administration's focus on Iraq it is impossible to determine which factor, or combination of factors, was most prevalent in making the decision to invade Iraq. A country's decision to wage war is always a complex and multi-faceted process. Furthermore, it is impossible to know for certain what went on in the minds of Bush and his senior advisors. Deception, distortion, misjudgment, incompetence, hubris, groupthink, and a fundamental failure to understand the nature of the continuing terrorist threat to the U.S. are among the most prevalent interpretations put forth to explain the administration's desire to launch a war against Iraq. It is impossible to say with certainty whether or not the Bush administration believed the validity of the evidence they gave to the public. Gwynne Dyer suggests that the extent to which the administration ended up believing its own "cooked intelligence" about Iraq's non-existent weapons of mass destruction is debatable.[77] The point remains that all the evidence has since proven to be false, and there was enough counter intelligence, and counter evidence available to the media that had they acted in an even semi-competent manner and investigated the publicly stated claims of the administration prior to the war, they could have presented alternative frames and interpretations to the public, generated discussion, and perhaps averted a war.

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[76] Iraq on the Record: The Bush administration's Public Statements on Iraq, United States House of Representatives March 16, 2004, online at: www.reform.house.gov/min
[77] Dyer, 137.

To conclude this section it is useful to understand the power of these initial frames. The pioneering cognitive linguist George Lakoff has researched the importance and longevity of initial frames, and they should not be underestimated. Lakoff describes the powerful metaphors that were employed following 9/11 in order to frame going to war in Iraq in ways that would appear justifiable to the American people and the military. Two scenarios that have worked well in the past are what he calls the Self-defence Scenario, and the Rescue Scenario. What occurred in speeches by Bush and the administration was the attempt to link Saddam to Al Qaeda, thus making a case for a self-defence scenario, and hence for a 'just' war on those grounds. The Rescue Scenario was the default option when no WMD stockpiles were found and the administration needed another way to legitimize the war. In this scenario the administration portrayed the Iraqi people and Saddam's neighbours as victims whom he was seen as "threatening." This is the reason the administration repeatedly listed Saddam's crimes against the Iraqi people and the weapons he could use to harm his neighbours.[78]

It was obvious to most governments that those metaphors did not fit the situation, and that the war was not a "legal" war, but most Americans accepted these metaphors as they were led to do by the administration, a generally credulous media, and the lack of effective opposition by Democrats.[79] Interestingly, Lakoff is not a proponent of 'the

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[78] See George Lakoff, "Metaphor and War Again", Alternet (March, 2003), online at: http://dpingles.ugr.es/lies/metaphor_and_war_again.htm
[79] It is important to stress that most legal commentators deemed the war in Iraq an illegal one on the grounds that the Security Council did not authorize the use of force, nor was Iraq an "imminent threat." See Severin Carrell and Robert Verkaik, "War on Iraq was Illegal, Say Top Lawyers" in The Independent, (May 25, 2003), online at http://globalsecurity.com/war_on.htm and Jeff Sallot, "Attack Illegal Experts Say," in The Globe and Mail, (Thursday, March 20, 2003). UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan also made clear the war was illegal: "I have indicated it was not in conformity with the UN charter from our point of view, from the charter point of view, it was illegal." See BBC news broadcast September 16, 2004 online at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3661134.stm

Truth will set you free' line of thinking. This is due to one of the fundamental findings of cognitive science – people think in terms of preconceived and usually unconscious frames and metaphors. The lack of a credible link between Saddam and Al Qaeda, and the idea that large numbers of innocent Iraqi civilians would be killed or maimed by U.S. bombs, each failed to lead Americans to a more rational conclusion, since either would contradict "common sense" about the nobility of U.S. policy. In Lakoff's view, "The frames are in the synapses of our brains – physically present in the form of neural circuitry. When the facts don't fit the frames, the frames are kept and the facts ignored.....Framing matters. Frames once entrenched are hard to dispel."[80]

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[80]Lakoff, "Metaphor and War Again", online at: http://dpingles.ugr.es/lies/metaphor_and_war_again.htm

4:   MEDIA FRAMES

No government can be depended upon to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—especially not when that government makes mistakes or misjudgements in war time. The natural inclination then is to cover up, to hide, and the press's role, in war even more than in peace, is to act as a watchdog and truth seeker.[81]   Stanley Cloud, post-Gulf War mediator.

