THE ELITE PRESS, THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION, AND IRAQ: IDEOLOGY CONFINES SCRUTINY IN THE *POST* AND THE *TIMES*

A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
University of Missouri-Columbia

In partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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MAY 2005

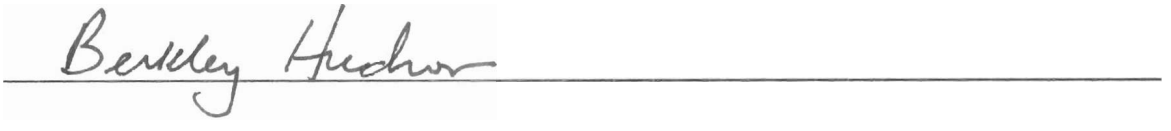
The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School,
have examined the thesis entitled.

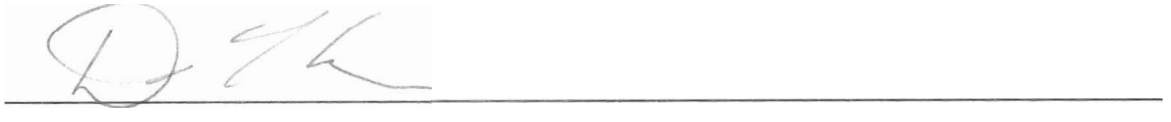
THE ELITE PRESS, THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION, AND IRAQ:
IDEOLOGY CONFINES SCRUTINY IN THE *POST* AND THE *TIMES*

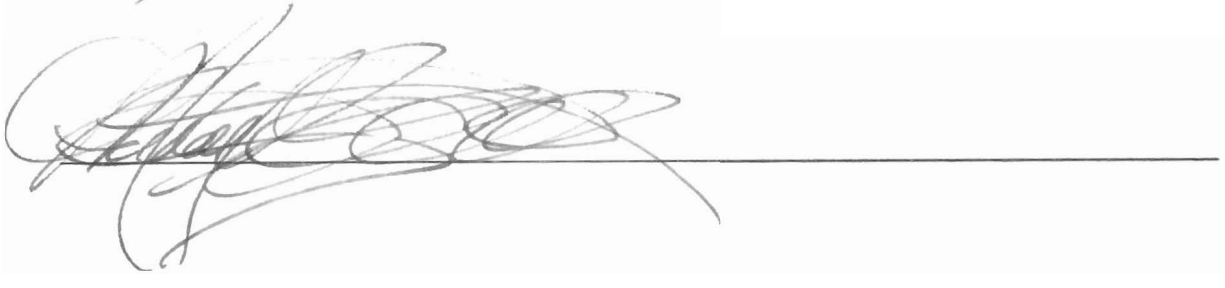
Presented by Eric Dick

A candidate for the degree of Master of Journalism

And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.







ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author owes a bit of gratitude to those angry newspaper readers who call to complain about what a story means even if that is not what a story says. It seems beauty as well as the meaning of text is in the eyes of the beholder. Journalists would do well to remember this rather than defend their ways despite when their ways deterred from better public understanding.

Those angry readers planted the seed, but the scholars and professors at the Missouri School of Journalism deserve the credit for what appears on the following pages. Throughout the process of conceptualizing, researching and writing this thesis, the author found himself making use of some research here or a lesson there from his various courses. The author was surprised by how what he had learned in seemingly unrelated topics was put to good use in this thesis. He expects that is the goal. It is a neat trick.

The author owes a great deal of gratitude to his thesis committee, Dana Baker, Michael Grinfeld, and Lee Wilkins, for their wisdom, guidance, and generosity, and to his committee chairman, Berkley Hudson, for his teachings on being a better scholar, journalist, and person. Each has made contributions toward this thesis and other matters that the author always will be indebted to them for.

The author would like to thank Terri Danielson, whose patience and support allowed her husband to spend two years of their lives on his career ambitions. The author also would like to thank his mother. Of course.

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INTRODUCTION

THE MEDIA FAIL IN THEIR PRIMARY ROLE

After the United States invaded Iraq, after a former Cabinet member and a former national security adviser questioned the motives of the Bush administration, after weapons of mass destruction in the Mideast country were never found, and after the 9/11 Commission found no collaborative relationship between Saddam Hussein and the al Qaeda[1] terrorist network, the elite news media recognized the need for a more critical eye toward the White House (Buncombe 2004, Harris 2004, Kurtz 2004, New York Times 2004, Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States 2004).

After the war, the news media emerged as a topic of criticism themselves from media critics and the media alike. "By now, we and the world know that the media misled us about Iraq's search and development of weapons of mass destruction," said Charles L. Klotzer, an editor with the *St. Louis Journalism Review* (2004). *Harper's Magazine* publisher and author John R. MacArthur lamented "a compliant press that uncritically repeated almost every fraudulent administration claim about the threat posed to America by Saddam Hussein" (2003). "Reporters have handled Bush gingerly, particularly after the September 11 terrorist attacks prompted a surge of patriotism," said Rachel Smolkin, a contributing writer for *American Journalism Review* (2003). "The news media," said *American Journalism Review* editor Rem Rieder, "stumbled badly" (2004). Although a

[1] Each of the three newspapers analyzed for this study spell the name of the terrorist organization differently. Quoted excerpts from the text will reflect these differences.

few reporters took a hard look at the administration's justification for war, most of the major media did not (Ritea 2004). The chorus of criticism in the scholarly journals seemed well-deserved.

The *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, elite newspapers that heavily influence U.S. press coverage of foreign policy (Hertog 2000), ultimately agreed with their critics. On May 26, 2004, in a letter from the editors, the *Times* expressed misgivings for failing to better scrutinize the Bush administration's claims during the run-up to war in Iraq. "In some cases, information that was controversial then, and seems questionable now, was insufficiently qualified or allowed to stand unchallenged," the *Times* editors said on page 10 (2004). "Looking back, we wish we had been more aggressive in re-examining the claims as new evidence emerged — or failed to emerge." Three months later, on Aug. 12, the *Post* in a front-page story expressed similar misgivings following its own self-analysis, saying its coverage had been "strikingly one-sided at times" (Kurtz 2004). The *Times* vowed to do better. The *Post*, in its self-criticism, suggested likewise. The quality of the journalism was substandard.

The media are expected to do better.[2] Their primary democratic role is to act as a public watchdog over government (Curran 1996). As events unfolded in Iraq and as the foundation to the administration's claims for waging war eroded, the media's failure in its primary role became clear. "From whom, if not the press," says Kalb (1994, 4), "are the American people to get the information on which to base an intelligent decision on the worthiness of a particular war, or the soundness of their government's strategies and policies, or the actual conditions on and above the fields of combat?" Say Entman and

[2] The terms press, media, and news media are used interchangeably in this study.

Page: “Careful public deliberation is especially important when it comes to decisions on going to war” (1994, 83). For Dorman and Livingston, the quality of news coverage is “never more important” than when the country is considering whether to wage war:

> Central to public debate in a democracy is relatively free, open, and accessible information pertinent to the situation at hand. In American society the news media have a constitutionally guaranteed right and, therefore, we would argue, responsibility to provide information that goes beyond government publicity campaigns (1994, 63).

As the Bush administration marched toward war, the media could have picked no worse time to fall in line.

Purpose of Study and Rationale: A Unique Research Opportunity

The purpose of this study is to examine the Iraq coverage in the *Times* and in the *Post* to gain a better understanding of the influences upon the elite media during times of armed conflict, particularly how ideology shapes the coverage. Such an analysis is expected to provide guidance to journalists on how to better cover crises that elicit such fervor stemming from an attack on U.S. soil. The analysis also is expected to add to the scholarship on media influences, particularly that in times of war.

A number of definitions are necessary to understand the focus of the research:

- *Coverage* is the array of elements that constitute a news story in a newspaper format: what page the story appears in the newspaper, the inclusion (or exclusion) of particular sources, the emphasis (or de-emphasis) on particular sources, and a host of rhetorical techniques, which are defined later in this study.
- *Media routines* are those news conventions that decide what information is obtained from whom, how that information is organized, and how it is presented.

- *Media influences* are a myriad of factors inside and outside of media organizations that affect their coverage, from government policy to personal values to the limitations of the physical media itself. These influences are described more fully later in this study.

- *Sources* are the people whom journalists observe or interview and those who supply background or story suggestions (Gans 1979). *Official* or *elite* sources typically are those who work in the upper echelons of government, such as legislators, agency directors, cabinet members, and the president himself.

- *Ideology* is an "aggregate of values and the reality judgments associated with it" (Gans 1979, 68), a "symbolic mechanism that serves as a cohesive and integrating force in society" (Shoemaker and Reese 1996, 183), "a pattern of beliefs that determines a group's interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world" (Foss 2004, 239).

For scholars, the context in which the Iraq coverage occurred may provide new insights into the influences upon media content. A number of media scholars contend that mainstream U.S. news coverage of foreign conflicts uncritically accepts the tenets of U.S. foreign policy and that during times of war the media tend to "rally around the flag" (Eisman 2003, Hallin 1986, Hertog 2000, Nacos 1990). Unique to this study is the context in which American journalists found themselves. For the journalists at the *Times* and the *Post*, the terrorist attacks of September 11 literally brought the horror of war home.

Furthermore, the Bush administration's approach toward Iraq was unprecedented for the United States. A preemptive attack represented a "turning point in U.S. foreign policy and possibly a turning point in the recent history of the world," Sen. Robert Byrd

told the U.S. Senate on Feb. 12, 2003 (Humanist 2003). Said foreign policy experts Charles W. Kegley Jr. and Gregory A. Raymon: “This radical revision of customary international law is leading the world into uncharted waters” (2003). The attack led journalists into uncharted territory as well.

For journalists covering the administration as the White House explained its case for going to war, the stakes involved in what they were reporting had never been higher or closer to home. Two extraordinary events had converged. The fallout was bound to affect the media. “Truth is not the first casualty in this new war; the role of the media as independent, neutral observers has been under attack since Sept. 11th,” media scholar Jane Hall said (2002, 117). The press yet again faced hard challenges to fulfilling their watchdog role.

CHAPTER 2

A LONG AND FAMILIAR TALE OF MEDIA CONTROL

The watchdog role of the U.S. news media has been compromised during times of war since the American press covered its first battle. Whether the factors are patriotism, government policy, ideology, or media routines such as a reliance on official sources, these influences impinge on journalists, shape their stories, and affect public opinion.

Such influences upon the news media are not unique to times of war, but the ramifications are never higher. “Public opinion wins wars,” General Eisenhower told newspaper editors during World War II (Greenway 1999). This view by the military has defined press-state relations during times of war: the journalist tries to reveal information while the government tries to control it. This dichotomy reached its apex during the Vietnam War and the fallout continues to this day, a ripple effect that encumbers the news media and thus threatens the democracy of an informed public.

Government policies are not always necessary to propagandize a war. During the Revolution, for instance, *Massachusetts Spy* editor Isaiah Thomas was censored by his own convictions. In the pages of the *Spy*, the British appeared as inhumane and barbaric, while patriots were described as brave, persecuted heroes (Blanchard 1992).

Four decades later, the independence of the press faced a particularly difficult task. During the War of 1812, partisan support for President James Madison’s fight against Great Britain stirred a tempest of intolerance to dissent. As *Federal Republican* editor Alexander Contee Hanson railed against the war, Republican-backed mobs railed

against him. They destroyed his press, fatally beat one of his supporters, maimed another for life, and seriously injured several others, as well as Hanson (Blanchard 1992).

A less severe though equally effective tactic is to imprison the press. Outraged that the *New York Herald* had published details of a confidential peace treaty to end the Mexican War, President James Polk in 1848 prompted a Senate investigation. The Senate called upon the *Herald* reporter to reveal his sources. He refused and was cited for contempt and put under house arrest (Blanchard 1992).

President Lincoln exercised the government's authority even further during the Civil War. He suppressed dissent against the Union by suspending the writ of habeas corpus, the constitutional provision that protects American citizens from being incarcerated without due cause (Blanchard 1992). Lincoln locked up editors, publishers, and proprietors of news media critical of his administration (Blondheim 2002).

By World War I Congress initiated policies to control the press. Lawmakers passed both the Espionage Act and the Sedition Act of 1918, measures that prohibited criticism of the war. Journalists covering the war had to take an oath to "convey the truth to the people of the United States" and refrain from disclosing any information that might help the enemy. Newspapers had to post a $10,000 bond – an immense sum in those days – to be forfeited if a journalist broke the rules (Greenway 1999).

While President Roosevelt's Office of War Information and Office of Censorship ensured similar restrictions during World War II, patriotic feelings, surely stoked by an attack on American soil, shaped press coverage as well. A patriotic press was revered as good for the country rather than shunned as a disservice to its citizenry (Tobin 1997). The celebrated columnist Ernie Pyle captured the reality of the war without revealing the true

ugliness. “To tell much more,” Tobin (1997) said, “was to risk shock, anger, rejection, not to mention censorship.” Ernie Pyle and his tales of the courageous G.I. made America look good.

The drums of patriotism continued to validate press censorship during the Korean War, but by Vietnam the reports, and the mood of the country, had markedly changed (Arnett 1997). If World War II was the high point of military-media relations, in large part because patriotism was the order of the day, then Vietnam was undoubtedly the lowest. The media were free to report without government censorship, and a core of critical journalists exposed the failures of both the military and the administration (Arnett 1997, Hallin 1986).

Still, research by Hallin (1986) found the news coverage of the Vietnam War was not as critical as it could have and should have been. His analysis of the *Times* and network evening news, coupled with interviews from journalists and officials involved in the war, revealed that larger questions about the United States’ role in Vietnam were never seriously discussed in news coverage. A “Cold War” ideology and media routines that dictated “objectivity” tied news coverage to Washington perspectives. Criticisms about policy were excluded from the news agenda.

The Spheres of Consensus, Controversy, and Deviance

In explaining the relationship between the press and the government, Hallin introduced a spherical model of objective journalism (see Figure 1) that is helpful toward understanding the focus of this study. Hallin’s model divides the journalist’s world into three regions, each of which is governed by different journalistic standards.

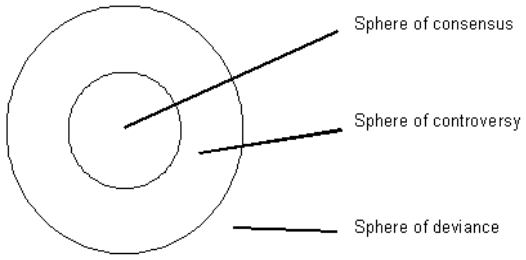

Figure 1 Hallin's spheres of consensus, controversy, and deviance

Objectivity is represented by the middle region, the sphere of legitimate controversy. This is the region of debate by the elites within the American political process, where, for instance, lawmakers outline their differences on policy.

Bounding the sphere of legitimate controversy is the sphere of consensus. It encompasses that which journalists and most of the public consider noncontroversial. Terrorism is evil, for instance. Within this region journalists do not feel compelled to present opposing views or to remain disinterested observers. Rather, the journalist is expected to serve as an advocate for what Gans (1979) describes as "motherhood values," values such as altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, and small-town pastoralism.

Beyond the sphere of legitimate controversy is the sphere of deviance. Here lie the views that journalists and the mainstream public reject as unworthy of being heard. It marks the limits of acceptable political conflict. For instance, advocacy for communism is found here.

Though Hallin found the news media lacking of more critical coverage during Vietnam, the press' behavior marked a turning point in media-government relations. Journalists had severed the accommodating relationship their predecessors had forged with the military in two world wars and instead demanded accountability (Arnett 1997).

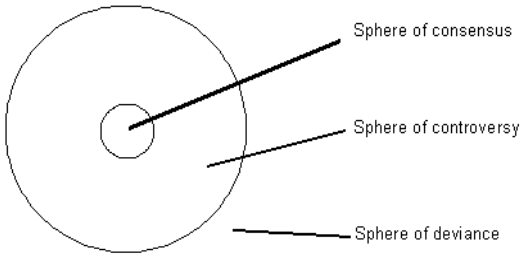

Figure 2 Media coverage of Vietnam: 1968-1974

Coverage of the Tet offensive in 1968 exposed the official American optimism as a fraud, and the growing unrest at home fueled consistent criticism of U.S. policy from the media, Capitol Hill, and the public (Greenway 1999, Hallin 1986, Nacos 1990.) The sphere of controversy expanded greatly (see Figure 2). The military's fervent belief that such pessimistic press coverage tipped public opinion against the war was the harbinger of press-state relations, an image- and information-control edict by the military and government that Gottschalk (1991) calls the "Vietnam syndrome." The "corrosive animosity" that developed between the military and the press would sour relations between the two for more than a generation (Hammond 1998). Each knew the coverage of future conflicts would be different.

The First Gulf War

By the first Gulf War the military had learned its lesson. Well aware of how media routines influence press coverage, the military established press pools that limited journalists to only official sources (Greenway 1999). The military's dramatic war footage appealed to the broadcast news media's reliance on "spectacle." What makes good television are good images, and images alone cannot criticize or at least criticize well (Peer & Chestnut, 1995).

In an analysis of Gulf War coverage by ABC News, the *Times* and the *Post*, Peer and Chestnut (1995) found the print news media to be more independent than broadcast news media of the "government line" but still dependent upon official sources. Peer and Chestnut expanded on Hallin's spheres of objectivity by suggesting that in addition to the political climate, structural and format characteristics of different media may also correlate with variable levels of independence. Newspaper stories are likely to be more resilient to a particular interpretation of events because they are less constrained by the themes, a frame of reference, that television depends on to tell the story. As a result, newspaper coverage may be more contextual and detailed and relatively more challenging to the official administration line.

In the early stages of the war, for instance, television spotlighted American military technology and quoted experts and military personnel whose assertions supported the president's policy. Newspapers, on the other hand, free from the news frames of U.S. superiority and solidarity imposed by smart-bomb video images, provided a more diverse mix of sources. Newspapers yielded a more complete account of the controversy involving the president's actions in the Gulf.

For prestige newspapers, Peer and Chestnut noted, spectacle is less of a consideration. For television news, the powerful patriotic theme of President H.W. Bush's rhetoric discouraged opposing views and undermined serious debate about the policy. For television news, the first Gulf War occurred in the sphere of consensus. For newspapers such as the *Times* and the *Post*, it occurred in the sphere of controversy.

An analysis of Gulf War coverage by Dorman and Livingston (1994) also found the *Times* and the *Post* too reliant on official sources. Journalists failed to examine U.S.

policy claims within a context of historical settings. Why, for instance, was Saddam Hussein not only tolerated by the Bush and Reagan administrations but even given vital economic and military support by them if he was so evil? Although there were exceptions, the media coverage was dominated during crucial moments by themes offered by the Bush administration that Saddam Hussein and Iraq were akin to Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany.

An analysis by Entman and Page (1994) of the *Times*, the *Post* and ABC's nightly "World News" also revealed how media routines stifled critical coverage. In the print media, the most pertinent critical information was presented inside the newspapers rather than on page 1. Much of the criticism involved the process and politics of decision-making rather than the policy itself. The prominence of the official sources dictated the degree of criticism.

Although Hallin's research established that the news media develop only sporadic and limited challenges to the administration line during war, Entman and Page (1994) had reasons to expect greater press independence since Vietnam:

> Chief among them: the diminution in elites' foreign policy consensus since Vietnam; the rise in public and journalistic cynicism toward politicians; improvements in communication and information technologies; and the decline and final disappearance of the cold war as an ideology and cognitive frame (83).

Had the news media defined their roles more self-consciously as stimulators of public debate, Entman and Page argued (1994), the press might have deliberately given alternative voices, no matter their institutional roles or power, equal play with administration leaders.

In his review of the research on the first Gulf War and the news media, Bennett argued that the press' reliance on official sources is an insufficient excuse to discount the watchdog role:

> Even if most foreign policy news is elite-driven, there can be important differences from one policy situation to another in the degree of elite conflict offered up to the press, the duration of resulting news coverage, the play given to different sides of the story, and other information patterns of great consequence to the formation of public opinion and the legitimation of policy. These differences suggest that while journalists may be operating with one norm referring them to official sources, they also operate with an equally important professional norm that discourages taking sides by looking to report different sides of a debate (1994, 24).

During times of armed conflict, one professional norm consistently seems to quash the other. This study explores one reason why.

The Media Paradox

Despite two centuries of history as a guide and the persistent condemnation by their critics, the press continue to fail in their central mission to hold government accountable during times of war. This is remarkable because, as Entman notes, the "recapitulation recurs in the face of journalists' own frustrations and sincere desires to improve. It is paradoxical that a 'free' press, especially one as committed to its ideals and unfettered by government regulation as the American press, cannot seem to profit from its mistakes and reform the way it gathers and reports the news" (1989, 7-8). The media know they should do better, but each time war or a similar crisis occurs they continue to lose sight of their responsibility to provide objective, independent coverage.

During the first Gulf War, the news media had again "shortchanged" the public (Kalb 1994). A patriotic press once more was the standard of the day. "Thus," said Kalb,

"it seems it has always been, even if the journalists have been saddled with censorship in one form or another from the Civil War to the Gulf War." (1994, 3).

Kalb's words then are prophetic today, as the public and the media themselves look to understand how the press failed once more:

> What happens when another Gulf War erupts? Will the press regroup, and serve the people? Will the public interest be addressed? Or, will the Pentagon, feeling no pain or popular constraints and encouraged by its recent successes in controlling a not terribly popular press, again establish its pools, its censorship, its vision of reality – and sell it in prime time? If there was ever a time for the press to reconsider its function and purpose, it is now. The press does not have to be popular or patriotic, it has to be energetic, purposeful, detached, unemotional, cool, skeptical, determined (7).

In the wake of September 11th, a strike against the American way of life, patriotic fervor reached new heights, and the news media followed suit. The press enthusiastically participated in the outpouring of patriotism. The press rallied behind the "war on terror." As Kirtley said, "it seemed like the right thing to do" (2001).

Therein, however, lies the risk to a critical media and a democratic society. Such demonstrations of solidarity, Kirtley said (2001), "represent a trap for journalists who might be tempted to support the government's initiatives without first subjecting them to the kind of independent scrutiny that is essential to any democracy."

Snookered once again, the *Post* and the *Times* promised to do better. Of the "three great instruments" that can prod the mass media to responsible performance – the government, the mass media themselves, and the general public (Rivers et. al, 1980) – the *Times* and the *Post* took it upon themselves to evaluate their own coverage and vowed to better fulfill their obligation to democracy. The question remains: Did they?

Influences Upon the Media

Any review of the newspapers' coverage would need to entail an analysis of the influences upon the journalists themselves. Although mass communication research has tended to focus on the message, the audience or the effects of the media, a number of researchers have explored what factors inside and outside media organizations affect their coverage (Bennett 1990, Entman 2003, Gans 1979, Gitlin 1980, Graber 1993, Hall et al. 1978, Peer and Chestnut 1995, Reese and Buckalew 1995, Schudson 1996, Shoemaker and Reese 1996, Sigal 1973, Tuchman 1978).