News Coverage

This section of the study addresses the question of news content following September 11, 2001, and the dominant media frames found on major television networks. Data will be presented which suggests that the media focused heavily on official, pro-administration sources, failed to debate the range of alternative viewpoints and responses to September 11th, and acted, by and large, as a conduit for the Bush administration's 'war on terror'.

The attitude of the press toward government officials following 9/11 was anything but adversarial. Indeed, the media made clear its desire to enlist in the war effort. The dominant response on U.S. television was to frame the attacks as an "act of war" requiring military retaliation. Dan Rather expressed it best on the Late Show with David Letterman: "George Bush is the President. He makes the decisions and, you know, it's just one American, wherever he wants me to line up, just tell me where."[82] The American flag became dominant in all the major television news logos along with slogans such as "War on America", "America's New War" and "America Strikes Back"

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[81] Cited in Schechter, "Information Warriors."

[82] Dan Rather on David Letterman, (9/17/01). Ironically, Rich Noyes, the right-wing Media Resource Center's director of analysis said, "Dan Rather' has been just fine on this one". See Jim Rutenberg and Bill Carter, "Network Coverage a Target of Fire from Conservatives", New York Times, (November 7, 2001).

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which assumed only a military response would be appropriate. CNN was perhaps the most aggressive in presenting the patriotic message. By November, 2001 the network had developed a 30 second collage of military and patriotic images that "identified the US, war, Bush and CNN in a harmonious unity of patriotism and goodness".[83] When the US began its military action in Afghanistan, CNN President Walter Isaacson stated, "It seems perverse to focus too much on the casualties or hardship in Afghanistan" and then circulated a memo telling CNN commentators that when they mentioned casualties, they should "balance" them with reminders of the horrors of the 9/11 attacks.[84]

As Bob Woodward reports in his book, Bush at War, Fox News President Roger Ailes (former adviser to Nixon, Reagan, and Bush Sr.), sent a confidential communication to the White House urging Bush to act quickly and harshly following 9/11 on the basis that support for Bush would "dissipate if the public did not see [the President] acting harshly."[85]

Further examples of media enthusiasm to endorse and encourage the administration's line include Fox "Special Report" host Brit Hume's suggestion of subtle disdain for anyone doubting the efficacy of U.S. military strategy with this segue: "We have to take a quick break for other headlines here, but when we return, find out what some of these military pessimists are saying now..."; and CNN anchorman Aaron Brown trying to form a question to former General Wesley Clark: "All right, lets start ratcheting

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[83] Douglas Kellner, From 9/11 to Terror War: The Dangers of the Bush Legacy, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.,2003) 105.
[84] See Howard Kurtz, "CNN Chief Orders 'Balance' in War News: Reporters Are Told to Remind Viewers Why US is Bombing", Washington Post, (October 31, 2001).
[85] Bob Woodward, Bush at War, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 207.

up the military option. Who do we bomb, where do we invade, who do we go after, how do we do it, where do we start? Where do we start?"[86]

A more quantitative indication of the pro-administration emphasis in the media in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 was revealed by a Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) survey which covered CBS, ABC and CNN from September 12 to 17. Out of 189 "expert" guests 105 were American government officials, 50 were specialists, 18 were corporate representatives, 10 were religious figures, and 6 people were from advocacy organizations. Of the 50 specialists, only 9 covered the Middle East or Afghanistan policy, and they were from organizations like the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Rand Corporation, both closely associated with the U.S. military. The study found no foreign policy experts from the left, and no peace advocates; in other words, nobody appeared who was likely to challenge the idea of a military response to the 9/11 attacks.[87]

A further study conducted by FAIR just prior to the invasion of Iraq found that of the 393 sources quoted on ABC, NBC, CBS, and PBS evening news shows during the week just before and after Colin Powell's February 5 presentation to the U.N., 75 percent were associated with the U.S. government or with governments that supported the Bush administration's position on Iraq, and only two percent of those were critical of or opposed to the war. In total, just 17 percent of guests were critical of the administration's

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[86] Return to Normalcy: How the Media Covered the War on Terrorism found online at:
http://www.journalism.org/resources/research/reports/normalcy/versus.asp
[87] Rahul Mahajan. The New Crusade: America's War on Terrorism, (New York: Monthly Review Press 2002) See also Extra! (November/December, 2001) and Robert McChesney "September 11 and the Structural Limitations of U.S. Journalism" in Journalism after September 11, (London: Routledge, 2002), 97.

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policy, the majority of whom were non-Americans. Less than one percent were affiliated with organized protests or the peace movement.[88]

Similar results were found in a study conducted by the Project for Excellence in Journalism with Princeton Survey Research Associates. The study examined all stories relevant to the 'war on terror' (clean up of ground zero or personal stories of victims and their families were not considered relevant), and then tallied whether the statements and assertions in the story were entirely pro-official U.S. response (100 percent), predominantly so (at least 74 percent), mixed (25 to 74 percent), predominantly anti-official U.S. response (less than (25 percent), or entirely anti-official U.S. response. Taking all the coverage combined, 49 percent of the applicable stories contained only viewpoints that entirely favoured U.S. policy, thirteen percent that predominantly favoured U.S. policy, and the percentage of stories that might be perceived as largely providing the 'other side' or dissenting from the administration point of view, never exceeded 10 percent. To put it another way, during the periods examined, the press's pro-administration and official U.S. viewpoints were as high as 71% early on, and while the balance of viewpoints broadened somewhat over the course of the study, criticism of the administration's agenda never exceeded 10 percent.[89]

The study also found that the medium makes a difference. Television was much more decidedly pro-administration – 83 percent 'mostly' or 'entirely' in September, 62 percent in November, and 74 percent in December. Television networks were also

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[88] FAIR, "Action Alert: In Iraq Crisis Networks are Megaphones for Officials' Views", (March 18, 2003).
[89] The study involved a detailed examination of 2,496 stories contained on television, magazines and newspapers during three key periods in mid-September, mid-November and mid-December. http://www.journalism.org/publ_research/normalcyplain.html

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measurably less likely to include criticism of the administration than the print media.[90]

Overall, the study concluded that any suggestion that the media are by nature anti-administration or adversarial to government views is simply not reflected in the numbers. "The press coverage has been demonstrably pro-administration or pro U.S. policy in the viewpoints it has reflected."[91] In the initial aftermath of September 11th, solid sourcing and 'factualness' (facts = official sources) dominated the coverage of bombings and their aftermath, and 75 percent of what the press reported was a straightforward accounting of events by administration or other officials.[92]

It seems clear from the data that the media implicitly took the point of view of the American government following the attacks of September 11. It can be argued that even when more debate was noticeable it was contained within a narrow range of opinion. The Iraq debate coverage focused more on what journalists call hard news, specific military plans, numbers of soldiers to be sent, debates over certain tactical questions, etc. In other words, the focus was not on motivations behind the war – those were all official frames and were taken for granted – Saddam is evil, he has weapons of mass destruction, is an imminent threat to his neighbours and the United States, and the war in Iraq is "the first step in the larger war on terror" which implied some connection to al Qaeda. There was strikingly little debate regarding the issue of whether or not the U.S. should go into Iraq, if this was the best way to deal with the new threat of terrorism, or questioning of the administration's reasons for its necessity.[93]

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[90] Ibid.

[91] ibid

[92] ibid

[93] For more on media failure to investigate administration's rationales see, Rick Mercier, "Why the Media Owe You an Apology on Iraq", FreeLance Star, (March 28, 2004); and Orville Schell, "Why the Media Failed Us in Iraq", History News Network (February 9, 2005) at http://hnn.us/articles/6209.html

Public Opinion

As a way to further test the similarity between the frames of the administration and the

frames found in the media one can look to public opinion polls for supportive evidence.[94]

Despite the complete lack of evidence that Saddam Hussein was involved in 9/11, polls

conducted in April of 2003, (and again still in April of 2004) showed that the majority of

Americans had come to believe that he was personally involved in the attacks.[95]

According to a Harris poll, in June of 2003, 69 percent of Americans believed that Iraq

had WMD's when the war began, and in June of 2004, 69 percent also believed that

Saddam Hussein was supporting al Qaeda terrorists.[96]

In an October 2003 study conducted by the Program on International Policy

Attitudes (PIPA) three major misperceptions were found among the American public:

that evidence between Iraq and Al Qaeda had been found; that weapons of mass

destruction had been found in Iraq; and that world public opinion favoured the U.S.-led

invasion of Iraq. As noted above, massive evidence disproves all three misperceptions,

and even the Bush administration has finally admitted they are false. The study found

that a majority of sixty percent had at least one of these three misperceptions. The study

also found that those who held misperceptions were far more likely to be supportive of

the administration's decision to go to war.