A review of the literature following Shoemaker and Reese's hierarchical model (1996) helps to explain those influences upon media content. Citations from both the *Times*' (2004) and the *Post*'s (2004) mea culpas provide further clarity. This literature review concludes by exploring a matter conspicuously absent from the *Times*' and *Post*'s self-assessments: Does the media's dependence on official sources or its adherence to a dominant ideology have a greater influence on news content?

The hierarchical model of influences on media content identifies five levels of influence on media content: individual, media routines, organizational, extramedia, and ideological. A closer examination within the literature explains their roles.

At the *individual* level, factors that can influence media content include the journalist's personal and professional background, personal attitudes, values and beliefs, and professional orientations (Shoemaker and Reese 1996). "Reality judgments," says Gans (1979, 39), "are never altogether divorced from values." One value Gans (1979) identifies is ethnocentrism (the journalist's tendency to value U.S. practices above others), particularly in war news.

At the *Post*, for instance, a reporter described the attitude of editors dismissive of skeptical stories thusly: “Look, we’re going to war, why do we even worry about all this contrary stuff?” (Kurtz 2004).

Media routines affect the reality portrayed by the media (Shoemaker and Reese 1996). The inverted pyramid style of writing, the short lead, and the headline force journalists to simplify complexity (Sigal 1973). News stories must be presented “as neatly as possible” (Gitlin 1980, 264). Journalists must make “suitability judgments” to winnow the mass of information down to what they can cover with a limited staff and by deadline (Gans 1979, 81). Editors balance page 1 with a variety of topics because page 1 is “the newspaper’s showplace” (Sigal 1973, 26-30). Journalists rely on official sources because they are the most accessible and reliable (Gans 1979).

These factors influenced content at the *Post* and the *Times*, according to each newspaper, respectively. At the *Post*, an editor perceived a reporter’s skeptical report of U.S. claims as cryptic and hard to follow and so he heavily rewrote it. Another editor cited the need for page 1 to encompass a broad range of subjects as the reasoning for bumping skeptical reports on Iraq inside. One reporter said, “We are inevitably the mouthpiece for whatever administration is in power” (Kurtz 2004).

Organizational-level factors have a critical impact on newspaper content (Gans 1979, Shoemaker and Reese 1996, Sigal 1973). Top editors, for instance, not only shape what appears in a newspaper but they direct how and what information is gathered and how it is presented (Gans 1979).

The *Times* and the *Post* acknowledged the influence such roles had upon their coverage. The editors at the *Times*, for instance, said editors should have pressed

reporters for more skepticism. At the *Post*, editors shelved stories skeptical of the administration, buried them inside or rewrote them.

Organizational factors also influence media content by affording consensus during times of uncertainty (Shoemaker and Reese 1996, Sigal 1973). When there is doubt, agreement among colleagues helps to "authenticate" the news (Sigal 1973, 39). On more than one occasion, the *Post* referred to instances of "groupthink" that shaped its coverage (Kurtz 2004).

Though *extramedia* influences include a number of factors, such as government policies and actions, special interest groups, public relations campaigns, and advertisers (Shoemaker and Reese 1996), the *Post* and the *Times* said their coverage was primarily affected by sources and competition. The choice of sources is of "prime significance" (Gans 1979, 281). In particular, the president has no peer as an authoritative source (Sigal 1973). Said one *Post* reporter: "If the president stands up and says something, we report what the president said" (Kurtz 2004).

Another extramedia factor that appears to have influenced coverage in both the *Times* and the *Post* is competition. Standards of news quality put a premium on who gets the story first (Sigal 1973). Explaining the story is not as important as advancing it (Gitlin 1980). The emphasis on timeliness further perpetuates dependence on official sources (Gans 1979). In covering the run-up to war in Iraq, the *Times* said its editors were perhaps too intent on rushing "scoops" into the paper.

Encompassing all other levels in the hierarchical model is the influence of *ideology*. In this sense, ideology is not an individual belief system but rather a societal-level phenomenon. It is an amalgamation of meanings, values, and beliefs that serves as a

cultural common denominator, a shared outlook for diverse groups (Shoemaker and Reese 1996). For journalists covering the immense complexity of international affairs in the early 1960s, for instance, the ideology of the Cold War related every crisis to a single, familiar axis of conflict that readers could understand (Hallin 1986). This study later identifies an ideology that shaped the coverage at both the *Post* and the *Times*.

A Dominant Influence for Different Times

Of these influences on media content, several researchers underscore the importance of official sources (Durham 1998, Gans 1979, Hertog 2000, Mermin 1996, Sigal 1973, Tuchman 1978). To Gans, the choice of sources is the primary factor: "Sources alone do not determine the news, but they go a long way in focusing the journalists' attention on the social order" (1979, 145). Journalists from the elite press depend on official sources because they can always supply information and because they satisfy the source considerations for authoritativeness and productivity. Because of this, the recruitment of sources and their access to journalists reflect the hierarchies of society (Gans 1979). Sources shape the news.

Indeed, Sigal's study of U.S. media (1973) found that the most important sources of information are officials of the U.S. government. More national news emanates from officials than from any other source. As such, they are in a position to "exert considerable influence" over news content (60).

Tuchman (1978) sees the journalist-source relationship as a symbiotic one. By using official sources, journalists legitimate them as social institutions. As social

institutions, they are the sources of “normal, natural, taken-for granted” facts that journalists depend on (210).

Although journalists rely on official sources as a reliable and accessible source of news, journalists “pay a price for access: they become dependent on their official sources” (Sigal 1973, 54). That dependency begets journalistic compromises. Journalists become reluctant to offend their sources. Journalists become willing to print whatever their sources tell them. Journalists show little or no insistence that officials take responsibility for the information they pass along (Sigal 1973).

Like any successful relationship, the members connect to each other. For the journalist, this is both necessary and precarious. Reporters who absorb the perspectives of the officials they cover become sensitive to the nuances that may signal something is underfoot. Without such role-taking, journalists would find it harder to anticipate the outcomes of controversies or understand what the sources mean. Yet, “the line between role-taking and absorption is a thin one indeed” (Sigal 1973, 47).

Such co-opting of the journalist by an official source compromises the independent, watchdog role of the press. It serves as a hegemonic function that keeps the journalists’ portrayal of criticism of the administration within conventional bounds (Entman 2003, Gitlin 1980). By hegemony, the author means “a kind of social control, a means of symbolic coercion, or a form of domination of the more powerful groups over the ideologies of those with less power” (Foss 2004, 242), “the means by which a ruling order maintains its dominance” (Shoemaker and Reese 1996, 194), “a ruling class’s domination through ideology, through the shaping of popular consent” (Gitlin 1980, 9).

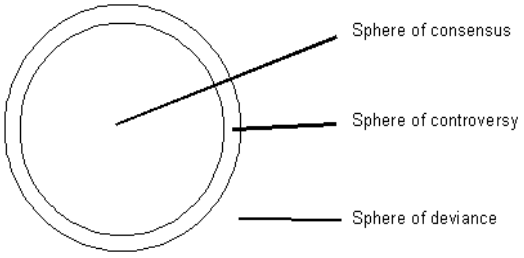

Figure 3 Media coverage during the run-up to war in Iraq

Says Gitlin (1980, 5): "The closer an issue is to the core interests of national political elites, the more likely is a blackout of news that effectively challenges that interest." When political crises erupt, however, the hegemonic frames may fail to maintain social stability. During such crises mainstream journalists discover that the claims of the opposition movement have merit, and the hegemonic frame begins to shift (Gitlin 1980).

Gitlin describes the coverage of Vietnam as an example. In 1968 editors at the *Times* and other news organizations turned sympathetic to the antiwar movement. What journalists observed for themselves in the field derailed the positive spin by the administration. Meanwhile, amid a building economic and political crisis, journalists at home began to turn against President Johnson's war policy. An upwelling of opposition at home occurred while younger reporters shared in their generation's rejection of the war and editors worried about their sons' draftability. The hegemonic frames shifted, and the sphere of controversy expanded. The author's proposed study is expected to reveal whether a similar shift in hegemonic frames occurred after the second Gulf War began (see Figure 3).

Researchers have proposed specific theories to explain this shift and its relationship to official sources. Bennett's indexing hypothesis (1990), for instance, says media tend to "index" the range of viewpoints in news according to the range of views

expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic. The indexing theory says that journalists may tend to support liberal or oppositional views in the news but give voice to those views only when parallel voices are being raised in circles of government power. Journalists implicitly answer questions about what, how much, and whose opinion to cover by looking to "official" opposition within the government. Entman's (2003) cascading activation model, on the other hand, says although media rely on elite discord to surface to contest the administration's frames, the media are not entirely "passive receptacles" for government propaganda.

That official sources are the primary influence upon media coverage is a recurring theme within each of these arguments. Gans, Tuchman, and Sigal contend that the scope of media coverage hinges on the viewpoint of official sources. Bennett builds upon that argument by saying media only report critical viewpoints on government policy decisions if the criticisms are first expressed by other official sources in Washington. Entman agrees with such hegemonic theories but maintains that the media maintain a degree of independence.

The Unconscious Influence of Ideology

Yet these theories may not explain why the *Post* and the *Times* stumbled with their coverage. The newspapers ventured beyond official sources, included criticism outside of Washington, independently reported beyond the official government line, yet media critics and the newspapers themselves found fault with their coverage.

In times of intimate crises, in this case in the wake of Sept. 11 and before the United States' first preemptive war, does ideology surpass individual, media routines,

organizational, and extramedia factors to have the greatest influence on news coverage? When "the chips are down" – when the nation is faced with a threat to a large number of its citizens – the press tends to rally behind the chief executive or mutes its criticism (Nacos 1990).

Journalists are both influenced by the dominant ideology and perpetuate the dominant ideology. Even if they conceive of themselves as objective, journalists react to the news with the same attitudes and values as their readers (Gans 1979). Their ideology controls what the journalists see as natural or obvious by establishing the norm (Foss 2004). The dominant ideology determines what type of information will be gathered and the range of meanings that will be given to it (Graber 1993).

Ideology provides a cultural "map" of the world, without which journalists could not make sense for their readers of the unusual, unexpected, and unpredicted events that become news (Hall 1978). Hall elaborates:

> Thus the media's mapping of problematic events within the conventional understandings of the society is crucial in two ways. The media define for the majority of the population *what* significant events are taking place, but, also, they offer powerful interpretations of how to understand these events. Implicit in those interpretations are orientations towards the events and the people or groups involved in them. (57).

It is important to note that journalists who adhere to an ideology do not conceive of it as an ideology (Gans 1979). The process takes place "behind our backs," producing and structuring consciousness in ways that the journalists themselves are unaware of (Bennett 1982, 48). "Ideology is a function of the discourse and of the logic of social processes," says Hall (1982, 88), "rather than an intention of the agent."

The text within the news stories, the narrative, is both the signal and the signaler. To tell the story in a way that readers can understand, journalists rely on the "symbolic tools" that make up the dominant ideology. Says Hallin (1986, 50): "Indeed, the nature of their work makes them particularly dependent on those tools, and this is especially true in the reporting of foreign affairs."

The ramifications are subtle yet profound. News as ideology limits free speech and the introduction of new ideas. It marginalizes dissent (Tuchman 1978). By crafting news stories in a fashion that is commonly understood, journalists perpetuate the single common understanding.

Research Question

To see whether ideology or dependence on official sources reigns as the primary influence upon media content, and to better understand the relationship between the two, this study focuses on the following question: *How did The New York Times' and The Washington Post's coverage of the United States' involvement in Iraq change after each newspaper's published admission that its reporting should have been more critical?* The study gauges how each newspaper responded to its own critique, and it explores how ideology, a factor unconsidered by the *Times* and the *Post*, shaped the news coverage.

CHAPTER 3

LOOKING FOR MEANING IN THE TEXT

This study examines the coverage qualitatively. The author uses theory as a lens to guide the approach and show what issues are the most important to examine (Creswell 2003). To explore how the coverage in the *Times* and the *Post* of the United States' involvement in Iraq changed, the author conducts a critical cultural methodology textual analysis. The method is appropriate for several reasons:

- Insofar as the author is looking for meaning in the text, why the news coverage was reported in the way that it was, a textual analysis gets behind the manifest content in the news texts to the latent, implicit patterns and emphases (Hall 1975).
- Textual analysis allows the researcher to consider all aspects of the content – including omissions – whereas a content analysis does not (Hall 1975, Hall et al. 1978, Lentz 1991, Lester-Roushanzamir and Raman 1999). Content analysis is a quantitative measure of text that analyzes the recurrence of manifest content. Textual analysis analyzes emphasis in latent content. With textual analysis, the researcher can step beyond counting and coding of the text at hand and compare text on a similar topic in a similar genre to turn up evidence of omitted material (Lentz 1991).
- Insofar as the author is not interested in showing what the journalists explicitly reported, an analysis of the text can reveal the "structure of meanings in the configurations of feeling" (Hall 1975, 16). In this instance, the author wants to see

how journalists' ideology had influenced the coverage of the run-up to war in Iraq and how that coverage changed following each newspaper's mea culpa.

- Textual analysis also is an appropriate method of inquiry because the journalists at the *Times* and at the *Post* may be unaware that ideological factors had influenced their reports (Foss 2004, Hall 1975, Hall et al. 1978). Surveys or in-depth interviews may fail to reveal traces of ideological influence. The author cannot simply ask the journalists whether ideology influenced their coverage of Iraq and expect any more of a complete answer than if the author were to ask them to recognize their own psychological structure (Hall 1975, 23).

In an ideological critique, the goal is to discover and make visible the dominant ideology embedded in the text and the ideologies that are being muted in it (Foss 2004).

Foss (2004) provides a two-step process to analyze text for traces of an ideology: 1) Identify the nature of the ideology; and 2) identify strategies in support of the ideology.

In reading the text, the researcher should consider the following questions to gain a comprehensive view of the ideology in the text (Foss 2004): *Who are we? Where are we from? Who belongs to us? What is expected of us? Why are we here? What do we want to realize? What are our main values? Who are our enemies or opponents? Who is like us, and who is different?*

The articulation of the ideology in the text should provide the answers to these questions about the ideology (Foss 2004): *What is the preferred reading of the text? What does the text ask the audience to believe, understand, feel or think about? What arguments are being made in the text? What values or general conceptions of what is and*

what is not good are suggested? What doesn't the text want the audience to think about? What alternative interpretations are possible to the one offered by the ideology in the text?

The second step Foss employs is to identify the strategies in support of the ideology. Ideologies "are not simply sets of ideas and beliefs about the world hanging loose in people's heads" but rather they are "realized in concrete practices and apparatuses" such as news constructions (Hall et al. 1978, 83). The rhetorical devices in news "are the bearers of a structure of meanings and values, which we construct out of the linguistic raw materials as we use them in context" (Hartley 1982, 2).

A Close Reading of the Text

In analyzing the text, the researcher is looking for clues to understand the meaning of the larger text as a whole. Clues include "every significant stylistic, visual, linguistic, presentational, rhetorical feature" (Hall 1975, 23). The researcher will want to look at "every shift in tone and rhetoric, every change in the balance of content, every move in the implied 'logic'" (Hall 1975, 23) because such devices signify more than just a "seamless narration and digest of events" (Lester-Roushanzamir and Raman 1999, 704). Possible elements to consider are uses of metaphor, simile, allusions, tone, themes, mood, voice, style, narratives, language, recurring patterns, and omissions (Lester-Roushanzamir and Raman 1999; Lule 2002; Morris 2004, Robins 2003). The researcher, in undertaking a close reading of the text, may consider attribution, quotation, connotation, denotation, and contrast (Morris 2004).

Narratives in text provide clues. They are stories that tell not only what happened but how to interpret what happened. For the researcher, investigating the narrative "helps to reveal the ideological underpinnings of journalistic work even though news stories are assumed to be merely a rendition of the facts" (Robins 2003, 34).

The narrative establishes a frame of interpretation. In Robins' analysis of U.S. newspaper coverage of Sudanese refugees resettling in the United States, the narrative constructs the refugees as incomplete vessels waiting to be filled with American culture. A reporter describes one refugee as "a child-man." The reporter also describes the man's bewilderment over a coffeemaker, so foreign "it might as well have been dropped from the sky." Another reporter describes a grocery store "full of wonders." And yet another describes the arrival of nine other refugees who have "a look in their eyes of unimaginable distance." As they file through the airport terminal, they peer around "like visitors from another planet" (2003). A story requires a storyteller, and a storyteller describes events from a point of view.

Amid the narrative emerges a tone, and tone provides a link to the journalist's ideology. Tone reveals a journalist's personal and political attitudes. Says Hall (1975, 23): "Tone is another way in which the underlying assumptions behind an explicit rhetorical style can be traced out and shown to be at work."

Tone is identified through word choice, phraseology, and characterization. Mermin's analysis of the *Times*' coverage of the invasion of Panama showed how the tone of the coverage questioned the ability of the president to succeed. A front-page story described Bush's decision as a "roll of the dice," warned that the operation "might end up looking more like Vietnam than like Grenada," and noted the possibility of a "long and

decidedly unheroic slog" through the jungles in search of General Noriega (1996). In Mermin's analysis of the first Gulf War, a dramatically positive tone emerges. The *Times* reported that the invasion "went almost like clockwork" and had achieved "tremendous success" (1996). How something is said, then, can prove as meaningful as what is said.

Selectivity provides evidence to the textual analyst. What material is used and how the material is put together can say much about the journalist. "In analyzing content for ideological patterns," Shoemaker and Reese say, "we must examine how news combines and structures key elements" (1996, 242).

An examination of the sources used and where they appear in the text can reflect more than "balanced" news coverage. In choosing sources the media appropriate and transform news events (Hall et al. 1978). For instance, Hall et al. in their study of British newspaper coverage of a mugging incident noted the inclusion of quotes from speeches made months earlier by government politicians. In so doing, the newspapers suggested that the sentences handed down in the crime were in accordance with the wishes of government, a political rather than judicial decision. In another newspaper, quotes from a police commissioner and judge emphasized a judicial perspective that outweighed the formal balance and objective style of the story. Lacking were quotes from parents that would have presented a more humane perspective (Hall et al. 1978). Who is speaking, then, can prove as meaningful as what is said.

With textual analysis, the researcher is able to consider the meaning in the text by considering what information is left out. Textual analysis allows the researcher to take account of all aspects of content, including *omissions* (Hall 1975, Lester-Roushanzamir and Raman 1999). Says Lentz (1991, 11): "Silence may reflect not the journal's (or

reporter's) intention so much as the power of ideology, customs, traditions, and mores in force at a given time."

As Hall et al. (1978, 65) explain, a close reading of the rhetorical features in the text can reveal ideological underpinnings:

> Many of these structured forms of communication are so common, so natural, so taken for granted, so deeply embedded in the very communication forms which are employed, that they are hardly visible at all, as ideological constructs, unless we deliberately set out to ask, "What, other than what has been said about this topic, *could* be said?" "What questions are omitted?" "Why do the questions – which always presuppose answers of a particular kind – so often recur in this form? Why do certain other questions never appear?"

The absence of details, context, and story lines can prove telling. In Robins' analysis of refugee coverage, she found few stories that contradicted the dominant ideology of U.S. capitalism. The newspapers' framing of the United States as the consumer "Promised Land" excluded discussion of international affairs, economic globalization, and the role of the United States in world affairs (2003). What is not said, then, can prove as meaningful as what is.

Sources

To examine the coverage in the *Times* and the *Post*, the first step was to select the text to analyze. A general sense of the events as they unfolded guided the selection (Pauly 1991) as well as the use of a dating scheme. News coverage was analyzed from the *Times* and the *Post* from October 2002, the month Congress authorized the use of force in Iraq, to February 2003, the month when Secretary of State Colin Powell made his case to the United Nations for invading Iraq, and from September 2004, a month after the *Post*'s mea culpa, to January 2005. The selection of dates was scheduled to avoid a sample just prior

to the U.S. presidential election when the sound-bite, tit-for-tat, horse-race political coverage would be expected to reach its peak and subsequently drown out any other forms of policy discussion.

The (London) *Guardian* also was analyzed over the same sample period to gauge alternative perspectives and the use of other sources. The British newspaper was used as the cross-media comparison because its journalists were more removed from the rallying effects of September 11 yet the newspaper generated enough coverage over the sample periods that omissions in and differences from the U.S. press could be identified. It should be noted, however, that the British public and its parliament were more hostile toward the Bush administration even though Prime Minister Tony Blair's government supported the war.

In each time period the review consisted of one abbreviated constructed week – five successive weekdays in five consecutive months. A Lexis-Nexis full-text search of the keywords "Iraq" and "United States" or "Bush" on Monday, October 7, 2002; Tuesday, November 5, 2002; Wednesday, December 4, 2002; Thursday, January 9, 2003; and Friday, February 7, 2003, returned 205 stories. Of those, this study examined only the "news" stories that referred to U.S. policy in Iraq or events in Iraq. There were 69 such stories, 45 of which are cited in this study. A search with the same criteria on Monday, September 13, 2004; Tuesday, October 12, 2004; Wednesday, November 17, 2004; Thursday, December 16, 2004; and Friday, January 14, 2005, returned 191 stories. Fifty-two of those referred to U.S. policy in Iraq or events in Iraq. Thirty-seven of those are cited in this study.

Once the periods of time were identified and the stories culled, the author took "a long preliminary soak" in the text (Hall 1975, 15). He read through the coverage to find the moments of most intense debate and then went back and read again the coverage of those moments in depth (Pauly 1991, 12).

During the analysis the author kept in mind the meaning of the rest of the text, the genre of the text, and the wider public context in which the text was circulated (McKee 2001). Before a researcher can understand one word, the researcher needs to understand one story. Does the use of "he claims" suggest suspicion if the rest of the story suggests support? Is the scarcity of other viewpoints a factor of ideology or just a function of news constraints? How does the larger context play a role? The social, political, and historical conditions of the production and consumption of the text will have shaped what it said (Hartley 1982). These were journalists who were working in a post-September 11 world. Context was key.

Limitations of the Study

There are limitations to the research. The author's findings are valid and reliable because he demonstrated how his interpretation is grounded in his choice of theoretical perspective. "In the case of qualitative observations," Kirk and Miller (1986, 21) note, "the issue of validity is not a matter of methodological hair-splitting about the fifth decimal point, but a question of whether the researcher sees what he or she thinks he or she sees." Still, the author's interpretation is among a host of interpretive options that are either openly or implicitly in conflict (Jameson 1981). Because "validity is a fundamental problem of theory" (Kirk and Miller 1986), an equally strong reading of the text seen

through the prism of a different theory may yield an equally valid yet different interpretation.

A textual analysis discounts the impact of the other media influences. Media routines that call for simplicity in story structure or a variety of topics on page 1 may have influenced the newspapers' coverage. Organizational influences such as the role of editors may have been the primary factor. A closer eye could be cast upon the influences from outside of the media organizations and the haste the newspapers employed to scoop the competition. In each of these instances, perhaps in-depth interviews or ethnographies would prove more meaningful. Such might make for insightful research, too.

And it should be noted that textual analysis is not an examination of how readers received those messages. How the coverage of Iraq indeed shaped public opinion is a different matter.

CHAPTER 4

THE RUN-UP TO WAR: THREE 'MAPS OF MEANING' EMERGE

Following a close reading of the 69 stories published prior to each newspaper's self-criticism, from October 2002 to February 2003, three predominant background frames of reference emerge. These "maps of meaning" identify, classify, and contextualize the unusual and unexpected events involving Iraq into an intelligible realm of understanding for readers (Hall et al. 1978). However, this analysis will show that they also limit a broader understanding of events and marginalize opposition and dissent. Clues to these frames include tone, as indicated by word choice, phraseology and characterization, metaphor, omissions, selectivity in the structure of key elements, recurring patterns, and the treatment of sources. These three maps of meaning are "good vs. evil," "American omniscience," and "Republican vs. Democrat."

Good vs. Evil

The *Times* and the *Post* similarly characterize Saddam Hussein. He is an evil man who does evil things, and any war necessary to stop this evil will prove as necessary, just, and honorable as the wars before that defeated similar tyranny which oppressed the innocent.

Hussein is the evil-doer, front and center. He is a "menace," an administration official says in the *Post* (Allen 2002). He is a "dictator," according to the president, quoted twice in the same *Post* article, once from his State of the Union address 10 days earlier as well as a second time from a press conference the day before (DeYoung 2003).

Hussein is a deceitful liar who is not to be trusted, as both the *Post* and the *Times* made clear in quoting Bush's reference to the Iraqi leader's "empty concessions, transparently false denials" (DeYoung 2003, Schmitt and Preston 2003). Hussein employs games of "hide and seek" (Lynch and Allen 2002). Feelings toward the Iraqi leader are "a blend of hatred and fear" (Sciolino 2003). Indeed, according to a former national security adviser who is discussing whether Hussein can be contained, the Iraqi leader is a "thoroughly evil" and "power-hungry survivor" (Von Drehle 2002). The text characterizes any decisions involving Iraq as less a matter of policy-making than a threat posed by a madman.

The characterization undermines objectivity. For the press – and the administration – a madman is an unreliable source, so marginalizing Hussein and his supporters is construed not as a bias perspective but as a *reasonable* perspective. For the journalist, giving too much credence to the claims of an unreliable source would be *unreasonable*. The rhetorical devices employed by the *Post* and the *Times* twist the journalistic tenet of objectivity inside out.

The evil man is also evident by the evil such men do. Hussein has "arrested or executed scores of disaffected officers," says an Air Force general (Von Drehle 2002). He has "used chemical weapons against Iranian soldiers," and at least one Iranian says he fears Hussein "may gas us again with chemical gases" (Sciolino 2003). Hussein once left salt marshes filled with the "bloated corpses" of "teenage martyrs" (Sciolino 2003). He once even "tried to use secret agents to assassinate George H.W. Bush" (Von Drehle 2002). The coverage by the *Post* and the *Times* portrays Hussein as a ruthless and wicked man, a tyrant who thinks nothing of killing his own people, gassing children or murdering

the leader of the free world. The characterization makes any proof of weapons of mass destruction unnecessary. What evidence is necessary if the devil himself is on trial?

Hussein's evilness is not only measured by the innocent lives he takes. Like any dictator, he benefits while his people suffer, according to the *Post* and the *Times*. Hussein lavishes himself with the trappings of wealth and royalty while distilling fear among any who would oppose him. One of his many palaces is an "opulent" and "forbidden" place, "secretive" and "garish." "Elaborate gold-and-crystal" chandeliers hang from the ceiling. Elevators feature "gold-plated doors." No item of opulence is too much for this overlord. "A lime green fly swatter was sitting on the buffet table," the *Post* reports, "albeit in a seemingly custom-built wooden rack" (Chandrasekaran 2002b).

Such decadence at the expense of the commoners is familiar to Americans and their press. It is the stuff of which revolutions are founded (McCullough 2001). It is the stuff of which American journalists rail against (Ettema and Glasser 1998).

The newspapers hint at the forces at work here. According to the *Times*, Iraqi guards open "imposing" iron gates to allow U.N. inspectors and their "white" vehicles inside (Burns 2002b). The *Post* also notes that the inspectors' vehicles are "white" but describes the gates as "black" (Chandrasekaran 2002b). There is no simpler expression of good and evil.

Metaphor removes any misconception of the latent meaning behind the text. The palace grounds, according to the *Times*, "could have been modeled on the Moghul gardens of 16th-century India." Nearby, the headquarters of the ruling Baath party "looks like something out of Imperial Rome." Hussein's palace "performs much the same

psychological function as Imelda Marcos's collection of hundreds of pairs of identical unworn shoes. There was nothing to suggest the palace was actually lived in" (Burns 2002b).

Hussein is now akin to Mongolian warlords, emperors who persecute Christians and wildly corrupt dictators. Is there any doubt that such a man is a threat to the free world?

Yet there is hope, according to the *Post* and the *Times*. The liberators can free the oppressed, just as history has shown before. The risk to the United States posed by Hussein recalls the fears associated with the "Cold War" and "communist" expansion (Von Drehle 2002). An Iranian town left scarred by Hussein is "reminiscent of World War I" (Sciolino 2003). Urban fighting in Baghdad, one retired American general says, could resemble "the last 15 minutes of 'Saving Private Ryan'" (Von Drehle 2002). Americans and the rest of the world know how that conflict against that evil-doer turned out.

This conflict, as characterized by the *Times*, would seem to be nothing different:

> For Iraqis, this was the stuff of the wildest imagination. In the 23 years he has been Iraq's absolute ruler, feared in every corner of this land, Mr. Hussein has built dozens of palaces, each more grandiose than the last. Vast and imperial, they are intended to overwhelm, and they do. Passing by, Iraqi drivers plead with passengers not to gaze, lest the very act convey an unhealthy interest or, perhaps fatally, disrespect. ...
>
> It was as if, at that moment, something quite new in Iraq had been born, as though far more was opening in the Iraqi consciousness than just those gates (Burns 2002b).

The thought of freedom was born. A U.S. invasion of Iraq promises freedom from tyranny and oppression, the text suggests. Suggesting otherwise would have been akin to giving Hitler the benefit of the doubt.

Initially, a few in the Middle East may oppose a U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. But like Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld correcting skeptics because surely they just do not understand, another *Times*' narrative characterizes such criticism as for the foolhardy:

> While the official line in Tehran is to oppose an American-led war against Iraq, here the argument is different: only when Mr. Hussein is overthrown will Khuzistan Province be secure enough to persuade businesses and individuals to invest in an economically depressed area that wants to be made whole again.
>
> "Of course war brings misery," said a heavyset merchant in the Indian Spice Shop as he blended curries for stews, soups and kabobs. "But it would be wonderful if there's a war and Saddam disappears."
>
> His partner agreed, "Yes, it would be good to get rid of that regime no matter what."
>
> An old man chimed in: "What are you talking about? This whole thing is about Iran, not Iraq. The Americans want to surround Iran. They are already doing it. Even the son of the shah wants to come back and claim the monarchy."
>
> But still, he added, war would be a "positive development."
>
> An engineer from nearby Ahwaz said afterward that Mr. Hussein was a useful scapegoat for the problems of the Islamic Republic.
>
> "If we don't want to be too pessimistic about our own government, we say the problem is Saddam," he said as he gave a foreign guest a drive around the area. Then he refined his argument, adding that the problem is indeed Mr. Hussein (Sciolino 2003).

The people of the Middle East have no doubt that Hussein is guilty, the text suggests. Why should the American press?

The "good vs. evil" frame of reference by the *Times* and the *Post* is a familiar one. Saddam Hussein is an evil man who does evil things. His rein prevents his people and the people of the Middle East from life, liberty, and their own pursuit of happiness. An

invasion of Iraq would be a fight for justice. An invasion of Iraq would be a fight for freedom. An invasion of Iraq would be a fight for the American way.

The Omniscient United States

Another recurring perspective that emerges throughout the text is that of an omniscient United States. The United States is not only the most powerful country but also the wisest. The *Post* and the *Times* routinely marginalize other countries and the opinions of their leaders, whose knowledge on matters is represented as inferior to that of the Bush administration. The United Nations, in particular, is portrayed as too daft and too dim to be trusted with any meaningful policy decision regarding the fate of Hussein and his country. The Bush administration *knows*, and it is the newspapers' uncontested acceptance of this wisdom that has enlisted the *Post* and the *Times* among the coalition of the willing.

In global affairs, according to the *Post* and the *Times*, there is the United States and there are, quite literally, the others. France and "others" say inspections should be given more time. The United States was doubtful that "other" Security Council members would have approved of the resolution (DeYoung 2003). The German ambassador is leaning closer to the U.S. position than to France and "several other Council powers." "Other Council nations" are optimistic that inspections can avert war (Preston 2003a). "Others" are trying to determine the best way to determine whether Iraq had violated U.N. weapons inspections demands (DeYoung 2002). The "other" Council members were ready to approve aid for Iraq (Preston 2002b). Chief U.N. weapons inspector Hans Blix receives advice from many Security Council members and "others" (Burns 2002a).

France and “other” key U.S. allies said U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell failed to make a convincing case before the United Nations (Richburg 2003). The United States may change the language of the resolution to make it more acceptable to France and “other skeptics” on the Council (Schmitt and Preston 2003). Bush is trying to persuade “other world powers” to support the resolution (Allen 2002).

“Others” is used in these instances as a substitute for a number of specific countries. Although this practice conforms to journalistic tenets of brevity, it reduces the debate as between the United States and “others.” The debate then is not the opinions of one against the opinions of several but one against one, where one is the United States and the unnamed “other” is collectively less than any one named country alone.

Opposition from countries that the *Post* and the *Times* do identify by name is often couched in terms of the naiveté. Turkey’s reluctance to allow U.S. ground troops is attributable to its “new and inexperienced leadership,” an American official tells the *Times*. The prime minister’s diplomacy mission to seek a peaceful resolution might be nothing more than a show to demonstrate his willingness to exhaust other avenues before supporting a U.S. strike (Gordon 2003). In Germany, Chancellor Gerhard Schroder reiterated his opposition to war, but he was criticized by his detractors for having “unnecessarily isolated Germany from its main ally and weakened its ability to play a role in international affairs” (Schmitt and Preston 2003). An American official predicts countries will be ready to push for military action once the “full impact” of Powell's presentation before the United Nations sinks in (DeYoung 2003).

The tone borders on mockery. France and Russia, the *Times* reports, "coined a new term for their objections, saying they did not want 'automaticity' for the United States to go to war" (Preston 2002a).

Such characterization by the newspapers shows other countries as unknowing, ill-informed or foolish. As such, the text suggests, their detractions should not be taken seriously, if they are to be considered at all.

Those in agreement with the United States, by contrast, are among the wise. "Clearly, people in senior levels in the Iraqi regime are realizing what's going on and having second thoughts," an administration official tells the *Post*. "I don't want to say we think a coup is imminent, but clearly people are seeing the effect of all that's going on" (Loeb 2003). Even the Iraqi government knows the Bush administration is right, the text suggests. So why would the American press question it?

The United Nations is repeatedly portrayed as particularly inept. The United States provided "significant" intelligence to U.N. weapons inspectors so that they could become "more aggressive" and "more comprehensive in the work they're doing." But the United States is still holding back some information to see if, as Powell says, U.N. weapons inspectors "are able to handle it" (DeYoung and Pincus 2003). Such intelligence provided to the United Nations has "enabled the inspectors to go into a number of specific facilities and seal them off before Iraqi officials could spirit away evidence that they possessed or were developing chemical, biological or nuclear weapons" (Gordon 2003). Such characterizations propagate the notion that the United States is superior to the United Nations.

In addition to lacking intelligence, the United Nations is characterized as weak, indecisive, and unsure. A 1998 U.N. report on Iraq's weapons program "could stand as the archetype of diplomatic inconclusiveness" (Burns 2002b). "It's never easy to put calcium in the U.N.'s spine" a White House official says (Allen 2002). The president himself has "challenged the Council to back up its words with action," warning that if it is "incapable of doing its duty," the United States will (Schmitt and Preston 2003, DeYoung 2002). Both the *Times* and the *Post* choose to quote U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan as saying Iraqi cooperation with weapons inspectors "seems to be good" (Lynch and Allen 2002, Burns 2002a). The United Nations, the text suggests, is incapable of dealing with the threat of Iraq.

The portrayal borders on characterizing U.N. weapons inspectors as Keystone Cops. The narrative, description, and selectivity in quotes depict a bumbling, half-hearted inspection process. "We are determining if an engineer who worked on missiles is now making bicycles," a U.N. official says (DeYoung and Pincus 2003). Inspectors arrive at one of Hussein's palaces in "blue jeans and baseball caps" but are seen without radiation detectors or microbe sniffers.

Both the *Post* and the *Times* note an exchange between an Iraqi official and a weapons inspector. "I think you'll find," the Iraqi official says to a U.N. official inspecting a jar, "it's marmalade" (Chandrasekaran 2002b). "According to one report circulating at United Nations headquarters later," reports the *Times* account, the inspector "paused at one point in the kitchen to sniff a marmalade jar. But perhaps that was apocryphal" (Burns 2002b). It is of interest to note that although the *Times* doubted the accuracy of the report, it chose to include it anyway.

The *Times* report goes on: “In fact, much about the inspection suggested that it had not been ordered out of any real belief that Mr. Hussein might be hiding toxins in the cookie jars or enriched uranium in the socks, but to make the point, early on, that the inspectors are empowered to enter any of the palaces, and probably will” (Burns 2002b). The first unannounced search of one of Hussein’s palaces as part of the resumption of international inspections intended to avoid a war is presented as nothing more than a comical affair.

The portrayal by the *Times* and the *Post* raises doubts about the efficacy of the United Nations and questions whether it has the wherewithal to protect the free world.

More subtle indicators in the text reveal the American omniscience frame. Word choices build upon the guilt of Iraq and the ignorance of other countries. There is the matter of Iraq’s “contention” that it destroyed tons of biological weapons and chemical warfare agents (Chandrasekaran 2003). Some countries “contend” that military force should be considered only if Iraq obstructs the weapons inspectors (Chandrasekaran 2002a). An Iraqi biologist “acquiesced” to an interview with inspectors; the “concession” came one day after Powell “assailed Iraq for hindering the inspectors and flouting U.N. resolutions” (Chandrasekaran 2003). The *Post* describes an “unprecedented” release of intelligence information (DeYoung 2003). Powell “made the case” to the Security Council that Iraq still has weapons of mass destruction (Fisher 2003). Such word choices suggest the *Post* and the *Times* believe the Bush administration’s claims to be true while the newspapers doubt the claims of Iraq and others.

How different the impression would be if Iraq had “said” it destroyed its weapons, if an Iraqi biologist had “agreed” to an interview, if Powell had “claimed” that Iraq was

hindering inspectors and ignoring U.N. resolutions. But that is not what the "unprecedented" release of information indicates, and if it is unprecedented, it has to be true.

Even the choice of article reflects an assumption. Several stories note "the threat" from Iraq or "the Iraqi threat," rather than "a threat," "a potential threat" or "whether" Iraq poses a threat (DeYoung 2003, Von Drehle 2002, Balz 2002, Gellman 2002, Allen 2002, Bennet 2002).

It is here where a number of insightful comparisons with the *Guardian* begin that reveal omissions, understatement or overstatement by the U.S. press. Not once does the *Guardian* refer to "the threat." Rather, the British newspaper refers to Iraq's "weapons program" (Teather 2002, White and Whitaker 2003).

The *Post* and the *Times* refer to Iraq's weapons program by another name, and the newspapers' presupposition again suggests Iraq's guilt. Whereas the *Times* reports that Iraq is required to declare all of its "banned weapons projects," the *Guardian* refers to a declaration of Iraq's "arsenal" or a "full list of its arms capabilities" (Burns 2002a, Steele 2002). The *Guardian* directly quotes an Iraq official as saying "Iraq is free of weapons of mass destruction," while the *Times* only paraphrases the same Iraqi official as saying the weapons declaration will be completed on time.

The *Post* refers to Powell's presentation on "Iraqi arms violations" (Loeb 2003). The *Times* describes the role of inspectors as determining whether the inspections "are working to eliminate illegal weapons programs in Iraq" (Preston 2003a). The proposed U.N. resolution, according to the *Post*, gives Iraq 30 days to "declare all of its nuclear, biological and chemical weapons programs" (Chandrasekaran 2002a).

The *Guardian*, on the other hand, refers to the resolution as an assessment of Iraq's "weapons programs" (White and Whitaker 2003). A U.N. inspectors report, according to the *Guardian*, will disclose "whether they have been able to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq" (Black 2003). British officials must have time, the *Guardian* says, "to search for proof – or lack of it – that Saddam Hussein is concealing weapons of mass destruction" (White and MacAskill 2003).

Through the use of the definite article and the characterization of Iraq's weapons programs, the *Post* and the *Times* imply that "the threat" of weapons of mass destruction exists in Iraq, lending support to the administration's claim. The *Guardian's* coverage underscores how uncertain such a claim to be.

The presupposition of guilt by the *Post* and the *Times* extends into news judgment, balance, and reporting standards. The lead to a *Times* story about a proposed U.N. resolution says that "major Council nations said they were optimistic that the measure would be adopted soon and with broad support." Who were the foreign leaders who expressed this sentiment? Only Mexico's foreign minister, in an interview on Radio Red, predicting the vote based on what foreign leaders earlier had told him. The story itself later notes that American and British officials considered the foreign minister's comments premature, but that did not keep the *Times* from leading with it. (Preston 2002a). Like the Bush Administration, the *Times* looks to highlight supporters of the U.S. plan and disregard detractors.

The *Guardian's* coverage of the same Security Council negotiations leads with Powell expressing the United States' zero tolerance toward any further hesitation from Iraq. Midway through the story the *Guardian* reports that Powell "claimed he was

making headway" with his efforts to rally support for a new U.N. resolution, but his optimism "belied the very nature of yesterday's meeting with journalists, chosen to represent the current membership of the council" (Goldenberg 2002).

If the administration had failed to convince Europe, it seems to have succeeded with the *Post* and the *Times*.

In another instance, the *Post* reports that "skepticism is very high that the Iraqi weapons problem can be solved while Hussein runs the country." The sources to whom this skepticism is attributed? One person, a former U.N. weapons inspector (Von Drehle 2002).

And while the *Times* reports that American officials perceive declining support in Europe for France and Germany's opposition to an attack on Iraq, the *Guardian* that same day says the two countries are signaling their determination to give weapons inspectors more time (Preston 2003a, White and Whitaker 2003).

The use of few sources and the narrow interpretation of events by the *Post* and the *Times* provides a limited account of affairs. Their frame of reference is aligned with the Bush administration's outlook.

Stories about Powell's speech before the United Nations underscore just how rooted in an American omniscient perspective the *Times* in particular is. A Feb. 7 story begins: "Secretary of State Colin L. Powell's speech to the Security Council on Iraq was well received abroad, bud did it change any minds? Following is a sampling of opinions from selected European newspapers." Of the eight opinions selected, six were negative toward the United States (New York Times 2003b). This is well-received? The *Guardian* clarifies the global sentiment, noting not just a "sceptical British public" but that Powell

"failed to convince the security council" (White and Whitaker 2003, Engel 2003). That the *Times* characterized the reaction to Powell's speech in such a positive fashion despite its own recognition of such skepticism abroad suggests the *Times* subscribed to one interpretation of events even if the events themselves suggested another.

The *Times* peculiar news reasoning continues. A same-day story, "How Powell's evidence compares to findings from prior intelligence," compares information Powell presented to the U.N. to earlier intelligence on matters such as Iraq's weapons programs and whether it had ties to al Qaeda (New York Times 2003a). But a more critical – and more meaningful – approach would have been to compare Powell's claims before the United Nations to the rebuttals of Iraq and the skepticism expressed by other countries. That the *Times* would present Powell's assertions so largely unchallenged is particularly noteworthy given how under fire American intelligence gathering was at the time.

Interestingly, a story that confirms Powell's accusations that Iraq tried to buy equipment from Romania and Slovenia that could be used to build nuclear weapons appears on page 13 (Reuters 2003). Why would a newspaper put a story that confirms Powell's claims on page 13? Because the newspaper never doubted those claims. The story is nothing but formal acknowledgment of what already was believed to be known.

The *Post* is not immune from a failure to maintain healthy skepticism, either. Consider the story "4 nations thought to possess smallpox; Iraq, N. Korea named, two officials say."

> *The lead*:
> A Bush administration intelligence review has *concluded* that four nations – including Iraq and North Korea – *possess* covert stocks of the smallpox pathogen, according to two officials who received classified briefings. Records and operations manuals captured this year in Afghanistan and

> elsewhere, they said, also *disclosed* that Osama bin Laden devoted money and personnel to pursue smallpox, among other biological weapons (emphasis added).
>
> *Paragraph 21*:
> Confidence about the smallpox evidence varies somewhat among the 14 U.S. intelligence agencies and departments (Gellman 2002).

The story goes on to note how some administration officials familiar with the intelligence review agreed that the evidence "is not decisive." Publicly, an administration official tells the *Post*, "there is a concern with regard to North Korea and Iraq that they may have smallpox" (Gellman 2002).

The lead refers to conclusions and disclosures while the story refers to inconclusive evidence and mixed confidence and maybes.

Perhaps the most significant indicator of the *Post*'s and the *Times*' frame of reference involves how each newspaper treated the alleged ties between Iraq and al Qaeda, the terrorist organization responsible for the Sept. 11 attacks.

On Oct. 7, 2002, a page 1 story by the *Post* raises the question if such ties exist, "but so far, no one has publicly proved it one way or the other" (Von Drehle 2002). Still, the story notes, "if the answer is yes, it strengthens the case for moving quickly." The story does not similarly summarize the options if the answer is no.

On Nov. 5, 2002, the *Times* reports in a Bush campaign story that the president asserted that Saddam Hussein has connections to al Qaeda. No elaboration is given. A month later a *Post* story tells of former President Clinton saying the al Qaeda terrorist network is more of a threat than Iraq. The former president makes the distinction. The *Times* does not.