Another significant finding was that the extent of American's misperceptions

varied significantly depending on their source of news. Those who received the majority

[94] As previously stated, most people get most of their information about foreign affairs from the major mass media, especially television; a full 90 percent of Americans had turned to television for their news following the 9/11 attacks.

[95] Los Angeles Times poll, April 2-3, 2003, accessed January 31, 2005, online at: www.pollingreport.com/iraq.htm

[96] The Harris poll, June, 2003, June 2004, accessed January 31, 2005, online at: www.pollingreport.com/iraq.htm

of their news from Fox News were most likely to have one or more of the three

misperceptions about the war: a full 80 percent in fact. Misperceptions that there was

evidence of Al Qaeda links, WMD's found, and favourable world opinion prior to the

war were also found in the majority of CBS, ABC, NBC, and CNN watchers, though

none reached the level of Fox viewers. 71 percent of CBS watchers, 61 percent of ABC

watchers, and 55 percent of both NBC and CNN viewers held one or more

misperceptions.[97]

In short, these misperceptions are a direct result of the administration's official

communication strategy, which attempted to link Iraq to the broader 'war on terror'. The

study found that belief in these misperceptions strongly correlated with support for the

war, and that even the majority of Bush's supporters would not have supported his

invasion of Iraq had they not been blinded by the administration's campaign that was

regurgitated, by and large, in the mainstream media. 58 percent of Bush supporters (and

98 percent of Kerry supporters) would not have supported the decision to go to war in

Iraq if the intelligence community had concluded that Iraq did not possess weapons of

mass destruction and was not providing substantial support to Al Qaeda.[98] Had the media

questioned the administration's claims, or attempted to provide their own alternative

counter frames, it would be difficult to account for these overwhelming public

misperceptions that are in direct accordance with the administration's preferred frames.

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[97] "Misperceptions, the Media and the Iraq War", October 2, 2003 PIPA online at:
http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Iraq/Media_10_02_03_Report.pdf. Interestingly, print media had a 47 percent misperception rate while PBS' was only 23 percent.
[98] PIPA, 10/21/04 See full study online at:
http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Pres_Election_04/Report10_21_04.pdf

The enormous gap between the claims of the Bush administration and the truth that has emerged raises such questions such as, "Why were the major media outlets in the United States so lacking in skepticism toward the administration's rationales for war?", and, "Why did the media fail to act as a 'watchdog' over government in the public interest?" Independence, objectivity, and balance are all attributes the media claims to embody, yet as has been shown, few of these characteristics were demonstrated following September 11, 2001.

5:   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

As was shown in the previous chapter, the mass media following September 11 proved to

be anything but an oppositional voice during the lead up to war in Iraq when such

scrutiny might have made a difference in public opinion and hence, the decision to go to

war. Instead, content analysis during this period shows that mainstream U.S. media

coverage of the Iraq issue overwhelmingly and uncritically reproduced the Bush

administration's carefully constructed case for going to war. While the media in a

democracy should critically debate urgent questions facing the nation, the mainstream

media following 9/11 privileged a military response to the problem of terrorism, and

served to legitimate policies put forth by the Bush administration. Serious debate

concerning the alternative responses to the problem of global terrorism and the

September 11th attacks almost never took place in the mainstream media.

Gramscian hegemony theory suggested that perspectives and story focus within

the news coverage would be maintained within narrow boundaries, most of the time

(there are always exceptions) for a number of reasons. First, there is the dominant

professional ideology of objective journalism which holds that the reporter's job is to

provide a record of what was said and done by those in positions of authority.[99] Second,

just as during the Cold War when reporters themselves almost all accepted the basic

'bipartisan' consensus on foreign policy - specifically that world politics was a conflict

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[99] Bernard Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy, (Princeton :Princeton University Press, 1963).

between the "Free World" led by the U.S., and the expansion of Communism led by the former USSR – reporters following the 9/11 attacks almost all accepted the new 'bipartisan' consensus that the new global conflict was between the 'most free and democratic country in the world' and 'freedom hating' Islamic terrorists led by al Qaeda. These ideological assumptions shaped the news, and the news in turn reinforced those assumptions within public understanding. Although it is important to stress that the process is open to contradiction and conflict, it is nonetheless quite effective overall.