The coverage following Powell's presentation before the United Nations illustrates the newspapers' perspective well. On Feb. 7, 2003, the second paragraph of a page 1 *Post* story refers to the day after Powell presented "detailed evidence he said proved Hussein continues to deceive the inspectors, maintains vast stores of chemical and biological weapons, and harbors international terrorists tied to al Qaeda." Later, the story quotes Bush as saying Iraq is "harboring a terrorist network, headed by a senior al Qaeda planner." For his part, Powell had said that a terrorist group in Baghdad had an "association" with al Qaeda. Yet the story references a recent public opinion poll that Powell's "allegation" of Iraqi ties to al Qaeda was among the least convincing parts of his argument before the United Nations. (DeYoung 2003). The public apparently doubts the connection, even if the administration and the *Post* do not.

Elsewhere on page 1, the last paragraph of another story, "Scientist interviewed in private," reports that an Iraqi Foreign Ministry dismissed as "totally baseless" Powell's allegation that Iraq has been harboring a terrorist cell run by Abu Musab Zarqawi, "whom Powell described as a member of the al Qaeda network" (Chandrasekaran 2003).

Clearly, questioning the administration's al Qaeda claim is not a priority for the *Post*. To vociferously challenge the contention would fall outside the frame of an omniscient United States. On *page 21* appears the story "Alleged Al Qaeda ties questioned: Experts scrutinize details of accusations against Iraqi government," a critical assessment noting the opinions of foreign government officials, experts in terrorism, and a few members of Congress (Pincus 2003).

The *Times* is just as inclined. Its Feb. 7 story comparing intelligence reports details Powell's claims:

> POWELL – There is a "potentially sinister nexus between Iraq and the Al Qaeda terrorist network," Mr. Powell said. He presented details of what he said was a ring of terror operatives based in Baghdad, commanded by Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi, a follower of Osama bin Laden. Mr. Powell also said that high-level contacts between Iraq and Al Qaeda went back to the mid-1990's and that Zarqawi's lieutenants were helping to run an explosives training camp in northeastern Iraq.
>
> Mr. Powell made the first public accusations from a top American official that Mr. Zarqawi and his network "have plotted terrorist actions against countries, including France, Britain, Spain, Italy, Germany and Russia." Since last year, he added, 116 members of that network have been apprehended in France, Britain, Spain and Italy. He said that Qaeda affiliates had been operating freely in Baghdad for more than eight months (New York Times 2003a).

As mentioned earlier, the story never contests those claims.

By perpetuating the notion of an Iraq-al Qaeda tie rather than questioning it, the *Post* and the *Times* give further support toward the Bush administration and its planned invasion of Iraq: Even if Hussein is found without weapons of mass destruction, he is in league with the perpetrators of Sept. 11.

The *Times* on Feb. 7 does offer a dissenting opinion. On *page 10* appears an excerpt from *Le Monde* of France, part of the sampling of European newspaper response to Powell's claims:

> We were waiting for the "day of evidence," but it ended up being the "day of reiterated suspicions." On the arguments that he chose – arms, the link with Al Qaeda – Mr. Powell expressed possibilities, not factual reality. We remain in doubt. Are suspicions enough to go to war? To that question, a majority of the Council answered "no," and suggested giving the inspectors time to confirm or debunk those suspicions (New York Times 2003b).

Just like the *Post*, the *Times* structures any challenge to the administration's claims of Iraq-al Qaeda ties as just the fancy of others rather than as justifiable doubt.

The marginalizing of opposition is evident elsewhere. Patterns in the structure of the narrative show that when dissent is present, it is presented in a fashion that discounts its merits or serves only as a token of balance.

Opponents of U.S. policy are given little or no opportunity to rebut the administration's claims. A page 1 Feb. 7 story in the *Post*, "'The game is over,' Bush warns Iraq," the president attacks Hussein for his "empty concessions, transparently false denials," yet the *Post* does not give Hussein, his spokesmen or even an Iraqi delegate to the United Nations an opportunity to respond. As mentioned earlier, only at the end of another page 1 story, "Scientist interviewed in private," is an Iraqi official provided the chance to deny Powell's "contentions" that are based on "a lot of fiction" (DeYoung 2003, Chandrasekaran 2003). An excerpt provides more perspective.

> *The lead*:
> An Iraqi biologist acquiesced to a private interview with U.N. weapons experts tonight, becoming the first scientist linked to the country's arms programs to agree to confidential questioning sought by the Bush administration and the United Nations' top inspector, U.N. and Iraqi officials said.
>
> Paragraph 16
> (Iraqi Gen. Amir) Saadi and a senior Foreign Ministry official, meanwhile, assailed Powell's presentation at the Security Council during a lengthy news conference. Saadi accused Powell of quoting reports out of context, playing fabricated recordings, using unreliable sources and mischaracterizing documents seized from the home of an Iraqi scientist. (Chandrasekaran 2003).

The *Times* subscribes to this token approach toward balance as well. A Feb. 7 story, "U.N. envoys said to differ sharply in reaction to Powell speech," reports that many nations would support a U.S. war against Iraq, but only by the last paragraph does the story acknowledge the criticism of a Russian foreign minister, who said Powell "revealed

no persuasive proof that weapons of mass destruction have been produced in Iraq. ... there are no grounds to resort to this in Iraq whatsoever" (Preston 2003b).

The marginalizing of dissenting voices continues in another Feb. 7 *Times* story, "U.S. ready to back new U.N. measure on Iraq, Bush says." The last paragraph of the 1,400-word, page 1 story reports that, according to the Kremlin, President Vladimir Putin and French president Jacques Chirac had agreed that the crisis should be solved by diplomatic means. (Schmitt and Preston 2003).

The *Guardian*, on the other hand, prominently acknowledges opposing viewpoints. Its page 1 story of the same day on the same affair refers to a "skeptical British public" of a "justifiable" American-led war against Iraq (White and Whitaker 2003). The lead to a page 4 story notes how persuasive Powell's U.N. presentation was to the American public "even if he failed to convince the security council" (Engel 2003).

Other times the voice of opposition in the U.S. press is left vague and ambiguous. A Nov. 5, 2002, *Post* story notes "concern" raised by France and Russia on how to determine whether Iraq had violated U.N. weapons inspection demands, yet no representative of France or Russia is quoted to elaborate on those concerns (DeYoung 2002). A Feb. 7 *Times* story, "Scientist gives inspectors first private talk," notes how a news conference by Hussein's top science adviser was "devoted mostly to a detailed rebuttal of Mr. Powell's allegations against Iraq," yet the story fails to provide the details of that detailed rebuttal (Fisher 2003).

At other times when opposition viewpoints have a more prominent position in the text, the structure of the narrative marginalizes those opinions.

A page 1 *Post* story, “Key allies not won over by Powell,” quotes criticism from the French prime minister, a French foreign minister, a top Russian legislator, a Canadian foreign minister, and a German spokesman and summaries the criticism expressed by Italy, Pakistan, and Indonesia. Yet the following passage indicates consensus for the American argument:

> France and Germany lead European opposition to a speedy attack. But Britain, Italy, Spain, Denmark and Portugal, as well as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, have firmly backed the U.S. position. On Wednesday, 10 more European governments, in the former communist east, jointly declared support for Washington. They were Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.” (Richburg 2003)

This serve-and-volley account that acknowledges opposition but then refutes it is underscored in an Oct. 7, 2002, *Post* story, “Debate over Iraq focuses on outcome; multiple scenarios drive questions about war.” Should the United States invade Iraq, the *Post* outlines two scenarios of what the Iraqi people would do. One scenario portrays grateful Iraqis greeting their U.S. soldier liberators with “kites and boom boxes,” according to Arab scholar Fouad Ajami of John Hopkins University. The other, “pessimistic,” view, reflected in an unattributed summary with neither source nor direct quotes, is of deep divisions in Iraq and a long American occupation. While another paragraph quotes the director of a think tank and a former U.S. ambassador to Turkey raising concerns that a war in Iraq would leave the Middle East in chaos, the same paragraph ends with an Air Force general predicting jubilation in Baghdad that will “change the whole tenor of the world, and the sum of all of your fears will disappear, I assure you.” Perhaps a military campaign in Iraq may hurt the war on terrorism, according to talking point No. 7 of the story, but a war on Iraq and the war against terror

"fall under the same umbrella," according to the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in a statement culled from a Senate committee hearing (Von Drehle 2002).

By consistently discounting oppositional voices by giving them no opportunity to respond, little opportunity to respond or a limited opportunity to respond, by reaching to rebut oppositional claims, the *Post* and the *Times* clearly establish the United States as right and all others as wrong.

Throughout the text, a background frame of reference the *Post* and the *Times* adhere to is that of an omniscient United States. This perspective is evident by the newspapers practice of discounting and mocking other nations and delegitimizing the United Nations, a presupposition toward the guilt of Iraq, and the uncontested acceptance of the administration's claims and the marginalizing of dissenting views. This practice, though, is not reserved for only the international stage. The disparagement continues on the domestic front as well.

Republicans vs. Democrats

The moral and intellectual superiority of the United States is expressed more specifically than just an orientation toward the justness of American democracy. The newspapers' "map of meaning" is more refined than that. Democracy itself is not the frame of reference but rather the American two-party system. And within that reference, as this analysis will show, one party is cast as the sensible one that represents mainstream America: the Republican party.

Domestically, debate over the administration's Iraq policy is rooted in a Republican vs. Democrat perspective. The lead to a *Post* story summarizes how "Sen.

John Edwards (D-N.C.)" accuses President Bush of acting unilaterally toward Iraq, but it is in the second paragraph where Edwards is identified as "a prospective 2004 presidential candidate" (Balz 2002). This hierarchy toward identifying Edwards indicates it is his political affiliation that is more germane to the debate than his status as a presidential candidate.

This political perspective is centered on conflict. Another *Post* story notes how "Senate Minority Leader Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.)" had requested that Powell brief the Senate on his planned testimony before the U.N. Security Council but was "rebuffed" by the administration. Yet attendees at a Pentagon briefing by Powell included former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, former defense secretary Robert S. McNamara, and former national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, all of whom are affiliated with Democratic party but were not labeled by the *Post* as such (Kessler and Boustany 2003). The Democrat that represents conflict is singled out. The Democrats in step are not.

This two-party "map of meaning" is evident in more subtle ways. One *Post* report describes sources as "diverse" as the conservative Weekly Standard and former president Bill Clinton – Republicans and Democrats by another name (Von Drehle 2002). Another *Post* story reflects this political mindset in its choice of metaphor, comparing Bush's 11th-hour diplomatic effort toward Iraq as having "the precision planning of the final weeks of an electoral campaign" (DeYoung 2003). Whether expressed explicitly or implicitly, those recognized at the table of debate include only Republicans and Democrats.

The political theme is also evident in the newspapers' choice of phraseology. The crisis in Iraq, the potential of an unprecedented preemptive military strike against another

country, is described as an “issue,” with all of the limited context and focus on the political rigmarole that such issue coverage typically brings. The debate over the future of Iraq is construed as little more than the next campaign issue for Republicans and Democrats to spar over. One *Post* story leads with Congress preparing to “debate” a resolution giving President Bush broad powers to disarm Iraq, but it quickly does away with any deliberation by the second paragraph because the resolution is “expected to pass easily, in part because leading Democrats want to get the issue of war behind them” (Von Drehle 2002).

There is no mistaking of this *issue*. Democratic leaders believe a White House effort to focus attention on Iraq will cloud other “issues.” Democrats have been outmaneuvered on the Iraq “issue.” They had hoped to remove Iraq “from the political arena” (Nagourney 2002a). Earlier they had failed to make an “issue” out of national security (Nagourney 2002b). A new national security adviser is ready to prod the administration on important “issues” (Weisman 2002). Bush thanked Democratic Sen. Richard Gephardt and Republicans for their work on the “issue” of authorizing force against Iraq (Allen 2002). Americans said they thought members of both parties were trying to manipulate the Iraq “issue” for their political advantage. Republicans are seeking to use the “issue” of acting against Iraq as a way to undercut Democratic opponents. Senator Paul Wellstone would prefer to campaign on the “populist bread and butter issues” rather than on Iraq (Wilgoren 2002).

Amid such pressing issues as tax cuts, a balanced budget, the economy, and corporate malfeasance, Republicans and Democrats will need to consider this other

"issue" of engaging another country in war. But whether to wage war is not just another political issue. Equating it as such marginalizes the debate itself.

For further illustration of how a political frame of reference emerges in the text, let us go to the polls. While one Washington Post-ABC news poll found that a growing majority of Americans say the Bush administration has presented enough evidence to justify military action in Iraq, another Washington Post-ABC News poll found that Americans favor having the government provide needed services over tax cuts (DeYoung 2003, Milbank 2003). Democrats point to polls showing voters are upset about the economy, but then again, Democrats are recognizing that the public believes an attack on Iraq is warranted, as indicated by public opinion polls (Nagourney 2002a, Cushman Jr. 2002).

Reports the *Times* in its lead to a page 1 story: "A majority of Americans say that the nation's economy is in its worst shape in nearly a decade and that President Bush and Congressional leaders are spending too much time talking about Iraq while neglecting problems at home, according to the latest New York Times/CBS News poll." Later the *Times* adds: "The poll was conducted a month before what Democrats and Republicans view as an extraordinarily competitive round of midterm Congressional elections" (Nagourney and Elder 2002).

Such use of polling and the stories reporting the results of such polling frame Iraq as just another political issue to be debated between the two parties. In such an extraordinary time of whether to launch what only might be a justified pre-eminent attack against another country, this type of coverage diminishes the matter as just another political exploit along the campaign trail.

The Oct. 7, 2002, issue of the *Times* is a telling example of the degree by which Iraq is construed as only a political debate rather than also as a policy debate. Of the six stories in the paper involving Iraq and the United States, two appear on the front page. One is a poll story, which equates the conflict in Iraq to domestic issues such as the economy. The other is about the U.S. Senate race in Minnesota. None of the stories in either the *Times* or the *Post* for that day quoted a source whom the *Guardian* believes to be pertinent to the debate but falls outside the realm of America's two-party political system: Saddam Hussein. Hussein said a new U.N. resolution against Iraq was an attempt by the United States to cover up its "lie" about Baghdad's weapons programs, according to the Iraqi News Agency as reported in the *Guardian* (Teather 2002).

Further limiting the field of debate – from two viewpoints to one – is the skewed perspective the two newspapers present. The coverage may address both Republicans and Democrats, but it is not balanced. Republicans are characterized as representing the majority of the people. Democrats, on the other hand, represent the fringe. They are out of touch. "Many people, President Bush among them" believe the threat of nuclear weapons makes deterrence and containment no longer an effective policy for dealing with Iraq. "No one in the mainstream," the *Post* reports, "believes that Hussein will disarm voluntarily" (Von Drehle 2002). "The majority of the American people tend to trust the Republican Party more on issues involving national security and defense than they do the Democratic Party," a Democratic Senator tells the *Times* (Cushman Jr. 2002). The Democratic Party, a Democratic U.S. representative says, presents "an argument that the bulk of the country doesn't agree with." Democratic opposition to the president and to his plan to attack Iraq is "a total disconnect with the American people," Democratic Senator

Zell Miller says (Nagourney 2002a).[3] Such characterizations further taint the credibility of those who oppose the Bush administration and the war.

The *Times* Oct. 7, 2002, page 1 story on the U.S. Senate race in Minnesota underscores this marginalization. Wellstone himself is described as one of "Congress's most outspoken liberals." He is the only incumbent who has vowed to vote against the resolution giving the president authority to attack Iraq, a fact the *Times* gives a light-hearted nod to. Wellstone, the *Times* reports, "has a contest with Senator Russell D. Fiengold of Wisconsin, a fellow Democrat, over who dissents in more 99-to-1 votes." Wellstone, according to his challenger, is "so far out of the mainstream, he's so extreme." A political science professor says he is "too nutty left." "Republicans," the *Times* says, "paint the incumbent as a radical peacenik" (Wilgoren 2002). Is there any doubt, then, that Wellstone and his anti-war views are not among the majority?[4] Is there any reason to doubt, then, the Bush administration's rationalization for war?

Wellstone is not the only radical peacenik identified by the *Times*. The theme carries over to a page 3 story, "Thousands at Central Park rally oppose an Iraq war." The narrative portrays the debate with a level of sincerity that only a Dennis Hopper metaphor seems to be missing:

> Several thousand people filled the park's East Meadow yesterday afternoon, taking in the sun that bathed the slight slope facing a stage where speaker after speaker – from activist actors to relatives of people killed in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks to high school students – strode to the microphone. Their messages were as diverse as those on the signs and T-shirts and leaflets in the crowd:

[3] A visit to Baghdad by a three-member Democratic delegation was of particular concern to some Democrats, the *Times* reported, because Representative Jim McDermott suggested that Bush might be misleading Americans as he made the case against Saddam Hussein.

[4] A correction about the Wellstone article ran the following day. The *Times* had misstated his margins of victory in 1990 and 1996. "Mr. Wellstone won with 50.4 percent of the vote in 1990 and 50.3 percent in 1996," the *Times* correction said. "He did not receive less than half the vote either time."

> "It Takes Courage Not to Make War."
>
> "Imagine."
>
> "Stop the Drug War."
>
> ...
>
> "You know what I say? I say the hell with the Patriot Act," one speaker shouted. "Victory to the women's revolution!" (Wilson 2002 rally).

One participant at the rally was a college student at Baird College – "22 miles from Woodstock," the *Times* explains. (Wilson 2002).

Protesters share in the Democrats' marginalization.

The characterization is not relegated to peace rallies alone. The last paragraph of another *Times* story describes a group of protesters at a Bush campaign rally who unfurled a banner protesting a war, "but that was quickly covered over with Rick Perry for governor signs" (Bumiller 2002).

The text suggests that protesters, like Democrats and the United Nations, are wrong about Iraq. The United States and the Republican Bush administration are right.

This two-party frame of reference tipped toward Republicans limits a broader exchange of ideas on how to deal with Iraq. It limits discussion to Republicans and Democrats and centers on the conflict between the two rather than on an exploration of alternatives. Compounding such repression of viewpoints is the characterization of Democrats as out of the mainstream, akin to those radicals who oppose war, who are not to be taken seriously because they too are *unreasonable*.

This "Republican vs. Democrat" map of meaning coupled with that of "good vs. evil" and "American omniscience" collectively shape the news content as being

supportive of the United States and the Bush administration while being critical of not only Hussein but also of the United Nations and rest of the world. These frames of reference limit a broader understanding of events and marginalize opposition and dissent. They fail to afford the careful deliberation necessary when it comes time to decide whether to go to war (Entman and Page 1994).

The "good vs. evil" frame characterizes the situation in Iraq as not a matter of weighing the merits of such an invasion but of "the threat" Hussein presents. He is construed as a tyrant, a madman. Like the dictators Hitler and Stalin before him, Hussein endangers America and the American way of life. Conquering Hussein is no less than a fight for freedom for America and the Middle East. Such is the justification for war.

The frame of "American omniscience" defends a U.S.-led invasion despite what the merits may be. The United States, as the most powerful country in the world, is the wisest country in the world. If the United States says weapons of mass destruction exist, only the foolish or blind would demur.

The "Republican vs. Democrat" frame further marginalizes opposition and limits the context of events. A war in Iraq is presented as little more than another campaign "issue" to be volleyed between the candidates rather than as a discussion about what such an invasion would mean. Republicans who support the war represent the mainstream. Democrats who oppose it are labeled out of touch.

The next chapter will show how those maps of meaning may have changed following each newspaper's realization that its coverage should have been more critical.

The text will show whether the newspapers afforded a wider interpretation of events that better scrutinized the Bush administration or if their ideologies continued to support the government line.

CHAPTER 5

AFTER THE MEA CULPAS: IS THE FRAME SHIFTING?

A clear change in tone is evident in the *Times*' and *Post*'s coverage following their published self-criticisms. The text is more critical. Word choice and phraseology provide immediate clues, but a greater diversity of sources beyond the Bush administration, Republicans, and Democrats and the choice of coverage itself accentuate the change. Yet amid this critical coverage, the same three "maps of meaning" persist. The situation in Iraq is a matter of good vs. evil. Americans, if not the Bush administration, are undoubtedly right. Iraq remains an issue between Republicans and Democrats. At times, the coverage in the *Post* and the *Times* follows the same approach, and the coverage in the *Guardian*, by contrast, exposes these now-familiar perspectives. At other times, however, the *Post* steps out from these frames of reference while the *Times* remains in. It is these times that prove the most enlightening.

Evil by Another Name

For both the *Post* and the *Times*, the "good vs. evil" frame of reference evident in their coverage prior to their published self-criticisms remains in the coverage that follows. Only the characters have changed. Gone is the tyrant Saddam Hussein. A new evil has entered the conflict, but this evil is not so new after all. These Iraqi "insurgents" are terrorists by another name. Evoking the t-word provides for readers both an understanding and a justification for dealing with Iraqis who oppose the U.S. invasion.

The wickedness of their terrorist ways is overshadowed only by the virtue of the innocent – a familiar perspective that further justifies this war as a fight for what is good.

"Insurgents" itself is a term brimming with latent meaning. Insurgents are the people who "are rising up against the established authority," according to Webster's New World College Dictionary. They are "mutinous," "traitorous," "subversive" and "out of control," according to The Synonym Finder. Occasionally, according to the *Times* and the *Post*, these insurgents can be "rebels." For the *Guardian* alone, however, these insurgents also can be "resistance fighters."

As "terrorists," these insurgents represent an all-too-familiar-foe, according to the *Post* and the *Times*. A December bomb blast in Karbala was the "worst terrorist strike" since March 2 (Sarhan and Vick 2004). Iraq has replaced Afghanistan as the training ground for the "next generation of 'professionalized' terrorists," according to a new report cited by the *Post*. (Priest 2005). The *Times*, citing the same report, says the war in Iraq could provide an important "training ground for terrorists" (Jehl 2005). "Fallujah is no longer a terrorist safe haven," an Army general says (Shadid 2004a)[5]. "Neither insurgents nor foreign terrorists" had been wounded (Shanker and Schmitt 2004). Iraqi insurgents are a similar evil as terrorists. If not the same.

The evil tryst is still more dire. The Iraqi insurgents are tied to the worst of the terrorists, public enemy number one: Osama bin Laden. Two militant groups in Iraq are "believed to be linked to Al Qaeda" (Tavernise 2004). One insurgent leader is "a ranking figure in the group now known as al Qaeda in Iraq, headed by the Jordanian militant Abu

[5] The *Post* spells the Iraqi city Fallujah. The *Guardian* and the *Times* spell it Falluja. This thesis spells it Fallujah out of quoted text.

Musab Zarqawi," the *Post* says. (Shadid 2004a). "Zarqawi," says the *Times*, is "Al Qaeda's point man in Iraq" (Tavernise 2004). American air strikes killed at least six senior members of "the terrorist network led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi" (Shanker and Schmitt 2004). Zarqawi himself is now nothing less than "the most wanted man in Iraq" (Fainaru and Saffar 2004). The only thing more dangerous than a terrorist, the text suggests, is a bin Laden terrorist.