Hegemony theory addresses the difficult issue of how ideological boundaries can be maintained in a modern capitalist society without rigid control of political communication by the state.[100] Many journalists will tell you that no one tells them what to write or what to do, yet there is a homogenized tone and Pentagon reverberation to most media coverage of foreign policy issues, as was demonstrated in the coverage of Iraq. Many reasons for this congruence can be explained within a hegemonic framework: reporters themselves buy into the ideology of the mission; there are few visible war critics to provide dissenting perspectives; and information management has been so effective as to delegitimize approach.[101]

Ben Bagdikian, former Dean of Journalism at U.C. Berkeley, argues that ideological hegemony is maintained in part by the way media owners appoint executive editors and producers. He points out that owners rarely appoint someone who is likely to emphasize or interpret events in a way which might undermine the owners' political and economic interests though he notes that "some editors do so and there is a steady record

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[100] This kind of control would be impossible in a liberal-democratic society. See Hallin, We Keep America on Top of the World, 80.
[101] Danny Schechter. Information Warriors. (January 23, 2002,) online at: http://www.mediachannel.org/views/dissector/io.shtml

of their being fired or resigning to protest restrictions."[102] Obviously hegemony is most

effective when most people, including journalists, internalize the values and worldviews

of the dominant groups in society. Because hegemony is also a process embedded in

structures, practices, and routines, there are routine ways in which journalists choose

sources, frame events, and weigh information. For example, financial cutbacks and

deadlines imposed by the rapid speed of the news cycle are factors which constrain the

ability of journalists to have the time, resources, and opportunity to gather news

effectively.[103] In addition, the key issues of ownership and reliance on government

officials for information discussed earlier are further explanations for the dominance of

government frames found in the mass media, especially in regards to foreign affairs

reporting.

The issue of reporting official sources is an important point worth elaborating on.

The argument that is usually made by journalists is that professional reliance on official

sources can be justified as 'democratic' on the grounds that officials are elected and as

such are accountable in some way to the citizenry. But as McChesney argues, the

problem with this rationale is that "it forgets a critical assumption of free press theory:

even leaders determined by election need a rigorous monitoring, the range of which

cannot be determined solely by their elected opposition".[104] If this watchdog role is

absent, the public's ability to challenge the status quo or to criticize the political culture

as a whole is sharply reduced.

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[102] Ben Bagdikian, "Missing from the News," The Progressive, (August, 1989), 32.
[103] See "Return to Normalcy", 2002.
[104] Robert McChesney, "September 11 and the Structural Limitations of U.S. Journalism" in Journalism After September 11, (London: Routledge, 2002), 95.

As previously stated, among other things, hegemony is dependent upon the acceptance of the legitimacy of foreign policy elites by the public. This pattern was clearly demonstrated in the initial aftermath of September 11th. President Bush and his top aides clearly presented their interpretations of the 9/11 events, and the 'appropriate' military response that would follow. Because these frames were largely regurgitated, rather than questioned, in the mainstream television media, the public believed the administration's interpretation, and was largely in support of the war for many months.

Another related finding is that there is a tendency for there to be a lack of historical reference in media coverage during the lead up to war, which leaves officials relatively free to reinvent history and make dubious claims about policies. Hallin argues that "rarely, if ever do media, especially television media, consult alternative sources, seek to uncover historical parallels or comment on the accuracy, significance, or motivation of official information."[105] This has never been clearer than in the media coverage in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 and the lead up to the Iraq war. Norman Solomon stated that the authoritative word coming out of the press following September 11 was that "everything" has changed.[106] The implication is that we need not look to historical parallels for foresight. As Iyengar has demonstrated, the television news often frames complex policy situations in personal and emotional terms that appeal to audiences without providing a significant foundation for critical thinking.[107] The

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[105] Hallin, 51.

[106] Norman Solomon "The Discreet Charm of the Straight Spin" online at: www.alternet.org/colomnists/story/12161 (January 3 2002).

[107] Shanto Iyengar, Is Anyone Responsible: How Television Frames Political Issues (1991). Douglas Kellner also addresses the media's failure to debate the range of possible responses to the 9/11 attacks, or their possible consequences, see From 9/11 to Terror War, 19.

precedents for this type of reporting go back a long way, but just looking at the first Gulf War, the coverage patterns were strikingly similar to those found in the second.

They involved limited criticism of the leading policy option, with few oppositional voices and a narrow range of viewpoints making it into the news; in addition, there was a similar reliance on official sources and pro-administration stance taken by the media in 1991.[108]

To summarize, ownership, routines, and over-reliance on official sources for information are central to understanding political coverage by the American television media. The reliance on officials as primary sources of authoritative information, combined with the norms of 'objective journalism' requiring the journalist to pass on official information without comment on its accuracy or relevance, has significant implications. As was shown above, a large majority of Americans did not appear to question the administration's claims about Iraq's 'imminent' danger to the United States, even though the evidence was extremely weak (especially given that the United States was faced with the ultimate decision of going to war) and has since been proven false. In this way, media hegemony legitimized the Bush administration's claims about the need for war in Iraq and made them appear as "common sense". The interests of the dominant groups became the "general interest" of the public.[109] Because the case for war was so weak and incomplete, the media's failure (in their self-proclaimed role as 'watchdog') to

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[108] Bennett, Taken by Storm, 21. For further discussion of media coverage of the first Gulf War see John MacArthur's Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War, (University of California Press, 1991), and Robert Hackett, "The Press and Foreign Policy Dissent: the Case of the Gulf War" in News Media and Foreign Relations, Abbas Malek, ed. (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1997) 141-160.
[109] As Herman and Chomsky have shown, there is a continuing reluctance on the part of elites to go public with their foreign policy differences, and the problem is compounded by the continuing willingness of journalists and the public to accept official (hegemonic) ideological definitions of foreign policy situations. See Manufacturing Consent, (1988), 18-26.

thoroughly examine the evidence and raise appropriate and critical questions was a monumental – and deadly – failure.

Conclusions

We can conclude that the media play a fundamental role in influencing how citizens perceive and understand the world around them, especially during times of crisis. The case of Iraq is especially critical due to the almost daily reports undermining all of the official rationales for going to war in Iraq, thus highlighting the media's failure to investigate any of the administration's claims leading up to the invasion. In addition to regurgitating the administration's official rationales for war, the mass media failed to provide any alternative frames to counter the alleged necessity of a military response. The explanation which has been put forth in this paper is that the overwhelming acceptance of the administration's rationales for the war in Iraq can be understood to a significant extent by Gramscian hegemony theory. I am not attempting to argue that hegemony is applicable to all aspects of public policy making, nor that this is the only perspective one can take. I am arguing that, as a tool in many cases, including the invasion of Iraq, hegemony theory provides significant insight on policy debates and U.S. corporate media responses.

It is important to re-state that Gramscian hegemony theory does not simply argue that there is one, simple, top-down process at work, or that all journalists have been molded into one ideological shape. This common critique of Gramscian hegemony theory falls into the trap of confronting only the most simplistic version of it. Indeed, one of the strengths of Gramscian hegemony theory is that it explains many seemingly varied phenomena. The issues of ownership and reliance on advertising (which generates the

majority of the media's income and profit), as well as routines, deadlines and other realities of media production are incorporated within hegemony theory, thereby suggesting how ideological control can be maintained without direct interference by the state.

Even if the media are free from direct control from the state or other authority, there are other factors which limit the media's ability to act as an independent watchdog over government. The increasing concentration of media ownership since the early 1990's and the advent of 'infotainment' has severely eroded the ability of television to provide critical checks on governmental performance. Issues of public concern are increasingly displaced by entertainment. Public conversation has become increasingly commodified as news production is generally limited to what is profitable and convenient to produce and media tend to focus more on sensationalism than the public good. This trend has led to the cutbacks in the area of foreign affairs reporting and the focus on more sensational stories, for example, Michael Jackson or Monica Lewinski, and is a contributing factor to the public's willingness to accept foreign policy decisions rather uncritically.