The connotative meanings in the text only begin with such labels as insurgents and terrorists. The rhetorical structures of the stories perpetuate a similar understanding. A story in the *Post* illustrates well how this "good vs. evil" background frame of reference makes sense of events. While a literal parsing of the paragraphs suggests a critical assessment of whether Hussein and bin Laden operated in tandem, the juxtaposition implies a terrorist link between al Qaeda and Iraq that is a threat to democracy:

> President Bush has frequently described the Iraq war as an integral part of U.S. efforts to combat terrorism. But the council's report suggests the conflict has also helped terrorists by creating a haven for them in the chaos of war.
>
> "At the moment," NIC Chairman Robert L. Hutchings said, Iraq "is a magnet for international terrorist activity."
>
> Before the U.S. invasion, the CIA said Saddam Hussein had only circumstantial ties with several al Qaeda members. Osama bin Laden rejected the idea of forming an alliance with Hussein and viewed him as an enemy of the jihadist movement because the Iraqi leader rejected radical Islamic ideals and ran a secular government.
>
> *Bush described the war in Iraq as a means to promote democracy in the Middle East*. "A free Iraq can be a source of hope for all the Middle East," he said one month before the invasion. "Instead of threatening its neighbors and harboring terrorists, Iraq can be an example of progress and prosperity in a region that needs both" (Priest 2005) (emphasis added).

That the *Post* reaches back to cull a quote from Bush about promoting democracy to explain the U.S. effort to combat terrorism suggests a shared perspective with the administration: the only safe way for a government to operate is the American way.

The terrorist image is but one device used to characterize the Iraqi opposition. The tone of the text and the narrative further illustrate their evilness. The plight of the innocent serves as a stark contrast and further reinforces the frame.

Both U.S. newspapers depict how brutal these insurgents are. Innocent "hostages" are "kidnapped" and "beheaded" (Fainaru and Saffar 2004). Even women are "executed," a barbaric violation of the mores that govern war (Wong 2004). One "blindfolded woman was shot in the head at point-blank range" (Vick 2004).

The insurgents revel in their wicked ways. They lurk in their "hideouts" and await opportunities for "looting." They "mock" Iraqi authorities and "boast" of killing U.S. troops. (Shadid 2004a).

Their abomination has no bounds, according to the *Times*. No standard of decency is honored. Nothing sacred is left unviolated:

> "Who will benefit from your death?" one of the leaflets said in handwritten English. "George Bush and his oil cronies."
>
> "Who will benefit from your death?" said another leaflet. "Your wife and her new boyfriend" (Worth 2004b).

Much like how the actions of Hussein had defined his guilt, so too do the actions of the Iraqi opposition. Weapons of mass destruction or not, the text suggests, these barbarous people must be dealt with.

While the text of the *Times* and the *Post* defines and characterizes this evil, the stories also herald the innocent Iraqis as deserving of "liberation." They, too, abhor what the terrorists have done. A killing of a hostage brought "widespread condemnation" from among Iraqis, reports the *Post*. "There was anger in Iraq over the abduction. Iraqis on crutches and in wheelchairs gathered at a protest in Baghdad" (Vick 2004).

Narrative after narrative portrays innocent, oppressed Iraqis who yearn to pursue a life of liberty and happiness. They stomach war because they know it is for the better good. Like Americans, the Iraqi people loathe such terrorists because they attack their very freedoms and defile their moral values, the *Post* suggests:

> "To kidnap and kill anyone is inexcusable," Straw said, offering condolences to Hassan's family. "But it is repugnant to commit such a crime against a woman who has spent most of her life working for the good of the people of Iraq."
>
> Although the report of Hassan's death came within days of a fierce battle by U.S. forces to dislodge insurgents in the central Iraqi city of Fallujah, many Iraqis focused on her killing as a meaningless act.
>
> "Did they win? Is it something great for these men to kill an old woman?" said Sawsen Bayati, 35, who heard the news in a Baghdad kebab shop. "They cannot do anything to the American Army—that's why they go after those innocent people.
>
> "Oh, how I miss safety" (Vick 2004).

Themes of Iraqi people hopeful for a normal life emerge repeatedly in the text. They are portrayed as just regular Joes with regular jobs who are eager for regular days.

A baker yearns for the mundane, according to the *Post*:

> Abdulla Abu Ghassan, a bakery owner, received $1,200 after turning in a grenade launcher, an assault rifle and ammunition, all of which he said he had kept after serving in the now-disbanded Iraqi army.
>
> "I'm not connected to the Mahdi Army, but I think this is a good

> opportunity to end the fighting and achieve peace," he said. "The situation was very good yesterday. We did not hear any explosions, and we slept quietly. We really hope to live a normal life" (Fainaru and Saffar 2004).

A sandwich vendor only wants to work to support his family, according to the *Times*:

> One Mahdi Army member named Ali Abdullah approached the Habibiya police station to drop off his AK-47 assault rifle, his face wrapped in a white scarf for fear that someone would try to photograph him. He said he would use the $150 he received for his rifle to buy a cart to sell sandwiches on the street.
>
> "If Moktada says drop our weapons, then why should I resist?" Mr. Abdullah said. "He is the leader and he knows better than me what to do."
>
> "Look at my clothes," he said, pointing to his oil-spattered shirt and pants. "I can do any work you ask me, just give me a chance. I've got a family to support. I'll take the $150. Believe me, most of the people here are just ignorant and oppressed" (Filkins and Wong 2004).

A chef is only looking for a better life, according to the *Times*:

> The area is often the target of mortar fire, but rarely has the bombardment been so persistent and intense. About a dozen rounds were fired into the area through the night, said Tahir Rahim, a Pakistani who works as a chef there.
>
> "It was like an earthquake," said Mr. Rahim, who came to Iraq in July. "For months I was not scared, and today I woke up and thought maybe I made a mistake by coming here" (Tavernise 2004).

As every American knows, there is only one key to happiness. There is only one route to be free to work for a living and build a better life for your family. To realize such pursuits, to live a normal life, what is needed is clear. There are no other options. According to the *Post*, the good life is only available from, capable through, manifest in democracy:

> For many of the men gathered here, sitting under portraits of Baghdad's history, the elections are more important than the candidates. ...
>
> "Without elections, there will be tyranny," said Kadhim Hassan, a 37-year-old writer.
>
> A late-morning light bathed the crowded cafe in a soft glow as Hassan sat on a narrow wooden bench. He called the vote a "historic moment," then his face turned hard. "War and disasters," he said, shaking his head — that's what Iraqis have been born into.
>
> "Now most people feel they are living in darkness," Hassan said. "It's time for us to come into the light" (Shadid 2005).

There is no other way. There are no other avenues toward happiness and prosperity. Any other inkling is quickly discounted:

> "I'm not persuaded by the elections," declared Abdel-Rahman Abbas, 60, a former municipal worker with a well-groomed mustache and blue sports jacket. "The Americans can do what they want, and they've already made up their mind." ...
>
> But Abbas was a lone voice. Not that others thought the elections would be conducted peacefully; few didn't predict violence. But many of the writers, critics and intellectuals seemed to suggest that the price was worth paying (Shadid 2005).

The terrorist threat, the barbaric actions of the insurgency, and the plight of the innocent and oppressed reflect the "good vs. evil" perspective of the *Post* and the *Times*. The frame shapes the coverage. Any events that fall outside the frame – that lie beyond the sphere of consensus – seem to get ignored. Not so with the *Guardian*.

Absent from the coverage in both the *Post* and the *Times* are events in the *Guardian* that invert the "good vs. evil" frame. A Nov. 17, 2004 story, "Iraq crisis: Children pay a price for assault on Falluja," portrays a different type of innocence affected by the war. "Evidence began to emerge yesterday of civilians, including children, who were seriously injured in the US assault on the Iraqi city of Falluja," the *Guardian* story begins (McCarthy and Mansour 2004). Two months later another

Guardian story questions who indeed are the good guys. “America’s human rights abuses have provided a rallying cry for terrorists and set a bad example to regimes seeking to justify their own poor rights records, a leading independent watchdog said yesterday,” begins the January 14, 2005, story, “Bush under fire over human rights: Watchdog says US setting bad example” (Norton-Taylor, Borger, and Goldenberg 2005).

This coverage is conspicuously absent from the two U.S. newspapers, particularly the report by Human Rights Watch, whose representatives are quoted two months earlier by both the *Post* and the *Times* for other stories (Schmitt 2004a, Shadid 2004b). The omission suggests the news events did not suit their frame. The Human Rights Watch report lies in the sphere of controversy. The *Post* and the *Times* remain in the sphere of consensus.

The labeling of the Iraqi opposition as “insurgents” – and as “terrorists” in particular – continues to portray Iraq as a confrontation of “good vs. evil.” Coverage that would challenge that frame is omitted. The description of the Iraqi opposition’s savage ways contrasted with the plight of the innocent reinforces the frame. Post-war Iraq, as presented in this frame, is less about Middle East policy or exit strategies and nation-building than it is about the good guys against the bad guys. And the good guys practice democracy. Like the Americans do.

The Omniscient United States

A fissure seems to occur in the “omniscient United States” frame in the latter coverage. While the text prior to each newspaper’s mea culpa emphasizes the moral and

intellectual superiority of the United States – that the United States is right, the Bush administration is right, and the rest of the world is wrong – the latter coverage upholds a notion of U.S. preeminence but to varying degrees criticizes the Bush administration. Of particular interest is when the *Post* and the *Times* adhere to this frame while the *Guardian* does not and when the *Post* diverts from this frame while the *Times* does not.

A number of rhetorical features in the text of both U.S. newspapers maintain a perspective that differentiates the United States from the rest of the world and underscores its moral superiority.

Phraseology stakes out these boundaries for the *Times*. France and Germany are "estranged allies." Pakistan, Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia are "in the muddy middle." Poland, Italy, Britain, and Japan, on the other hand, have made the choice to "fall in line" (Cohen, Sanger, and Weisman 2004).

Even an effort by the *Times* to attribute this "us vs. them" mentality to the Bush administration only perpetuates it:

> "If you want to get a cheap cheer from certain quarters in America, it seems that all you have to do is bash the U.N., or the French or the very idea that allies are entitled to have their own opinions," Chris Patten, the commissioner for external relations for the European Union, said last month. "Multilateralists, we are told, want to outsource American foreign and security policy to a bunch of garlic-chewing, cheese-eating wimps."
>
> And so the cheese-eaters ask: What would a second Bush administration look like? (Cohen, Sanger, and Weisman 2004)

The transition may make for witty narrative, but it mocks the French, nevertheless.

Where the attribution is placed in the text subtly distinguishes the *Post* and the *Times* — and therefore the United States — from the rest of the world. Beginning with the attribution rather than ending with it emphasizes the notion that this is what others — not "we" — have to say.

From the *Post*:

> The British government concluded Tuesday that Margaret Hassan, a British-Iraqi relief official who worked on behalf of poor Iraqis for more than 20 years, was probably killed by kidnappers who seized her in Baghdad a month ago (Vick 2004).

From the *Times*:

> Sheik Ghazi al-Yawar, the interim president of Iraq, said Thursday that a veteran French journalist missing for eight days had been kidnapped and that his government was doing all it could to find her (Sciolino 2005).

By contrast, placing the attribution later in the lead suggests an interpretation tied to the U.S. perspective.

From the *Post*:

> While at least 38 Marine and Army troops have died in a tough week of house-to-house fighting in Fallujah, that is not the hardest part of the U.S. counteroffensive against the Iraqi insurgency.
>
> The U.S. strategy in Iraq, Marine Col. T.X. Hammes observed in a recent interview, is a three-step process ... (Ricks 2004).

From the *Times*:

> Iraqi insurgents are using roadside bombs with increasing effectiveness to disrupt American military operations in Iraq, the deputy commander of American forces in the Middle East said Wednesday. (Schmitt 2004b).

News-practice conventions suggest leading with the news itself rather than leading with the source, unless the source is as newsworthy as what the source says. But in the first two examples, in which a female hostage was probably killed and a French journalist likely kidnapped, the news is of greater significance than the source, yet each lead begins by identifying the source. This approach characterizes the account as something stemming from some "other" source.

The second two examples fall more in line with conventional news story structure, but as such they reinforce a frame of reference that the newspaper itself is among the "we," particularly the *Post* lead that places the attribution in the second paragraph. How different the perspective would be if "an American military commander said Iraqi insurgents are using roadside bombs with increasing effectiveness" or "a Marine colonel said that although 38 U.S. soldiers have died in a week of house-to-house fighting, the hardest part of the U.S. counteroffensive against the Iraqi insurgency lies ahead."

The alternating placement of attribution depending on the news content, stories about others such as the British and the French lead with the source while stories about Americans lead with the event, suggest the *Post* and the *Times* subscribe to a U.S. perspective that exceeds the journalistic goal of addressing an American audience.

One atypical attribution suggests an empathetic relationship with the source:

> "The next 10 days are a crucial period," a senior U.S. military officer, who spends extensive amounts of time in Iraq, said in a telephone interview yesterday. "My intention right now is to keep the pressure on, not let them go to ground, but batter them for the next 10 days to two weeks," said the officer, *whose position does not allow him to be quoted by name* (Ricks 2004) (Emphasis added).

Other rhetorical elements help to characterize the "others." Partial quotes are conspicuous: "He said that Iran and Islamic insurgents wanted "turbaned clerics to rule'" (Burns and Worth 2004). The opinions of others are not always expounded upon: "Shalan, who was criticized after making similar allegations about Iran last summer, also accused Syria of interfering, saying the neighboring state supported the Sunni insurgency. Both countries denied the charges." (Sarhan and Vick 2004).

The characterization of others becomes more pronounced during the coverage of the most intense events. The Marine shooting of an unarmed Iraqi exuded a divisive tone, making clear the Arab networks are not one of "our" own. "While U.S. networks declined to air the actual shooting, Arab networks such as al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya broadcast the entire incident, with graphics and narration illustrating the sequence of events," the *Post* reports (Shadid 2004b). Says the *Times*: "The insurgents have the added advantage of the Arabic-language satellite networks, particularly Al Jazeera, which endlessly repeat video clips of events like what appeared to be the shooting this week of an injured Iraqi prisoner in a Falluja mosque, helping to stoke the flames of Arab resentment" (Worth 2004b). It seems as though the *Post* and the *Times* blame Al Jazeera for the uproar rather than the shooting itself.

A comparison between the leads of the *Post* and the *Times* and the lead of the *Guardian* further illustrates a perspective among the American newspapers defending the United States and condemning the Middle East that the British newspaper does not share.

The *Post*:

> The killing of a wounded Iraqi by a U.S. Marine in Fallujah was termed a "tragic incident" by the U.S. military commander in Iraq on Tuesday as Arab satellite channels replayed unedited footage of the shooting as often as every half-hour (Shadid 2004b).

The *Times*:

> The marine who shot and apparently killed a wounded Iraqi prisoner in a mosque in Falluja on Saturday has been removed from the battlefield for questioning, and American commanders in Iraq said they were bracing for a wave of outrage in the Middle East after the broadcast of the videotaped shooting (Schmitt 2004a).

The *Guardian*:

> US marines yesterday rallied around their colleague who is being investigated for shooting an unarmed, wounded insurgent in a Falluja mosque, as a senior UN human rights official called for an inquiry into alleged abuses in the city (Younge and Whitaker 2004).

The *Post* characterizes the shooting as a "tragic incident" and points out the airing of "unedited" footage of the event. The *Times* qualifies the incident as an "apparent" shooting and also makes note of the airing of the videotape. The *Guardian*, in contrast, refers to the "shooting of an unarmed, wounded" insurgent and takes a different angle by noting that a U.N. official has called for an inquiry into other abuses. The second paragraph of the *Guardian* story goes on to report that the U.S. military promised an investigation into the shooting "amid allegations that marines shot three other wounded insurgents execution-style." The *Post* story makes no mention of these other allegations. Neither does the *Times*, though it does note — at the end of the story — two other soldiers who are facing charges of murder in similar events.

The pro-U.S. perspective shared by the *Post* and the *Times* had clear implications upon the content. The portrayals by the *Post* and the *Times* question whether the Marine shooting was even a wrongful action and blame Arab television for exacerbating the matter through their excessive coverage. The *Guardian* coverage, meanwhile, characterizes not just this incident as a human rights abuse but raises the issue of other abuses, abuses which the American press ignored.

The same differing perspectives between the American and British press is apparent in the coverage of a U.S. helicopter attack on Iraqi civilians. In the *Times*, the incident is reported in the fifth paragraph of a story headlined "Scores are dead after violence spreads in Iraq":

> In Baghdad, American military helicopters fired at Iraqis who were scaling a burning American armored vehicle. It was unclear how many Iraqis were killed in the airstrike. At least one television journalist was confirmed dead, and photographs immediately after the strike showed a group of four men severely wounded or dead at the site. American military commanders said the helicopters were returning fire aimed at them from the ground (Tavernise 2004).

The *Post* first recounts the incident in the third and fourth paragraphs of a story headlined "At least 80 civilians die in Iraqi violence; U.S. helicopter fires on crowd in Baghdad":

> A U.S. military helicopter fired into a crowd of civilians who had surrounded a burning Army armored vehicle in the capital, killing 13 people, said Saad Amili, spokesman for the Health Ministry. Among those killed was a Palestinian journalist reporting from the scene for the Arab satellite network al-Arabiya.
>
> The U.S. military said it was trying to scatter looters who were attempting to make off with ammunition and pieces of the Bradley Fighting Vehicle, which had been hit by a car bomb early in the morning on Haifa Street, a troublesome north-south artery west of the Tigris River (Spinner 2004).

The *Guardian* acknowledges the incident in the lead of a story headlined "Thirteen die in US attack on Baghdad crowd":

> The heaviest fighting for months erupted in the centre of Baghdad yesterday, only a brief stroll from the office of the prime minister, Ayad Allawi. Witnesses said at least 13 Iraqis were killed and 55 wounded after US helicopters attacked a crowd of unarmed demonstrators dancing round a burning Bradley armoured vehicle (McCarthy and Harding 2004).

Again, the portrayal of the incident by the American press is to either de-emphasize the incident or defend the U.S. position. The *Guardian*, in contrast, raises red flags, front and center.

The pro-U.S. perspective shared by the *Post* and the *Times*, however, is not universal. Whereas an omniscient portrayal of the United States remains, the actions of the Bush administration are singled out and called into question. Criticism emerges, as is evident by the sources, tone, narrative, and coverage.

While the coverage prior to each newspaper's published self-criticism routinely relies on official government sources, the coverage afterward is replete with sources outside of the immediate Bush administration and Republican and Democratic circles. The stories that cite these additional types of sources also portray a more critical tone and involve more critical coverage toward the administration. A story about the new national security adviser highlights the failed intelligence before the war and culls input from a former American arms negotiator, a former Central Intelligence Agency director, and a former executive with the National Security Council. A story assessing Bush's foreign policy following Sept. 11 features Mexico's former foreign minister, a foreign ministry spokesman in Tokyo, a former NATO secretary-general, a representative of the European

Union, the German ambassador to Washington, a French foreign policy expert, and a foreign policy expert at the American Enterprise Institute. A story about a day's violence in Iraq that also left civilians dead includes comments from Iraqi civilians and hospital officials. Another story about Iraqi violence includes accounts from witnesses who dispute accounts from the U.S. military about the helicopter strike. International human rights groups are quoted in the stories involving the Marine shooting of the unarmed Iraqi. The breadth of sources give more depth to the reporting.

Word choice also effuses a critical tone. Among the descriptions are a "discredited" intelligence report, "inadequate" planning, a "largely rejected" link between Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein, places in Iraq "ostensibly" under government control, "disintegrating" security and "rising" public anger, the "absence" of security and the "impotence" of the interim government, the Bush administration's "crash" program to provide funds for reconstruction that has "moved at a crawl," the Marine encirclement of Fallujah was "highly controversial," and the "uncertainty," "chaos," and "confusion" in the Iraqi capital."

A beacon for criticism is the word "criticism" itself: There are "critical" reports involving the detainment of immigrants, a "critical" report regarding an FBI whistleblower, and "widely criticized" Marine actions. There is American "criticism" of the reconstruction effort, and the Army Corps has avoided the "criticism" the Project and Contracting Office received. Major reconstruction projects have been "criticized" as grandiose, a lack of body armor has set off a fresh round of "criticism," "critics" said the legal memorandums sanctioned the use of torture, Bush has faced "criticism" for his

strategy in Afghanistan, “critics” point to a loss of international support, and many nations have “criticized” Bush. It is all very critical, if not incredulous.

Phrases especially underscore a changing portrayal of the Bush administration and its people and policies. “His statements also provided the most detailed explanation – and justification – of Marine actions in Fallujah this spring, which have been widely criticized for increasing insurgent activity in the city and turning it into a ‘no-go’ zone for U.S. troops,” reports the *Post* (Chandrasekaran 2004). “And over the course of the 18 month-long insurgency, U.S. officials frequently have overestimated their progress, both in creating durable Iraqi police and military units and in laying the groundwork for Iraqi political control of the country. ... On top of that, even the initial step of clearing out the insurgents is hardly concluded,” reports another (Ricks 2004). Says the *Times*: “The report says ‘experienced survivors of the war in Iraq’ may supersede current leaders of Al Qaeda to become major players in international terrorism, a possibility neither Mr. Bush nor his top advisers have given prominence to” (Jehl 2005). “The investigation, initiated recently by the inspector general at the Justice Department, will examine not only how reports of abuse witnessed by F.B.I. agents at the American base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and in Iraq were handled, but also whether bureau agents themselves took part in any improper methods of interrogation at the prisons, which are run by the military,” another *Times* story says (Lichtblau 2005). “What was planned as a short and decisive intervention in Iraq has become a grueling counterinsurgency that has put American troops into sustained close-quarters combat on a scale not seen since the Vietnam War,” the *Times* says (Shane 2004). “There is little question,” says another *Times* report, “that if Europe were voting on Nov. 2, Mr. Bush would lose by a landslide” (Cohen, Sanger, and

Weisman 2004). The journalists from the *Post* and the *Times* now seem to doubt the wisdom of their president if not the righteousness of their country.

A narrative in the *Times* questions the good of this Iraq war.

> The chubby man in the pale blue dishdasha robe was walking down the empty street, holding a set of white long underwear on a stick like a flag. He was the only Iraqi on the main road running through the heart of this nearly deserted city, and when they saw him, the American soldiers all raised their guns. He displayed his American handout of emergency food and his white underwear, and they let him pass.
>
> "I need the Americans to improve our lives, not make them worse," said the man, Kamal Mohammed Saleh, 44. He gazed around him at the burned and ruined buildings where he had lived through six months of guerrilla rule and then a week of all-out battle. "We want to have peace and law in this city," he said (Worth 2004a).

A narrative in the *Post* questions whether the war is worth it:

> Like the teenagers and college students across America who sit on couches late on weekend nights and into the next morning, these soldiers spend their free hours on the outskirts of the Iraqi capital killing one another in Xbox and PlayStation2 games such as Halo and Mortal Kombat. Between guard duty and patrols and shifts at the dining facility, they gather to crash fast cars, play volleyball with buxom women and mimic warfare.
>
> It's a virtual reality that at least temporarily hides the real war outside.
>
> "I don't like to leave the room, if possible," Girardin said, only partially in jest. He spends his days in a large tent as an administrator with the headquarters company of the 2nd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. "You forget where you are when you're in this room. Then you step outside and the reality hits you. You're in the desert. You're in Iraq. I try not to leave." (White 2004).

The breadth of sources, phraseology and word choice, and the storytelling reflect subtle changes by the *Post* and the *Times* toward being more critical of the Bush administration.

The choice of coverage itself is a more overt indicator and suggests a break from the earlier perspective that bordered at times on blind faith in the president. Headlines reflect a more skeptical U.S. press: "Powell sees no 'direct' link between Hussein, Sept. 11," "Ex-military lawyers object to Bush cabinet nominee," "Troops climbing first rung of steep ladder," "Grumbling swells on Rumsfeld's right flank," "A deluge of troubled soldiers is in the offing, experts predict," "Key general criticizes April attack in Fallujah; abrupt withdrawal called vacillation." Yet the newfound criticism itself does not signal a change in ideology.

Although the more critical portrayal of the Bush administration is evident in the coverage of the *Post* and the *Times*, whether an actual departure from the omniscient U.S. perspective has occurred is unclear given the newspapers earlier pro-U.S. portrayal of the Marine and helicopter shooting incidents. The coverage of two other events, however, suggests a change in perspective may have occurred – with one of them.

The first event concerns the release of a new CIA think tank report on future terrorist activity. The *Post* on January 14, 2005, found this story worthy of page 1. It leads with the following:

> Iraq has replaced Afghanistan as the training ground for the next generation of "professionalized" terrorists, according to a report released yesterday by the National Intelligence Council, the CIA director's think tank.
>
> Iraq provides terrorists with "a training ground, a recruitment ground, the opportunity for enhancing technical skills," said David B. Low, the national intelligence officer for transnational threats. "There is even, under the best scenario, over time, the likelihood that some of the jihadists who are not killed there will, in a sense, go home, wherever home is, and will therefore disperse to various other countries."
>
> Low's comments came during a rare briefing by the council on its new report on long-term global trends. It took a year to produce and includes

> the analysis of 1,000 U.S. and foreign experts. Within the 119-page report is an evaluation of Iraq's new role as a breeding ground for Islamic terrorists. (Priest 2005)

The *Times* places its same-day story on page 14. It leads with the following:

> The war in Iraq could provide an important training ground for terrorists, according to a government forecast that also says the key factors behind terrorism show no signs of abating over the next 15 years.
>
> The forecast, issued Thursday by the National Intelligence Council, describes a world in 2020 in which the United States remains the world's foremost power and political Islam remains a potent force. It describes the prospect of a terrorist attack using biological agents or, less likely, a nuclear device, as the greatest danger facing the United States.
>
> "A counterterrorism strategy that approaches the problem on multiple fronts offers the greatest chance of containing – and ultimately reducing – the terrorist threat," the report says. Beyond military force, the report advocates the promotion of education and political and economic development across the Muslim world (Jehl 2005).

The *Times* account later notes that the "discussion of the war in Iraq is limited to two paragraphs in the 119-page report."

In its story, the *Post* goes to great lengths to characterize a deteriorating situation in Iraq, ignoring the particulars of the report that would put the Iraq aspect in context. The story reflects an active challenge to the administration, and in this case perhaps an overzealous one.

The second event in which the two newspapers differ in their approach is the trial of the Army reservist involved in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. In its January 14, 2005, coverage, the *Post* extends the scope of the story to ponder involvement from superiors. The *Times'* same-day coverage opts instead to emphasize the individual's behavior.

Again, the coverage suggests divisions between the two newspapers' perspectives, with the *Post* casting a much more skeptical eye toward the Bush administration while the *Times* appears reluctant to.

The *Post* story, "Defense rests in abuse court-martial; judge refuses to allow efforts to determine role of officers at Abu Ghraib prison," appears on page 2. It leads with the following:

> After a military judge again rebuffed their efforts to probe the role of senior Army officers in the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal, defense lawyers for former guard Charles A. Graner Jr. rested their case Thursday, leaving the defendant's fate up to a 10-man military jury. (Reid 2005).

The story later adds:

> As has happened all week, testimony at the court-martial Thursday suggested that senior officers at Abu Ghraib knew about the conduct of guards who have been charged with crimes in the cellblock known as "One-Alpha."

Twice the story notes how the judge blocked defense attorney questioning into the role of military intelligence.

The *Times* story, "Army reservist's defense rests in Abu Ghraib abuse case," appears on page 10. It leads with the following:

> Lawyers for the Army reservist accused of being the ringleader of the abuse at Abu Ghraib prison abruptly ended his defense on Thursday without putting him on the stand to testify, as they had promised throughout his trial here (Zernike 2005).

The story explicitly details the role of the soldier in accounts of his e-mails presented during the trial:

> "The guys give me hell for not getting any pictures while I was fighting this guy," said one message, titled "just another dull night at work," with a photograph attached of a bound and naked detainee howling with pain, his legs bleeding. To an e-mail message about a Take Your Children to Work Day event, he replied, "how about send a bastard to hell day?" attaching a photograph of a detainee's head bloodied beyond recognition.

Any role that senior military intelligence officers may have played is recounted toward the end of the story, with rebuttals from the prosecution.

Again, the account in the *Post* is an active challenge to the administration, while the *Times* presents a more supportive depiction. The same event. Two different portrayals.

Do these differences in portrayals represent a change in perspective for the *Post* away from the frame of a superior and righteous United States? Bush bashing itself does not distinguish the coverage outside of the frame. What of the continuing characterization of "good vs. evil" that limits debate and the continuing portrayal of "us vs. them" that marginalizes other viewpoints? What of the earlier accounts of the Marine shooting and the helicopter strike? The perspective of the *Post* seems aligned with the *Times* in defending the United States, both of which contrast with the perspective of the *Guardian*. One "map of meaning" remains to shed more light.

Republican vs. Democrat

Notably, and surprisingly, the Republican vs. Democratic frame is less prevalent in the coverage following each newspaper's mea culpa. This is surprising, of course, because some of the coverage falls just prior to the presidential election, when it is

expected that each newspaper will seek comment from the Republican incumbent and the Democratic challenger on nearly every domestic and foreign policy discussion.

Themes that contribute to the "Republican vs. Democrat" frame emerge again in the text, but it is of interest to note that the characterization of Iraq as a campaign "issue" and as a matter of foreign policy differences between the candidates occurs primarily within the *Post* and before the election, while the marginalization of Democrats occurs primarily within the *Times* after the election.

For the *Post,* Iraq remains a campaign concern. A Sept. 13 story leads with the following:

> President Bush has risen in polls after taking the calculated risk to elevate security issues over pocketbook concerns in the campaign's home stretch.
>
> But strategists in both parties said that approach leaves him with acute vulnerabilities in case of an economic shock, a terrorist attack or heavy attention to a bloody October in Iraq (Allen 2004).

The rhetorical structure of the story is particularly illuminating. In this passage of text the juxtaposition of the war amid the campaign serves as an awkward transition, but the *Post* thought the content pertinent there, nevertheless:

> The week after that is the scheduled start of the campaign debates. Bush's negotiators plan to insist that the first debate, to be devoted to domestic issues, will include homeland security, according to outside presidential advisers.
>
> The exposure for Bush was clear as security spiraled out of control in Baghdad yesterday, with insurgents shelling the heart of the city with mortar and rocket barrages just days after U.S. military deaths in Iraq passed 1,000 and the Pentagon admitted that rebels control swaths of central Iraq. With violence flaring in urban areas last month, the United States suffered its highest combat injury toll for any month since the war began.
>
> The Bush-Cheney campaign's focus on safety and security pervaded the

> Republican National Convention, where prime-time speakers repeatedly portrayed Bush as a steady and steely commander in the war on terrorism, with little attention to domestic issues.

Discussion of the election is linked to Iraq. Discussion of Iraq is linked to the election. Notable in a Sept. 13 *Post* story headlined "Powell sees no 'direct' link between Hussein, Sept. 11," is the second paragraph:

> Asked how he believes Sen. John F. Kerry would respond to a terrorist attack, Powell said, "I can't tell you how he might respond to it. As commander in chief, I think he'd respond to it in a robust way (Washington Post 2004).

Another *Post* story continues to portray Iraq in relation to the presidential campaign. It leads with the following:

> *At a sensitive moment in the U.S. presidential campaign*, the Bush administration is promoting the tentative success of Afghanistan's election as a hopeful model for Iraq's future: a messy, often violent struggle against extremists that has nevertheless produced democratic elections" (Wright 2004) (emphasis added).

The story goes on to say that "analysts and some U.S. officials" question just how much similarity there is between the two countries. Sandwiched amid comments from various analysts and White House and State Department officials are a few paragraphs explaining Kerry's opinions as well as a few quotes from the Democratic candidate. Kerry is not an analyst or a U.S. official. The "Republican vs. Democratic" frame persists in shaping the story.

The *Times*, to a lesser degree, follows suit. The second paragraph of an Oct. 12 story, "U.S. is pressing donors to speed aid for Iraq," notes the following:

> The extent to which the United States is going it alone in Iraq has been debated heatedly in the presidential campaign, so the outcome of the conference, to be held tomorrow and Thursday, could figure in domestic politics as well" (Eckholm 2004).

And later:

> Beyond the implications for Iraqi welfare, the quest for aid is colored by presidential politics at home. The Democratic challenger, Senator John Kerry, argues that by making a fresh start with shaky allies, he could more successfully gain international help in Iraq.

The recurring characterization of Iraq as a campaign issue before the November election is expected. Iraq indeed is an issue the candidates should debate, and that debate the *Post* and the *Times* should report. But the seeming inability of the *Post* and the *Times* to extract Iraq from the campaign trail, whether the subject is ties to Sept. 11, Afghanistan or international aid, suggests their coverage is confined to the "Republican vs. Democrat" perspective.

Following the election, however, only the *Times* continues to portray Iraq as a matter between Republicans and Democrats. But as was the case in the coverage earlier, one political party is characterized as superior to the other.

Democrats are portrayed as outsiders angling to get in. Their viewpoints are expressed as political mischief rather than as policy debate. The ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee and five other lawmakers, "all Democrats," requested that the Justice Department investigate reports of torture (Lichtblau 2005). President Bush's nominee for attorney general has been "put on notice by Senate Democrats" that he will be questioned (Lewis 2004). The relegation to troublemaker is another method of marginalization.

Acceptable criticism of the administration is up to Republicans to make. A National Guardsman's concerns about a lack of battle armor in Iraq set off a sharp round of criticism of him "from some fellow Bush supporters, including prominent Republican senators, a retired general and a leading intellectual architect of the war" but apparently no Democrats (Purdum 2004)[6].

One word in another *Times* report provides a final clue. A story recounting Bush's foreign policy record notes how he walked away from certain international treaties. "*Even* Mr. Kerry," the *Times* reports, "says the Kyoto protocol on global warming that Mr. Bush rejected should be renegotiated (Cohen, Sanger, and Weisman 2004) (emphasis added). Even those as far out of the mainstream as Democrats would have agreed with President Bush, the text suggests.

The "Republican vs. Democratic" portrayal is less evident in the latter coverage than it is prior to each newspaper's mea culpa, but it seems just as indicative of each newspaper's perspective. That such a portrayal is absent in the coverage in the *Post* after the election is revealing. That it remains in the *Times* is more so.

As this chapter has shown, the three "maps of meaning" persist in the reports of the *Post* and the *Times* following their mea culpas. Just like with the earlier coverage, the newspapers' subscription to these background frames of reference limit scrutiny and a broader understanding of events.

[6] The Times later printed a correction to its December 16, 2004, story: Because of an editing error, an article yesterday about new criticism of Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld from Bush supporters referred incorrectly in some copies to the political affiliation of one critic, the retired general H. Norman Schwarzkopf. He is an independent, not a Republican.

The degree by which Iraq is still portrayed as a fight between good and evil continues to perpetuate the administration's range of meanings for the conflict. The tyrant Saddam Hussein is gone, but *terrorists* such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi are now the threat. Weapons of mass destruction are less the justification for war than the liberation of an innocent people. Events that challenge this frame – such as the death of Iraqi children by U.S. bombs or the United States' poor human rights record – are omitted.

An omniscient United States frame remains in the text, but a more critical tone toward the Bush administration emerges. Sources such as foreign policy experts, human rights groups, and witnesses – all absent from the earlier coverage – impart context beyond what the Bush administration, Republicans, and Democrats provide. The tone of stories is more critical of the administration as are the topics of stories themselves, such as the questioning of links between Hussein and Sept. 11, the Republican rebuke of Rumsfeld, and a general criticizing U.S. military strategy. Yet the coverage of two intense events – the Marine shooting and the helicopter attack – suggest the *Post* and the *Times* are still characterizing events through a perspective that the United States is right and just, despite any evidence to the contrary. Only by January 14, 2005, the last sample period for this study, dose one of the newspapers seem to break from this perspective. The coverage of the CIA terror report and the Abu Ghraib trial suggests the *Post* is moving away from this frame.

The *Post* also seems to break from the "Republican vs. Democrat" frame in the latter coverage. Before the election, the frame is evident in how Iraq is characterized as an issue for the candidates to debate. It is a characterization that primarily occurs within

the *Post*. After the election, the frame is evident in how Democrats are marginalized. It is a characterization that primarily occurs within the *Times*.

If a shift in the hegemonic frame occurs, if the "symbolic coercion" of the Bush administration is spurned, if the claims of the opposition are realized to have merit, it occurs with the *Post* and not the *Times*. Yet their sources are similar. A change in ideology seems to have changed the *Post*'s perspective.

CONCLUSION

ANALYSIS SUFFERS AS MORAL IMPERIALISM REIGNS

If General Eisenhower was right, if public opinion wins wars, then the *Post* and the *Times* helped the Bush administration "win" the Iraq war, or in the least, they helped sell it to the American public. More than a year after the invasion and months after these elite newspapers publicly vowed to do better, the substandard reporting continued. The coverage supported the ideology of the Bush administration if not the Bush administration itself. Pundits and patriots can debate whether such a perspective is good for the country, but the point this study reiterates is that the media's subscription to such an ideology – willingly or otherwise – is a failure to live up to the responsibilities of a free, open and democratic press. Ideology of one sort or another undoubtedly will influence the coverage, but during times of war a democratic press must be wary of succumbing to those ideologies that perpetuate the hegemonic frame at the expense of upholding those responsibilities.

This study set out to examine how the coverage of Iraq in the *Times* and the *Post* changed following each newspaper's admission that its earlier reporting should have been more critical of the government. The examination itself was expected to provide a better understanding of the influences upon the elite media during times of armed conflict. It has. Within the parameters of this study, the newspapers' ideologies – rather than their reliance on official sources – have a greater impact on shaping the coverage.

What is the ideology that the *Post* and the *Times* embrace and perpetuate? A close reading of the text reveal three predominant background frames of reference. These

"maps of meaning" contextualize the events in Iraq. Whether the coverage involves the affairs that lead up to the war or the events that follow, these "dominant interpretative paradigms" frame for the American public what foreign policy experts and at least one Congressman consider to be a radical turning point in U.S. history (Hall et al. 1978, Humanist 2003, Kegley and Raymond 2003). These frames make the unprecedented understandable.

Together these frames – "good vs. evil," "the omniscient United States," and "Republican vs. Democrat" – constitute an ideology of *moral imperialism*. By moral imperialism, the author means a perspective rooted in the belief that there is good and there is evil, that the United States and its brand of democracy are the embodiment of this good, and that Republicans – hence "mainstream" America – and not Democrats will lead this righteous cause.

It is important to reiterate that journalists do not set out to skew their reporting to conform to such an ideology. Indeed, journalistic principles disapprove of any such tactics rooted in willingness. But as Bennet notes, the process takes place "behind our backs." Ideology gives meaning to events that otherwise would be too foreign to understand. What Hall says bears repeating: "Ideology is a function of the discourse and of the logic of social processes rather than the intention of the agent." Without ideology, there could be no understanding.

This study does not purport some journalistic Holy Grail of ideology-free reporting. It only hopes to raise further awareness among journalists that ideology limits a broader understanding of events, and the more unusual the events, the stronger the influence of ideology becomes.

The degree by which an ideology of moral imperialism restricts context and marginalizes other voices is evident in the text both before and after each newspaper's mea culpa. The newspapers' coverage later becomes more critical, as reflected in their effort to reach beyond official sources and cover the troubles of war, but the ideological frame persists, lending support to the government's initiatives rather than marshalling scrutiny.

Fables Are for Fairy Tales

As noted earlier, the "good vs. evil" frame persists in the newspapers' coverage. The earlier stories revolve around the "menace" Saddam Hussein. The latter stories conjure images of "insurgents," "terrorists" by another name. The depiction of events, the influence of the ideology, is evident in the text. Although the characters – and subsequently the sources – changed, the theme remains the same.

The earlier coverage demonizes Hussein. The Iraqi leader is a tyrant, a liar, a man not to be trusted. The issue of whether to invade Iraq is reduced to a matter of the good guys vs. the bad guy. Hussein's guilt is presumed, and any debate about whether Iraq has weapons of mass destruction is less a matter of deliberation than the administration – and the U.S. press – going through the motions toward conviction. The Bush administration, the elite media, the American public all *know* he is guilty. Impartiality seems a relevant journalistic tenet for only less certain things.

The latter coverage continues to characterize events from the same perspective, where the nature of the opposition predetermines their guilt and the righteousness of the U.S.-led invasion. "Insurgents" – and "terrorists" specifically – are now the new evil

standard by which the government rationalizes its actions. As Hartley notes, "certain terms become 'loaded' with significance" (1982, 6). The *Post* and the *Times* follow dutifully along. That both newspapers vacillate between identifying Abu Musab Zarqawi as either a Jordanian militant or bin Laden's right-hand man suggests the newspapers may have tried to step outside of the perspective but failed (Tavernise 2004, Fainaru and Saffar 2004, Schmitt 2004b, Shanker and Schmitt 2004, Spinner 2004, Vick 2004, Shadid 2004a, Chandrasekaran 2004).

Although the characters changed, the characterization remains. Zarqawi and his lieutenants replaced Hussein and his administration, yet the issue of Iraq remains a battle between good and evil. The latter coverage even reinforces this frame. The newspapers portray the Iraqi citizens as people who yearn for their own freedom and democracy. The conflict in Iraq remains a matter of moral reckoning.

Criticism and Scrutiny Are Not Synonymous

Much of the latter coverage suggests the newspapers may have rejected the "omniscient U.S." perspective, but in key moments it emerges, indicating the newspapers may not have abandoned the frame at all. However, some of the coverage in the *Post* stands out, so if a shift in the hegemonic frame occurred, if a different ideology emerged to shape popular consent, it began to be reflected within the pages of the *Post* alone.

The earlier coverage is so laden with government support that the *Post* and the *Times* deserve credit only for recognizing the elephant that had walked into their newsrooms. Other countries are delegitimized and their viewpoints marginalized – if included at all. The characterization of the United Nations borders on that of buffoon.

The degree to which the reporting made assumptions would have raised "Dewey defeats Truman" red flags in any other news context. Conclusions are presented based on limited sourcing or by presenting material out of context, journalistic deficiencies editors are trained to be dubious of. The administration's claims are largely unchallenged.

The latter coverage is decidedly more critical. The tone has changed. The choice of what to cover suggests a more skeptical perspective. Sources outside of official Washington circles provide additional viewpoints. Yet the coverage of the most intense events suggests the government's symbolic coercion persists. Only the text from the *Post* at the end of the study period suggests that a shift in the hegemonic frame may have begun.

Although whether such a shift occurred is uncertain, a comparison of the coverage among the *Post*, the *Times*, and the *Guardian* helps clarify the influences upon the media. The coverage shows accounts of the same events shaped by different perspectives but the availability of similar sources remains the same.

Two events in particular suggest the *Post* and the *Times* continue to subscribe to an "omniscient U.S." perspective. In both their headlines and their leads, the *Post* and the *Times* characterize the September 2004 U.S. helicopter strike in Baghdad as just another day of violence in Iraq. The *Guardian*, on the other hand, in both its headline and its lead focuses on the fact that the strike killed a number of unarmed demonstrators.

In the other event, the November 2004 Marine shooting of the unarmed Iraqi, the *Post* and the *Times* come to the defense of their country. The *Post* characterizes the shooting as a tragedy of war. The *Times* is unsure whether the soldier even committed a crime. Both lament the continuous replays of the shooting on Arab television stations,

suggesting that in itself is the greater sin. The *Guardian*, however, is clearly detached from such a perspective. The British newspaper not only is certain of the Marine's misdeed but also extends the debate by emphasizing a human rights official's call for an investigation into allegations of other "execution-style" shootings by U.S. Marines.

This omission of content in the U.S. press is what Lentz refers to as an "episode of strategic silence" (1991, 10). Such episodes help reveal an ideological perspective. "The version of reality thus constructed relies upon the production of meanings based not only upon published content but upon ways in which some things are not 'seen,' or if seen, not recorded, as part of the social transaction between readers and creators of editorial matter" (Lentz 1991, 11). The *Post* and the *Time*'s version of reality differed from that of the *Guardian*.

In both the helicopter strike and the Marine shooting, the U.S. newspapers perceived reality through an ideology of moral imperialism. The storylines fit that perspective. That American forces could be outright guilty of such heinous crimes is outside the newspapers' realm of understanding. The *Post* and the *Times* may not be sidling up with the Bush administration as before, but their coverage, in at least these two events, still falls within the sphere of consensus.

By January 2005, however, some key text hints at a change in perspective for the *Post*, five months after its mea culpa, but not for the *Times*. Here, once again, the available sources remain the same, but the characterization of events differs.

In one instance, the *Post* demonstrates a level of eagerness to challenge the administration that borders on the sensationalistic. By stressing Iraq in its story on the CIA terrorism report, the *Post* casts a critical light on both the Bush administration and

the war in Iraq, despite the fact that Iraq is limited to two paragraphs in the 119-page CIA report (Priest 2005). The *Times* story characterizes the CIA report as more of an assessment of terrorism worldwide, which the report is, and less of an indictment of the situation in Iraq, which it is not (Jehl 2005). The *Post* is *reaching* for an opportunity to criticize the government for what is unfolding in Iraq, and its exploit suggests the newspaper has abandoned the government's frame.

In the trial of the U.S. soldier charged in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, the *Post*'s changing point of view is evident again. Its characterization of the trial continuously suggests that military superiors played a role in the abuse – a challenge to the Bush administration's frame that none was involved (Reid 2005). The *Times* story on the trial portrays the scandal as the work of an individual – the Bush administration's contention (Zernike 2005). Same trial. Same sources. Different perspectives.