There are a number of additional factors which limit the media's ability to critically question information, provide alternative frames, and stimulate a range of debate. For example, even when journalists are skeptical, and try to take their watchdog role seriously, they are still confronted with pressures which restrict their ability to practice investigative journalism. Even the most intrepid reporters face the pressure to be

patriotic and many fear job loss, or ostracism, if they cross too far over the line.[110] As

CNN's top war correspondent Christiane Amanpour said on CNBC in September 2003, "I

think the press was muzzled and I think the press self-muzzled."[111] This issue of 'self-

censorship' in combination with institutional imperatives drastically limits the range of

expressible opinion in the mass media. In addition, the most successful journalists have

internalized the dominant values and perspectives to such a degree that they can be free

to express themselves without feeling pressure to conform. Of course in a liberal

democratic state, one would expect exceptions to the dominant views, and one can find

them, the case of Iraq included. As mentioned previously one of hegemony theory's

central claims is that, while the news media normally function to reflect, and even

mobilize support for dominant views in society, there are times when they serve the

interests of marginalized groups. "Challengers" or counter-hegemonic groups are

constantly forming in opposition to dominant groups. Again, because the United States is

to some degree a pluralistic democracy dissidents do exist and more critical viewpoints

are found in the debate from time to time.[112]

A media system whose stated professional role is to be independent of

government, and report objectively, has to take at least some notice of anti-war dissent.

Yet those in opposition to the war were rarely able to put forth substantive critiques of the

administration's rationales for war. As noted earlier, the media frames were decidedly

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[110] White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer – in response to Bill Maher's criticism of U.S. bombing campaigns in Afghanistan - infamously warned reporters as war approached to "watch what they do and watch what they say." See Press Briefing By Ari Fleischer online at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010926-5.html

[111] See Amanpour, "CNN Practiced Self-Censorship", USA Today website, online at: http://www.usatoday.com/life/columnist/mediamix/2003-09-14-media-mix_x.htm

[112] It is also important to understand is that allowing most dissidents to exist, but marginalizing their views, actually strengthens hegemony because it makes the system seem freer and more open than it actually may be. This argument regarding "repressive tolerance" was first made by Herbert Marcuse in Robert Paul Wolff, et al, A Critique of Pure Tolerance (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 95-137.

patriotic and pro-military and those opposed to the war received little air-time to express their views. While some elite division occurred prior to the war in Iraq, most notably in the summer of 2002, the television media largely reflected the position of the Bush administration during that debate.

Robert McChesney argues that there are several general assumptions about U.S. foreign policy that are rarely challenged in the mainstream media because they are 'common sense'. These include: that the United States is a force for good in the world; opposition to the U.S. or its policies is a sign of evil; the U.S. has a right to invade any other nation in the world in pursuit of its interests; and foreign governments are regarded as legitimate according to their support of U.S. interests, rather than by their adherence to human rights, or the structure of their governmental systems.[113] This argument coincides with Gramscian hegemony theory's prediction that voices outside of these consensus beliefs will not receive much coverage in the mainstream media. For example, issues of how economic interests related to the conflict, the United States' historical relationships in the Middle East and Israel, or whether - given that 15 of the 19 terrorists were Saudi's - that Saudi Arabia was perhaps a more critical target for American attention, received negligible attention in the mainstream press. In other words, it can be argued that whatever critical coverage existed during the lead up to the Iraq war did not extend to questioning the "benevolent" nature of U.S. foreign policy, or to other "common sense" beliefs that have been internalized by the process of hegemony. Fundamental alternatives

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[113] Robert McChesney, "September 11 and the Structural Limitations of US Journalism", 97-98.

to the state's most critical foreign policy decision – to wage war – were marginalized by the mainstream television media.[114]

The question of when opposition is great enough to change policy or gain attention in the mainstream media is important yet difficult to answer, as it is largely dependent upon the specific situation. During the Vietnam War, for example, the media were very uncritical of the administration's policies for the first years of the conflict. Most analysts point to the Tet Offensive, and Walter Cronkite's dramatic criticism of the war on CBS, as marking the major shift in television's framing of the war.[115] Hallin cites three elements which contributed most to the collapse of consensus journalism around 1968: the growing division in Washington; declining morale among American troops; and the spread of the anti-war movement to the political mainstream.[116]

Indexing theorists maintain that it is only when 'credible' elites come forward with critical opposition that the media take notice and cover dissent in a more balanced manner. As Robert Entman argues: "…elite discord is a necessary condition for politically influential frame challenges."[117] For example, when critical reports came out from Richard Clarke, Charles Duelfer, Paul O'Neill, and the 9/11 Committee, the media began to adopt a somewhat more sceptical stance towards the Bush administration's

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[114] This was not the case in much of the international press or in the U.S. independent and alternative media where one was much more likely to find critical question of U.S. governments motives in a historical context. One informative website which collects much of this material is www.accuracy.org

[115] It is important to note that Cronkite's criticism of the Vietnam War also included an affirmation that the government's intent to 'defend democracy' had been honorable, despite the outcome. See Walter Cronkite's "We Are Mired in Stalemate", Broadcast (February 27, 1968) online at: http://www.richmond.edu/~ebolt/history398/Cronkite_1968.html

[116] Hallin, The Uncensored War, 163. He ultimately argues that the change in Vietnam War coverage "seems best explained as a reflection of and a response to a collapse of consensus – especially of elite consensus – on foreign policy." Hallin, We Keep America on Top of the World, 53.

[117] Entman, "Cascading Activation", 430.

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evidence for invading Iraq. A somewhat more balanced debate was then found in the mainstream media because of division within official circles.

An additional way to test whether opposition counts as meaningful is to look at the ratio between pro-administration viewpoints and oppositional ones. If the media were acting in a watchdog role over government one would expect to find a rough parity of these frames in the media. As was shown, during the lead up to the war in Iraq the media had a consistently pro-administration bias, despite much opposition by the peace movement.

While some might argue that Gramscian hegemony theory is especially relevant to understanding foreign affairs reporting, it is important to note that it also appears consistent with coverage of domestic issues. With regard to the basic assumptions supporting the domestic social, economic, and political order, the mainstream media is not fundamentally critical. Certainly the media can be critical of a particular government's decision, or politician's behaviour; what is important is that they can be so without criticizing the logic that legitimizes a capitalist society in America. In other words, the media can be critical without undermining the fundamental ideological assumptions that reinforce hegemony.

There has been much research done in the area of critical media studies surrounding the U.S. media's role during times of war – from Vietnam, through Latin American wars, to the first Gulf War. This paper has intended to shed light on the functioning of the media *before* a country decides to go to war, when an informed public, exercising their democratic rights over this most fundamental of all decisions, might

actually be able to form enough of an opposition to prevent it. As Supreme Court Justice

Potter Stewart stated regarding the Pentagon Papers case:

> In the absence of governmental checks and balances present in other areas
> of our national life, the only effective restraint upon executive policy and
> power in the areas of national defense and international affairs may lie in
> an enlightened citizenry—in an informed and critical public opinion which
> alone can here protect the values of democratic government.[118]

To conclude, these findings have significant implications for questions of

democracy and for the role of the media before a country decides whether or not to wage

war. It has been demonstrated that the television media did not devote adequate

resources or air-time to debating the administration's rationales for war. Moreover, the

media failed to address the possibility that, even if all the evidence had been accurate,

attacking Iraq would actually make Americans less secure in the long run. It is also clear

that the media's failure was not simply due to short deadlines and a complex subject.

The misinformation and lack of balance found in television news before the invasion was

massive and serious.

This case is not unique, as other studies show a consistent pattern of media

deference to elite views and official sources; however, this example is a critical one.

September 11 and America's response to terrorism were the most important issues in the

country for many months following the attacks. There was strong public interest and the

media had a year and a half before the invasion of Iraq to investigate, question, and

stimulate democratic debate. If there is any time they should be expected to live up to

their "fourth estate" obligations it is during times of crisis when governments, democratic

or otherwise, tend to manipulate news to support their agenda. Yet, in a country with

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[118] Cited in Charles Lewis, "Clamping Down on Freedom of the Press", The Center for Public Integrity,
(November 22, 2004), online at: http://www.publicintegrity.org/report.aspx?aid=426&sid=200

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significant 'formal' freedom of the press, Americans ended up with virtually no independent journalism (in the mass corporate television media) to inform public opinion prior to the war. Given the consistent record of such failures in the past, the likelihood that the mainstream media will learn from this catastrophic error and be more vigilant in questioning the government's rationales for future wars is unfortunately slim. Perhaps the best one can hope for is that as the disastrous nature of the invasion of Iraq becomes more evident, the American public will demand that the news media finally begin to provide coverage that is truly "fair and balanced."

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