Choosing Sides

Although the "Republican vs. Democrat" perspective is less recurrent following each newspaper's mea culpa, when and to what extent this background frame of reference occurs helps to further reveal what appears to be an ideological break between the *Post* and the *Times.* Prior to the presidential election, September 13 and October 12 of 2004 in this study, the two newspapers continue to characterize Iraq more as a campaign issue between Republicans and Democrats than as a foreign policy quandary before the American public. After the election, November 17 and December 16 of 2004 and January 14 of 2005, the *Post* seems to have dropped this perspective, further suggesting it has

perceived a shift in the hegemonic frame. The *Times*, however, persists in characterizing events as a Republican vs. Democrat matter, its ability to scrutinize the administration still compromised by its indoctrination by the moral imperialism ideology.

For both newspapers, the scope of the coverage is shaped less by the sources per se than by the choice of sources. "By exercising selectivity," Hall et al. say, "the media begin to impose their own criteria on the structured 'raw materials' – and thus actively appropriate and transform them" (1978, 60). The *Post* abandons the "Republican vs. Democrat" frame because after the election it no longer fits what appears to be its changing perspective. The *Times* keeps the frame because it still suits its perspective. For the *Times*, delegitimizing Democrats still lies within the sphere of consensus.

The Contrary Stuff

Did the *Post* and the *Times* succeed in improving their coverage to better scrutinize the government's initiatives? An assessment of the manifest content of the text might suggest they have. A host of stories express criticism of the administration, from the sources quoted to the topics of coverage to the tone of the coverage itself. But a closer look at the text, an evaluation of its latent content, reveals the coverage remains largely entrenched in an ideology of moral imperialism that limits context and marginalizes other points of view. By January 2005, it appears the *Post* alone has started to break from that perspective, to move from the sphere of consensus toward the sphere of controversy. Whether the *Post* indeed has completed the shift would require further examination beyond the scope of this study.

Much like after the first Gulf War when the news media failed to sufficiently scrutinize the government, journalists once again are looking at ways to better fulfill their primary democratic role as public watchdog. The author offers some suggestions based on the findings of this study:

"Good vs. evil" always has been and always will be a compelling narrative frame, but journalists must continually remind themselves that the justification for war is too complex a matter to render sufficiently in such simple terms. This is not to say journalists must abandon such a theme and the drama and detail along with it, but they must remain aware that this frame exists and provide the additional scrutiny, reporting, and context so that "good vs. evil" is only a means to describe the story and not the story itself.

Journalists must avoid following the fable's convictions. As the *Guardian* showed in a number of incidents, from the U.S. helicopter shooting upon a Baghdad crowd to the death of Iraqi children from U.S. bombs, a peak behind the shining armor can reveal the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Sometimes the United States is wrong, no matter how likely it seems that the United States is right. There is no more an imperative time for American journalists to recognize the fallibility of their own country than during times of war. On most every other matter, from Capitol Hill to corporate America to the ball field, journalists scrutinize judiciously, as they should. Sometime after Sept. 11 and during the run-up to war in Iraq, that dubiousness apparently had gone astray. The shortcoming is not so simple a matter as a lack of access to information or competitive pressures or newsroom routines that affected the newspapers' abilities to scrutinize the government's claims. It is a matter of maintaining its scrutiny of those in power because the media has been

entrusted to serve as a watchdog over government. Sometimes it is a matter of resisting the administration's characterizations ("the threat," "Iraqi arms violations," "Al Qaeda's point man in Iraq") and claims (a well-received U.N. presentation by Colin Powell). Sometimes it is a matter of giving greater voice to those not in Washington or wearing the stars and stripes.

During times of war reporters and editors not only must "worry about all this contrary stuff" but also must actively seek it out and trumpet it across page 1. The story about New York-based Human Rights Watch condemning America's human rights record made Page 1 of the *Guardian*. It went unreported in the *Post* and the *Times*.

Although it is incumbent upon journalists in a democracy to publish the points of view of their political leaders, the airing of ideas should not be exclusive to political leaders alone. Just as journalists are obligated to provide information that goes beyond government publicity campaigns, they also must go beyond the political scripture confined to two perspectives: Republican and Democrat. Both newspapers found a variety of diverse sources to comment on the war once it had started. That same effort would have provided meaningful context before the war, even if, as the *Guardian* had, it meant quoting from the Iraqi News Agency to provide some alternative perspective. Politics may be a horse race, but any debate to wage war is not.

Distilling such grave matters into the two-party perspective runs an additional risk. Characterizing the ramifications of war akin to the routine serve-and-volley accounts of Republican and Democrat posturing cloaks the issue as only further political sniping in which the public has grown numb to. If the quality of the news coverage is never more

important than when the country is considering such a radical move as whether to wage war, then innovation – not convention – must drive the coverage.

This period of study shows that despite the vows by the *Post* and the *Times* to report with more scrutiny, they continued to stumble with their coverage of Iraq. Despite their intentions to do better, despite a changing of events and availability of sources, the journalists remain embedded within an ideology of moral imperialism that limits scrutiny of the government's actions. The crucial lesson, in which neither the published mea culpas nor the latter coverage suggests the *Post* and the *Times* have learned, is to recognize that ideology and how it influences the coverage.

The ideology renders a cluster of impressions, themes, and superficial explanations, what Hall et. al refer to as a "public image":

> Since such "public images," at one and the same time, are graphically compelling, but also stop short of serious, searching analysis, they tend to appear *in place of analysis* – or analysis seems to collapse into the image. Thus at the point where further analysis threatens to go beyond the boundaries of a dominant ideological field, the "image" is evoked to foreclose the problem (1978, 118).

Times of war demand serious, searching analysis. Anything less is a failure to live up to the responsibilities of a free and democratic press. This is the time when newspapers must lead, not follow.

APPENDIX

The Washington Post

FINAL

Thursday, August 12, 2004

In Athens, It's Safety At All Costs

$1.5 Billion for Security Is Most Ever for Games

By Amy Shipley and Craig Whitlock
Washington Post Staff Writers

ATHENS, Aug. 11—Two days before the 2004 Olympics begin, about 70,000 Greek security forces are patrolling Athens and competition venues scattered around the country, while 1,000 security cameras and a couple of blimps are keeping an electronic eye on the proceedings. Greek fighter planes and NATO surveillance aircraft are guarding the skies. Patriot missile batteries have been installed to counteract potential terrorist threats from above.

In the midst of international terror concerns, Greek government officials say they have gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure the safety of the Games. A seven-nation advisory group and NATO have lent their expertise and firepower in an unprecedented cooperative effort of a scale unimagined when Athens won the Games in 1997.

But Greece alone has been left to pay the bill—$1.5 billion, nearly triple the original projections. Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis said Greece "asked and happily received the assistance, grudgelove and contributions of all our allies," but no nation or group offered to defray the costs, which traditionally have been borne by the host nation. ...

"No country in the world may face the security

See OLYMPICS, A16, Col. 1

A Greek soldier patrols in Athens. Other countries will bring armed security guards for protection.

Ready to Make a Splash

Michael Phelps, of Baltimore County, is the center of attention in Athens as he prepares to launch his pursuit of a record eight gold medals in swimming. *Page D1*

Off to a Strong Start

Two days before the opening ceremonies, competition in the Athens Games begins: The U.S. women's soccer team gets underway with a 3-0 victory over host Greece. *Page D9*

Getting a Glimpse of the Zoo's Latest Attraction

Media representatives and friends of the National Zoo were given the chance yesterday to ooh and ahh over three Sumatran tiger cubs that were born May 3. They go on public view starting today. Story, and photos of the cubs, Page B1.

Oil Prices Up Despite Saudi Offer

Some Traders Doubt Kingdom's Ability to Increase Production

By Joseph Bloom
Washington Post Staff Writer

Saudi Arabia sought to calm turbulent oil markets yesterday by offering to boost production, but after an initial drop in prices the cost of oil rose again by day's end.

The Saudis' failed attempt to lower prices lower suggests to many industry specialists that current conditions—production at near capacity, surging demand and fears of terrorism—are curtailing the long-established power of the kingdom in international markets.

"In a sense, it's a perfect storm," said Fareed Mohamedi, chief economist for PFC Energy, a Washington-based consulting firm. "Many factors have just all come together and pushed the Saudi ability to the wall."

Rising oil prices have become an issue in President Bush's reelection.

The U.S. Federal Reserve on Tuesday blamed the run-up in oil prices for the recent sharp slowdown in the economy.

Democratic presidential candidate John F. Kerry has raised concern that U.S. dependence on oil from Saudi Arabia, the world's largest exporter, leaves the United States vulnerable. At last month's Democratic convention

See OIL, A13, Col. 1

Ominous Calm Settles Over Baghdad

A Week of Fighting in Capital, Najaf Has Residents Fearing the Worst

By Jackie Spinner and Doug Struck
Washington Post Foreign Service

BAGHDAD, Aug. 11—Said Shamari made his usual morning run on Wednesday to buy goods at a wave-house on Sinak Street, a commercial strip that is normally bustling with shop owners hosing crates of merchandise. But when he arrived, Shamari found the warehouse doors shuttered and the street deserted.

Like Sinak Street, much of Baghdad was subdued on Wednesday after militia fighters loyal to Moqtada Sadr, a militant Shiite Muslim cleric, warned that they would carry out attacks throughout the capital.

Those attacks had not come by dusk, and there were few reports of roving bands of Sadr's Mahdi Army fighters. But it was clear that seven days of fighting between U.S.-led forces and the Mahdi Army in southern Iraq and in Baghdad's Sadr City neighborhood have frightened a city already unnerved by months of violence.

"All we want is to make our country stable," said Shamari, a slight 23-year-old. "I think the only solution is to

See IRAQ, A18, Col. 1

Iraqis loyal to Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr pray in Najaf, where U.S. military commanders delayed what was expected to be a decisive battle. Story, Page A18.

■ **Chalabi said to be back in Iraq to face charges.** | *Page A19*

Prosecutors Seek Indefinite Delay For Bryant Trial

By Rene Sanchez
Washington Post Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES, Aug. 11—Calling their case clouded by court errors and delays, prosecutors have asked a Colorado judge to indefinitely postpone the upcoming trial of pro basketball star Kobe Bryant on charges of felony sexual assault.

In a filing made public Wednesday, the Eagle County, Colo., district attorney's office said it is making the request just two weeks before the scheduled start of Bryant's trial because it believes the jury pool has been tainted and because it is waiting for crucial court rulings on evidence.

The prosecution's request came in the same week that his accuser filed a lawsuit against Bryant, one of the nation's most famous athletes, seeking at least $75,000 in damages for the alleged assault. After that request became publicly known, prosecutors appealed a key ruling in the case to the Colorado Supreme Court—arguing that the accuser's sexual history should not be admitted as evidence, the Associated Press reported.

The developments could signal that the criminal case against Bryant is unraveling, legal analysts said.

See BRYANT, A13, Col. 5

The Post on WMDs: An Inside Story

Prewar Articles Questioning Threat Often Didn't Make Front Page

By Howard Kurtz
Washington Post Staff Writer

Days before the Iraq war began, veteran Washington Post reporter Walter Pincus put together a story questioning whether the Bush administration had proof that Saddam Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction.

But he ran into resistance from the paper's editors, and his piece ran only after assistant managing editor Bob Woodward, who was researching a book about the drive toward war, "helped sell the story," Pincus recalled. "Without him, it would have had a tough time getting into the paper." Even so, the article was relegated to Page A17.

"We did our job but we didn't do enough, and I blame myself mightily for not pushing harder," Woodward said in an interview. "We should have wanted readers we had information that the basis for this was shakier" than widely believed. "Those are exactly the kind of statements that should be published on the front page."

As violence continues in postwar Iraq and U.S. forces have yet to discover any WMDs, some critics say the media, including The Washington Post, failed the country by not reporting more skeptically on President Bush's

See COVERAGE, A20, Col. 2

INSIDE

U.S. Nears Deal To Free Hamdi
Yaser Esam Hamdi, a U.S. citizen who was captured alongside pro-Taliban forces in Afghanistan in 2001, has never been charged.
NATION, *Page A2*

Yaser Esam Hamdi

Chavez Builds Legacy in Venezuela
Even opponents of President Hugo Chavez, who faces a recall vote Sunday, concede that his social programs and appeals to the country's increasingly activist poor will have a lasting impact on Venezuelan society.
WORLD, *Page A14*

The Post on the Internet: washingtonpost.com

District Names Chief of Schools

Clifford Janey, Who Led Systems in Mass., N.Y., Will Take Over Soon

By Sewell Chan
Washington Post Staff Writer

Clifford B. Janey, who spent three decades educating students in Bosnia and Rochester, N.Y., was named superintendent of the District's public schools yesterday, ending an agonizing search that began in the fall and exasperated city officials, parents and teachers alike.

Addressing D.C. Board of Education members before they unanimously approved his appointment, Janey recalled growing up in a public housing complex in Boston in describing the educational aspirations he hopes to impart. "I always like to remind our students: It's not where you start but where you finish, and you never really finish with the work that you do," he said.

Janey, 58, who plans to start this month, was not the first choice of District leaders. Two previous front-runners withdrew from consideration. As the fifth regular D.C. superintendent in a decade, he inherits the task of educating 64,000 pupils—from toddlers in Head Start centers to 20-year-olds trying to obtain a high school diploma—in one of the lowest-performing urban education systems in the nation.

In his 30-year career, Janey said, "I haven't found an individual who didn't want improvement, but I've found a number of peo-

See SCHOOLS, A12, Col. 2

Clifford B. Janey, flanked by Board of Education President Peggy Cooper Cafritz and Mayor Anthony Williams, talks to media.

Group Runs Anti-Kerry Ads on Black Radio Stations

By Thomas B. Edsall
Washington Post Staff Writer

A group financed by a major Republican contributor has begun running radio ads in about a dozen cities, many in battleground states, attacking Sen. John F. Kerry as "rich, white and wishy-washy" and mocking his wife for boasting of her African roots.

The D.C.-based group, People of Color United, has substantial financial backing from J. Patrick Rooney, the former chairman of Golden Rule Insurance Co. and the founder of a new firm, Medical Savings Insurance Co. Both firms specialize in medical savings accounts, created by Republican-backed 1996 legislation, and health savings accounts, which were created by President Bush's 2003 Medicare prescription drug legislation.

CAMPAIGN 2004

One of the radio ads addresses Kerry's failure to vote on a bill to extend unemployment benefits for 13 weeks. "It needed 60 votes to pass. Ninety-nine out of 100 senators voted—Kerry did not! It lost by one vote! Maybe Kerry thought the more of us who are unemployed and hurting, the more likely we would vote Democrat."

Another ad attacks Teresa Heinz Kerry,

See ADS, A9, Col. 1

■ **Bush sticks to theme of national security.** | *Page A8*

August 12, 2004
The Post on WMDs: An Inside Story
Prewar Articles Questioning Threat Often Didn't Make Front Page

By Howard Kurtz
Washington Post Staff Writer

Days before the Iraq war began, veteran Washington Post reporter Walter Pincus put together a story questioning whether the Bush administration had proof that Saddam Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction.

But he ran into resistance from the paper's editors, and his piece ran only after assistant managing editor Bob Woodward, who was researching a book about the drive toward war, "helped sell the story," Pincus recalled. "Without him, it would have had a tough time getting into the paper." Even so, the article was relegated to Page A17.

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As violence continues in postwar Iraq and U.S. forces have yet to discover any WMDs, some critics say the media, including The Washington Post, failed the country by not reporting more skeptically on President Bush's contentions during the run-up to war.

An examination of the paper's coverage, and interviews with more than a dozen of the editors and reporters involved, shows that The Post published a number of pieces challenging the White House, but rarely on the front page. Some reporters who were lobbying for greater prominence for stories that questioned the administration's evidence complained to senior editors who, in the view of those reporters, were unenthusiastic about such pieces. The result was coverage that, despite flashes of groundbreaking reporting, in hindsight looks strikingly one-sided at times.

"The paper was not front-paging stuff," said Pentagon correspondent Thomas Ricks. "Administration assertions were on the front page. Things that challenged the administration were on A18 on Sunday or A24 on Monday. There was an attitude among editors: Look, we're going to war, why do we even worry about all this contrary stuff?"

In retrospect, said Executive Editor Leonard Downie Jr., "we were so focused on trying to figure out what the administration was doing that we were not giving the same play to people who said it wouldn't be a good idea to go to war and were questioning the administration's rationale. Not enough of those stories were put on the front page. That was a mistake on my part."

Across the country, “the voices raising questions about the war were lonely ones,” Downie said. “We didn’t pay enough attention to the minority.”

When national security reporter Dana Priest was addressing a group of intelligence officers recently, she said, she was peppered with questions: “Why didn’t The Post do a more aggressive job? Why didn’t The Post ask more questions? Why didn’t The Post dig harder?”

Several news organizations have cast a withering eye on their earlier work. The New York Times said in a May editor’s note about stories that claimed progress in the hunt for WMDs that editors “were perhaps too intent on rushing scoops into the paper.” Separately, the Times editorial page and the New Republic magazine expressed regret for some prewar arguments.

Michael Massing, a New York Review of Books contributor and author of the forthcoming book “Now They Tell Us,” on the press and Iraq, said: “In covering the run-up to the war, The Post did better than most other news organizations, featuring a number of solid articles about the Bush administration’s policies. But on the key issue of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, the paper was generally napping along with everyone else. It gave readers little hint of the doubts that a number of intelligence analysts had about the administration’s claims regarding Iraq’s arsenal.”

The front page is a newspaper’s billboard, its way of making a statement about what is important, and stories trumpeted there are often picked up by other news outlets. Editors begin pitching stories at a 2 p.m. news meeting with Downie and Managing Editor Steve Coll and, along with some reporters, lobby throughout the day. But there is limited space on Page 1 -- usually six or seven stories—and Downie said he likes to feature a broad range of subjects, including education, health, science, sports and business.

Woodward, for his part, said it was risky for journalists to write anything that might look silly if weapons were ultimately found in Iraq. Alluding to the finding of the Sept. 11 commission of a “groupthink” among intelligence officials, Woodward said of the weapons coverage: “I think I was part of the groupthink.”

Given The Post’s reputation for helping topple the Nixon administration, some of those involved in the prewar coverage felt compelled to say the paper’s shortcomings did not reflect any reticence about taking on the Bush White House. Priest noted, however, that skeptical stories usually triggered hate mail “questioning your patriotism and suggesting that you somehow be delivered into the hands of the terrorists.”

Instead, the obstacles ranged from editing difficulties and communication problems to the sheer mass of information the newsroom was trying to digest during the march to war.

The Doubts Go Inside

From August 2002 through the March 19, 2003, launch of the war, The Post ran more than 140 front-page stories that focused heavily on administration rhetoric against Iraq. Some examples: “Cheney Says Iraqi Strike Is Justified”; “War Cabinet Argues for Iraq Attack”; “Bush Tells United Nations It Must Stand Up to Hussein or U.S. Will”; “Bush Cites Urgent Iraqi Threat”; “Bush Tells Troops: Prepare for War.”

Reporter Karen DeYoung, a former assistant managing editor who covered the prewar diplomacy, said contrary information sometimes got lost.

“If there’s something I would do differently—and it’s always easy in hindsight—the top of the story would say, ‘We’re going to war, we’re going to war against evil.’ But later down it would say, ‘But some people are questioning it.’ The caution and the questioning was buried underneath the drumbeat. . . . The hugeness of the war preparation story tended to drown out a lot of that stuff.”

Beyond that, there was the considerable difficulty of dealing with secretive intelligence officials who themselves were relying on sketchy data from Iraqi defectors and other shadowy sources and could never be certain about what they knew.

On Sept. 19, 2002, reporter Joby Warrick described a report “by independent experts who question whether thousands of high-strength aluminum tubes recently sought by Iraq were intended for a secret nuclear weapons program,” as the administration was contending. The story ran on Page A18.

Warrick said he was “going out on a limb. . . . I was struck by the people I talked to—some on the record, others who couldn’t be—who were saying pretty persistently that these tubes were in no way suitable for uranium enrichment. On the other side were these CIA guys who said, ‘Look, we know what we’re talking about but we can’t tell you.’ “

Downie said that even in retrospect, the story looks like “a close call.” He said the inability of dissenters “to speak up with their names” was a factor in some of his news judgments. The Post, however, frequently quotes unnamed sources.

Not all such stories were pushed inside the paper. A follow-up Warrick piece on the aluminum tubes did run on Page 1 the following January, two months before the war began. And The Post gave front-page play to a Sept. 10, 2002, story by Priest contending that “the CIA has yet to find convincing evidence” linking Hussein and al Qaeda.

That hardly settled the matter. On Dec. 12, 2002, investigative reporter Barton Gellman—who would later win acclaim for his skeptical postwar stories from Iraq on WMDs—wrote a controversial piece that ombudsman Michael Getler complained “practically begs you not to put much credence in it.” The headline: “U.S. Suspects Al Qaeda Got Nerve Agent From Iraqis.”

The story, attributed to “two officials with firsthand knowledge of the report” to the Bush administration “and its source,” said in the second paragraph that “if the report proves true”—a whopper of a qualifier—it would be “the most concrete evidence” yet to support Bush’s charge that Iraq was helping terrorists.

Gellman does not believe he was used. “The sources were not promoting the war. . . . One of them was actually against it,” he said. “They were career security officials, not political officials. They were, however, wrong.” Gellman added that “it was news even though it was clear that it was possible this report would turn out to be false.”

But sources, even suspect ones, were the only game in town. “We had no alternative sources of information,” Woodward said. “Walter [Pincus] and I couldn’t go to Iraq without getting killed. You couldn’t get beyond the veneer and hurdle of what this groupthink had already established”—the conventional wisdom that Hussein was sitting on a stockpile of illegal weapons.

In October 2002, Ricks, a former national security editor for the Wall Street Journal who has been covering such issues for 15 years, turned in a piece that he titled “Doubts.” It said that senior Pentagon officials were resigned to an invasion but were reluctant and worried that the risks were being underestimated. Most of those quoted by name in the Ricks article were retired military officials or outside experts. The story was killed by Matthew Vita, then the national security editor and now a deputy assistant managing editor.

“Journalistically, one of the frustrations with that story was that it was filled with lots of retired guys,” Vita said. But, he added, “I completely understood the difficulty of getting people inside the Pentagon” to speak publicly.

Liz Spayd, the assistant managing editor for national news, says The Post’s overall record was strong.

“I believe we pushed as hard or harder than anyone to question the administration’s assertions on all kinds of subjects related to the war. . . . Do I wish we would have had more and pushed harder and deeper into questions of whether they possessed weapons of mass destruction? Absolutely,” she said. “Do I feel we owe our readers an apology? I don’t think so.”

Digger or Crusader?

No Post reporter burrowed into the Iraqi WMD story more deeply than Pincus, 71, a staff member for 32 of the last 38 years, whose messy desk is always piled high with committee reports and intelligence files. “The main thing people forget to do is read documents,” said Pincus, wielding a yellow highlighter.

A white-haired curmudgeon who spent five years covering the Iran-contra scandal and has long been an expert on nuclear weapons, Pincus sometimes had trouble convincing editors of the importance of his incremental, difficult-to-read stories.

His longevity is such that he first met Hans Blix, who was the chief U.N. weapons inspector in Iraq, at a conference in Ghana in 1959.

“The inspectors kept getting fed intelligence by our administration and the British and the French, and kept coming back and saying they couldn’t find” the weapons, Pincus said. “I did one of the first interviews with Blix, and like everyone else he thought there would be WMDs. By January and February [of 2003], he was starting to have his own doubts. . . . What nobody talked about was how much had been destroyed,” either under U.N. supervision after the Persian Gulf War or during the Clinton administration’s 1998 bombing of Iraqi targets.

But while Pincus was ferreting out information “from sources I’ve used for years,” some in the Post newsroom were questioning his work. Editors complained that he was “cryptic,” as one put it, and that his hard-to-follow stories had to be heavily rewritten.

Spayd declined to discuss Pincus’s writing but said that “stories on intelligence are always difficult to edit and parse and to ensure their accuracy and get into the paper.”

Downie agreed that difficulties in editing Pincus may have been a factor in the prewar period, because he is “so well sourced” that his reporting often amounts to putting together “fragments” until the pieces were, in Downie’s word, “storifyable.”

Some editors, in Pincus’s view, also saw him as a “crusader,” as he once put it to Washingtonian magazine. “That’s sort of my reputation, and I don’t deny it,” he said. “Once I get on a subject, I stay with it.”

On Jan. 30, 2003, Pincus and Priest reported that the evidence the administration was amassing about Baghdad hiding weapons equipment and documents “is still circumstantial.” The story ran on Page A14.

Some of the reporters who attended the daily “war meetings,” where coverage was planned, complained to national editors that the drumbeat of the impending invasion was crowding out the work of Pincus and others who were challenging the administration.

Pincus was among the complainers. “Walter talked to me himself,” Downie said. “He sought me out when he was frustrated, and I sought him out. We talked about how best to have stories be in the kind of shape that they could appear on the front page.” Editors were also frustrated, Downie said. “Overall, in retrospect, we underplayed some of those stories.”

The Woodward Factor

Bush, Vice President Cheney and other administration officials had no problem commanding prime real estate in the paper, even when their warnings were repetitive. "We are inevitably the mouthpiece for whatever administration is in power," DeYoung said. "If the president stands up and says something, we report what the president said." And if contrary arguments are put "in the eighth paragraph, where they're not on the front page, a lot of people don't read that far."

Those tendencies were on display on Feb. 6, 2003, the day after Secretary of State Colin Powell delivered a multimedia presentation at the United Nations—using satellite images and intercepted phone calls—to convince the world that Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction.

An accompanying front-page story by DeYoung and Pincus examined Powell's "unprecedented release of U.S. intelligence." Not until the ninth paragraph did they offer a "however" clause, saying that "a number of European officials and U.S. terrorism experts" believed that Powell's description of an Iraqi link to al Qaeda "appeared to have been carefully drawn to imply more than it actually said."

Warrick focused that day on the secretary's assertion, based on human sources, that Iraq had biological weapons factories on wheels. "Some of the points in Powell's presentation drew skepticism," Warrick reported. His piece ran on Page A28.

Downie said the paper ran several pieces analyzing Powell's speech as a package on inside pages. "We were not able to marshal enough evidence to say he was wrong," Downie said of Powell. "To pull one of those out on the front page would be making a statement on our own: 'Aha, he's wrong about the aluminum tubes.' "

Such decisions coincided with The Post editorial page's strong support for the war, such as its declaration the day after Powell's presentation that "it is hard to imagine how anyone could doubt that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction." These editorials led some readers to conclude that the paper had an agenda, even though there is a church-and-state wall between the newsroom and the opinion pages. Editorial Page Editor Fred Hiatt, not Downie, runs the opinion side, reporting to Post Co. Chairman Donald Graham.

In mid-March, as the administration was on the verge of invading Iraq, Woodward stepped in to give the stalled Pincus piece about the administration's lack of evidence a push. "We weren't holding it for any political reason or because we were being pressured by the administration," Spayd said, but because such stories were difficult to edit at a time when the national desk was deluged with copy. "People forget how many facets of this story we were chasing . . . the political ramifications . . . military readiness . . . issues around postwar Iraq and how prepared the administration was . . . diplomacy angles . . . and we were pursuing WMD. . . . All those stories were competing for prominence."

As a star of the Watergate scandal who is given enormous amounts of time to work on his best-selling books, Woodward, an assistant managing editor, had the kind of newsroom clout that Pincus lacked.

The two men's recollections differ. Woodward said that after comparing notes with Pincus, he gave him a draft story consisting of five key paragraphs, which said the administration's evidence for WMDs in Iraq "looks increasingly circumstantial and even shaky," according to "informed sources." Woodward said Pincus found his wording too strong.

Pincus said he had already written his story when Woodward weighed in and that he treated his colleague's paragraphs as a suggestion and barely changed the piece. "What he really did was talk to the editors and made sure it was printed," Pincus said.

"Despite the Bush administration's claims" about WMDs, the March 16 Pincus story began, "U.S. intelligence agencies have been unable to give Congress or the Pentagon specific information about the amounts of banned weapons or where they are hidden, according to administration officials and members of Congress," raising questions "about whether administration officials have exaggerated intelligence."

Woodward said he wished he had appealed to Downie to get front-page play for the story, rather than standing by as it ended up on Page A17. In that period, said former national security editor Vita, "we were dealing with an awful lot of stories, and that was one of the ones that slipped through the cracks." Spayd did not recall the debate.

Reviewing the story in his glass-walled office last week, Downie said: "In retrospect, that probably should have been on Page 1 instead of A17, even though it wasn't a definitive story and had to rely on unnamed sources. It was a very prescient story."

In the days before the war, Priest and DeYoung turned in a piece that said CIA officials "communicated significant doubts to the administration" about evidence tying Iraq to attempted uranium purchases for nuclear weapons. The story was held until March 22, three days after the war began. Editors blamed a flood of copy about the impending invasion.

Whether a tougher approach by The Post and other news organizations would have slowed the rush to war is, at best, a matter of conjecture.

"People who were opposed to the war from the beginning and have been critical of the media's coverage in the period before the war have this belief that somehow the media should have crusaded against the war," Downie said. "They have the mistaken impression that somehow if the media's coverage had been different, there wouldn't have been a war."

A10 THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 2004

THE STRUGGLE FOR IRAQ: Language of Politics, and Diplomacy

THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE

Candidates' Iraq Policies Share Many Similarities

By ADAM NAGOURNEY and RICHARD W. STEVENSON

WASHINGTON, May 25 — When it comes to Iraq, it is getting harder every day to distinguish between President Bush's prescription and that of Senator John Kerry.

They still differ on some details, and Mr. Kerry continues to assert that Mr. Bush has lost so much credibility around the world that only a new president can rally other nations to provide the necessary assistance, a point he made Tuesday while campaigning in Oregon.

But, as became evident with Mr. Bush's latest speech on Iraq on Monday night, which followed a detailed speech Mr. Kerry gave on Iraq's future one month ago, the broad outlines of their approaches are more alike than not. That is particularly true as Mr. Bush moves toward giving the United Nations more authority, a move long advocated by Mr. Kerry.

They both support the June 30 deadline for the beginning of the transition to civilian power. They both say they would support an increase in United States troop strength, if necessary. Neither has supported a deadline for removing United States troops.

Mr. Bush's gradual shift away from what many Democrats have long denounced as a go-it-alone stance is an adjustment to the surge in violence in Iraq, as well as the deterioration of domestic support for the occupation in the wake of the prison abuse scandal.

But there also is clearly a political component at play here, as the White House seeks, while managing its own problems, to create a predicament for Mr. Bush's Democratic opponent. Mr. Kerry this week is beginning a series of speeches in which he will lay out some of his most detailed foreign policy pronouncements.

The fact that Mr. Bush has moved close to Mr. Kerry on some of these questions makes it much more difficult for Mr. Kerry to take advantage of what Democrats and Republicans view as the biggest political crisis of Mr. Bush's presidency, by emphasizing differences between them. Mr. Kerry is left to argue that while both men have similar ideas about what to do, he has more credibility to do it, given the breakdown in relations between Mr. Bush and many world leaders over Iraq.

Mr. Kerry has negotiated the shifting sands of Iraq for more than a year now. Some Democrats said that their candidate would just as soon stand back and not engage Mr. Bush on the war, allowing the president to struggle with setbacks, while avoiding making himself a target should Mr. Bush attempt to suggest that he is not supporting the troops.

But as Mr. Kerry is well aware, there is a growing antiwar segment of the American electorate. And there is likely to be an antiwar candidate on the ballot, in the person of Ralph Nader, the independent candidate who has called for an immediate withdrawal of American forces. In another sign of the complication Mr. Kerry faces, Al Gore, one of the party's severest critics of the war, is to deliver a speech in New York on Wednesday that is expected to call for the dismissal of top administration officials and assert that Americans have been put at risk at home and abroad by Mr. Bush's foreign policy.

"He's caught between what would be politically advantageous, declaring a timetable for getting out, and what he knows is the reality on the ground, which is that we need more troops," said one adviser who Mr. Kerry relies on heavily. "And the internal debates have often been between the camps in the campaign who want a clear break from the Bush policy and those who want to portray Bush as largely introspective in executing what strategy they had."

Mr. Kerry's advisers minimized the extent to which Mr. Bush's shifts had made him less vulnerable to criticism on Iraq, and disputed the notion that Mr. Kerry has not, or could not, draw differences with the president on this issue. And they noted a series of recent polls that show both a drop in support for the occupation of Iraq and concern over whether Mr. Bush has a plan to end it, arguing that the issue was more of a problem for Mr. Bush than it was for Mr. Kerry.

"John Kerry as a Democratic candidate for president has said more about how to fix Iraq than the sitting president, the commander-in-chief, the person who will lead the nation into this war," said Stephanie Cutter, a senior Kerry adviser.

In a speech last month, Mr. Kerry said the goal of the United States should be to bring about "a stable, free Iraq with a representative government, secure in its borders." That position is broadly indistinguishable from that of Mr. Bush.

The differences, as they exist, are relatively minor. Mr. Kerry has called for NATO to take a major role in Iraq, freeing up American troops and providing an opening to attract military support from non-NATO nations like India and Pakistan.

Mr. Bush has left open the possibility of a larger role for NATO, but has not pressed hard for such a change, and administration officials are skeptical that Europeans have any desire to contribute more assistance than they already have.

Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said Tuesday that Iraq would be discussed at the NATO summit at the end of next month in Turkey, and that 16 of the 26 NATO member nations are already involved in Iraq in some way.

He said that NATO has not ruled out an expanded role in Iraq, but that there is no consensus on what that role would be.

"We should not go into this, as some critics have, thinking that, you know, all you have to do is go to NATO and there is a huge body of troops waiting there just to be asked," Mr. Powell said.

Mr. Kerry has also called for the establishment of a United Nations high commissioner to oversee the political development of Iraq and the rebuilding efforts. Mr. Bush has more or less embraced the need for the United Nations to authorize a multinational force led by the United States — a position long pushed by Mr. Kerry — but has signaled no support for putting additional direct power in the hands of a United Nations commissioner.

The core of Mr. Kerry's argument is that Mr. Bush is now viewed with such low regard in Europe that it would take a new president to put together an international coalition. Mr. Kerry asserted that it would take a new president to "clear the air" and re-establish battered relations with former allies.

Administration officials have been dismissive of Mr. Kerry's idea of putting a United Nations high commissioner in Iraq. They have argued that the Iraqis do not want the United Nations in power any more than they want the United States in power.

"This is not East Timor," one senior administration official said, a reference to the breakaway Indonesian territory where a high commissioner was put in place.

IRAQI GOVERNMENT

Scientist Jailed by Hussein Is Favored for Premier's Post

By STEVEN R. WEISMAN

WASHINGTON, May 25 — An Iraqi Shiite nuclear scientist who broke with Saddam Hussein over the country's nuclear weapons program has emerged as a leading candidate to become the country's first prime minister when sovereignty is restored at the end of June, American and Iraqi officials said Tuesday.

The officials said Dr. Hussein al-Shahristani, a science adviser to the Iraqi government who spent years in Abu Ghraib prison for defying Mr. Hussein and objecting to the weapons program, was the kind of nonpolitical figure being sought by both the United Nations and the Bush administration.

The selection of Dr. Shahristani, if it becomes final, could also break a long and bitter impasse among Iraq's various ethnic and religious factions over who will be governing Iraq from June 30 to the time of Iraq's first elections, planned for early next year.

Administration officials say that until a caretaker government is formed, there can be no final negotiations on a United Nations Security Council resolution aimed at conferring legitimacy on the Iraqi government and on a multinational force led by American commanders.

In a separate development on Tuesday, a difference of perspectives emerged between the United States and Britain over exactly how much power the new Iraqi government would have over its own security forces and over the multinational force.

Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain said Tuesday that Iraqi leaders would have an effective veto, not only over their own participants in military operations, but also over American operations aimed at insurgencies in places like Falluja, a center of resistance activity. In saying so, Mr. Blair went further in emphasizing Iraq's authority over military affairs than any American official had.

"If there's a political decision as to whether you go into a place like Falluja in a particular way, that has got to be done with the consent of the Iraqi government," he said at a news conference in London. "That's what the transfer of sovereignty means."

But in Washington on Tuesday Secretary of State Colin L. Powell declined to say there would be any veto by the Iraqis, emphasizing instead that there would be consultations before any military action.

"Obviously we would take into account whatever they might say at a political or military level," Mr. Powell told reporters at the State Department. "And to make sure that that happens, we will be creating coordinating bodies, political coordinating bodies and military-to-military coordinating bodies so that there is transparency with respect to what we are doing."

Still, American and British officials insisted that there was not a material difference in the two positions. Iraqi objections would in most cases block a major military action by the United States, the officials said, but the United States under some circumstances — like pursuing a known terrorist — would override Iraqi objections.

"Instead of imagining vetoes or hypothetical conflicts," a British official said, "we should be looking at what the Iraqi defense minister is saying, which is that the decisions will be taken through consultation and partnership."

The search for a prime minister and other top aides to the cared-for government has been led by Lakhdar Brahimi, a United Nations special envoy, and Robert D. Blackwill, President Bush's envoy in Iraq.

A senior administration official said from Baghdad that no final decision had been made on the top jobs in the government but that Mr. Blackwill and Mr. Brahimi were closing in on their choices.

"We're down to a handful of names

Patrick E. Tyler contributed reporting from London for this article, and Warren Hoge from the United Nations.

A Shiite nuclear expert said no to the dictator's order to build a bomb.

following but has won respect for his work in the American-picked Iraqi Governing Council.

There, said he two vice presidents, also in largely ceremonial posts, and a cabinet of up to 30 ministry that is expected to include both nonpolitical leaders and also representatives of various constituent groups.

The uncertainty and difficulties over setting up a caretaker government — with only five weeks to go before self-rule is established — increased confusion at the Security Council and even among some Iraqi leaders, who charge that the United States has not committed itself to full sovereignty at all.

The confusion over the precise nature of Iraqi control over Iraq's military operations and the actions of foreign forces after June 30 has also pervaded the debate at the United Nations Security Council, where the United States and Britain submitted a draft resolution on the issue on Monday.

French, German, Russian and Chinese envoys are all demanding that the American-British draft needed to spell out the issues of authority over security and also Iraqi authority over oil revenues, finances and the rostering of ministries.

Also needing to be clarified, European and United Nations diplomats said, is the extent to which American military officers or contractors will be, immune from prosecution by Iraqi courts.

A senior diplomat from a country on the Security Council complained recently that the United States needed to provide consistent signals about Iraqi sovereignty. As an example, he said Mr. Powell's recent statement that the United States would pull its forces out if asked after June 30 was at odds with Mr. Bush's statement that the United States would persevere and not allow itself to be driven from Iraq.

"It's a complete contradiction," the diplomat said.

FROM THE EDITORS

The Times and Iraq

Over the last year this newspaper has shone the bright light of hindsight on decisions that led the United States into Iraq. We have examined the failings of American and allied intelligence, especially on the issue of Iraq's weapons and possible Iraqi connections to international terrorists. We have studied the allegations of official gullibility and hype. It is past time we turned the same light on ourselves.

In doing so — reviewing hundreds of articles written during the prelude to war and into the early stages of the occupation — we found an enormous amount of journalism that we are proud of. In most cases, what we reported was an accurate reflection of the state of our knowledge at the time, much of it painstakingly extracted from intelligence agencies that were themselves dependent on sketchy information. And where those articles included incomplete information or pointed in a wrong direction, they were later overtaken by more and stronger information. That is how news coverage normally unfolds.

But we have found a number of instances of coverage that was not as rigorous as it should have been. In some cases, information that was controversial then, and seems questionable now, was insufficiently qualified or allowed to stand unchallenged. Looking back, we wish we had been more aggressive in re-examining the claims as new evidence emerged — or failed to emerge.

The problematic articles varied in authorship and subject matter, but many shared a common feature. They depended at least in part on information from a circle of Iraqi informants, defectors and exiles bent on "regime change" in Iraq, people whose credibility has come under increasing public debate in recent weeks. (The most prominent of the anti-Saddam campaigners, Ahmad Chalabi, has been named as an occasional source in Times articles since at least 1991, and has introduced reporters to other exiles. He became a favorite of hard-liners within the Bush administration and a paid broker of information from Iraqi exiles, until his payments were cut off last week.) Complicating matters for journalists, the accounts of these exiles were often eagerly confirmed by United States officials convinced of the need to intervene in Iraq. Administration officials now acknowledge that they sometimes fed for misinformation from these exile sources. So did many news organizations — including this one.

Some critics of our coverage during that time have focused blame on individual reporters. Our examination, however, indicates that the problem was more complicated. Editors at several levels who should have been challenging reporters and pressing for more skepticism were perhaps too intent on rushing scoops into the paper. Accounts of Iraqi defectors were not always weighed against their strong desire to have Saddam Hussein ousted. Articles based on dire claims about Iraq tended to get prominent display, while follow-up articles that called the original assertions into question were sometimes buried. In some cases, there was no follow-up at all.

On Oct. 26 and Nov. 8, 2001, for example, Page 1 articles cited Iraqi defectors who described a secret Iraqi camp where Islamic terrorists were trained and biological weapons produced. These accounts have never been independently verified.

On Dec. 20, 2001, another front-page article began, "An Iraqi defector who described himself as a civil engineer said he personally worked on renovations of secret facilities for biological, chemical and nuclear weapons in underground wells, private villas and under the Saddam Hussein Hospital in Baghdad as recently as a year ago." Knight Ridder Newspapers reported last week that American officials took that defector — his name is Adnan Ihsan Saeed al-Haideri — to Iraq earlier this year to point out the sites where he claimed to have worked, and that the officials failed to find evidence of their use for weapons programs. It is still possible that chemical or biological weapons will be unearthed in Iraq, but in this case it looks as if we, along with the administration, were taken in. And until now we have not reported that to our readers.

On Sept. 8, 2002, the lead article of the paper was headlined "U.S. Says Hussein Intensified Quest for A-Bomb Parts." That report concerned the aluminum tubes that the administration advertised insistently as components for the manufacture of nuclear weapons fuel. The claim came not from defectors but from the best American intelligence sources available at the time. Still, it should have been presented more cautiously. There were hints that the usefulness of the tubes in making nuclear fuel was not a sure thing, but the hints were buried deep, 1,700 words into a 2,800-word article. Administration officials were allowed to hold forth at length on why this evidence of Iraq's nuclear intentions demanded that Saddam Hussein be dislodged from power; "The first sign of a 'smoking gun,' they argue, may be a mushroom cloud."

Five days later, the Times reporters learned that the tubes were in fact a subject of debate among intelligence agencies. The misgivings appeared deep in an article on Page A13, under a headline that gave no inkling that we were revising our earlier view ("White House Lists Steps to Build Disputed Weapons"). The Times gave voice to skeptics of the tubes on Jan. 8, when the key piece of evidence was challenged by the International Atomic Energy Agency. That challenge was reported on Page A10; it might well have belonged on Page A1.

On April 21, 2003, as American weapons-hunters followed American troops into Iraq, another front-page article declared, "Illicit Arms Kept Till Eve of War, an Iraqi Scientist Is Said to Assert." It began this way: "A scientist who claims to have worked in Iraq's chemical weapons program for more than a decade has told an American military team that Iraq destroyed chemical weapons and biological warfare equipment only days before the war began, members of the team said."

The informant also claimed that Iraq had sent unconventional weapons to Syria and had been cooperating with Al Qaeda — two claims that were then, and remain, highly controversial. But the tone of the article suggested that this Iraqi "scientist" — who in a later article described himself as an official of military intelligence — had provided the justification the Americans had been seeking for the invasion.

The Times never followed up on the veracity of this source or the attempts to verify his claims.

A sample of the coverage, including the articles mentioned here, is online at nytimes.com/critique. Readers will also find there a detailed discussion written for The New York Review of Books last month by Michael Gordon, military affairs correspondent of The Times, about the aluminum tubes report. Responding to the review's critique of Iraq coverage, his statement could serve as a primer on the complexities of such intelligence reporting.

We consider the story of Iraq's weapons, and of the pattern of misinformation, to be unfinished business. And we fully intend to continue aggressive reporting aimed at setting the record straight.

Franks Is Knighted, to Some Brickbats

By The New York Times

LONDON, May 25 — The history of creating British lords and ladies has been full of surprises, but the decision to award an honorary knighthood just now to the top American commander during the Iraq war is causing some ripples along the Thames.

More than a year after the now retired Gen. Tommy Franks unleashed "shock and awe," and sent the Third Infantry Division flying across the Iraqi desert, some reformers in Parliament were raised when Defense Secretary Geoff Hoon announced that he would confer the title of honorary knight commander of the Order of the British Empire on the general.

The ceremony, which was private, took place Tuesday.

"General Franks has been a sterling friend" in a period "of extreme turbulence in world affairs," a spokesman for Mr. Hoon told Reuters. "This award is to recognize his exceptional leadership operational leadership of British forces during operations both in Afghanistan and Iraq."

But several members of Parliament expressed doubts about the wisdom of passing out awards when war in still in crisis.

"This is not a time to be honoring American military figures when we are being confronted almost daily with the most sickening images of abuse of Iraqis," said Alice Mahon, a leading critic of the war, in remarks to The Daily Mirror.

May 26, 2004
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