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The Militarism of Local Television: The Routine Framing of the Persian Gulf War

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☐—*This study examines how the practices of television newswork add up to coherent "frames of reference" toward the Persian Gulf War, supporting administration policy and creating an "illusion of triumph." We consider it especially important to look for these patterns in local television with its community ties and need for audience appeal. Using interviews with newsworkers and close analysis of coverage, we examine the way one local television station covered the war, with a special focus on how dissent was portrayed in January of 1991. We link coverage to the media routines of television newswork, showing how they act as coherent frames supportive of Gulf policy. The conflict frame placed anti-war protest in opposition to patriotism. The control frame relied on law enforcement and dealt with protest as a threat to social order. The consensual frame ultimately supported a legitimately controversial policy by connecting it to patriotism and "the troops."*

THE Persian Gulf war was not over long before the triumph of Desert Storm began to evaporate under public and scholarly scrutiny. The public did not think it sufficient an achievement to reelect George Bush, the primary architect of the U.S. action. The Gulf War policy—after all the Congressional and United Nations cover has been stripped away—was the policy of Bush and a remarkably small circle of advisers (Graubard, 1992; Smith, 1992; Woodward, 1991). In the months following the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq on August 2, 1990, the Congress and other elites were clearly divided over the wisdom of military action, as was the public. And yet a few months later those elites closed ranks, and that same public gave Bush the highest approval rating ever given to a sitting president. The media clearly played a major role in shaping public opinion in support of the conflict. In Doug Kellner's *The Propaganda War* (1992), for example, he attacks the myths, disinformation and propaganda, and the "Big Lie" disseminated during the war by the media,

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which served as a conduit for government manipulation and thus failed to adequately inform the public. Kellner terms the result of this campaign the "militarization of consciousness," in an "environment dominated by military images and discourse" (p. 237).

The "illusory" quality of Gulf media coverage can be seen more clearly in hindsight. The environmental damage, ineffectiveness of the Patriot missiles, and the carnage of retreating Iraqi soldiers, to name a few, put the administration's presumed successes in a different light (see, for example, MacArthur, 1992; Miller, 1992; and Gerbner, 1992). To best understand this illusion, we must not focus solely on direct government manipulation and censorship, which, although substantial, produce a view of the press as passive, easily duped, or even conspiratorial. The most pervasive, powerful, and difficult to counter illusion emerged from the routine, structured workings of the media system.

We tackle this process by analyzing how the illusion emerged at the community level, through the lens of local news, which does not deal so directly with issues of overt censorship.[1] Here we can best assess the construction job and root it in the context of news routines and community values, focusing especially on television which played the major role in selling the crisis. When public support for a President's decision is shaped as dramatically as it was during the Gulf crisis it is obvious that ideological forces are at work—especially when the underlying reasons for a policy are so clearly at odds with those expressed publicly.[2]

Local television provides especially important ideological guidance by structuring a way of thinking about government policy that is all the more persuasive for being based on familiar local people and organizations. Using Stuart Hall's terms, the media's power to construct the Gulf illusion resided not in their transmission of government propaganda, but in their rooting those definitions in popularly accepted frames of reference. Thus, in the process of giving meaning to events, the media both draw on an reinforce consensual notions of "society," adding to their "taken for granted" quality. This closed circle "spiral of amplification" places media in a crucial role, linking the powerful to the public (Hall et al., 1978). We pay close attention to this process in this study, observing how the war was translated into local idioms. Once government definitions of Gulf policy became translated into "objectified" news accounts, they provided foundations upon which further administration policy could be based. In local television news, the media's cultural and economic imperatives of audience appeal are amplified. We can more easily see locally how coverage results from the news gathering system, its routines, and its structured relationships to its audience and community institutions. The interlocking and reinforcing triangle of government, news media, and corporate needs works together to further a culture supportive of military adventures, such as those in the Gulf.

In this study we closely examine one local television news station in the medium-sized market of Austin, Texas, using in-depth analysis of its coverage and post hoc interviews with its newsworkers to show the factors

which directly and indirectly influenced coverage its coverage of the Gulf War. The study is largely interpretive, with the emphasis on linking coverage to media practices and larger cultural patterns, rather than on generalizing to other stations and media. We reviewed transcripts of newscasts from the period August 2, 1990, (when Iraqi troops entered Kuwait) through February 28, 1991 (as the war was ending), but we emphasize the period leading up to and immediately following the beginning of the air war in January. The January 16 air attack produced a massive upsurge in grassroots opposition along with a closing of the elite ranks behind government policy and the first expression of pro-war grassroots sentiment (Elbaum, 1991). Although Austin is perhaps more liberal than other communities, it provides an opportunity to see how local television supports policy even in the face of a vocal and well-organized antiwar movement.

ROUTINES APPROACH

The forces lying behind media content operate at several different levels, each with its own explanatory power (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991). The routines perspective, in particular, draws attention to the objectives and procedures of workers in organizations as they engage in their professional tasks. How do the routines of newsgathering within local television stations provide a setting that structures coverage? Routines are linked to content; they provide the underpinnings for ideological frames of reference. These routines structure reporting, impose their own logic, and work against alternative frameworks, contributing to the "militarization of consciousness." The heavy reliance on military sources, for example, causes newsworkers evaluate events within a military framework. As Stuart Hall argues, the major power of media lie in reproducing the definitions of the powerful. The institutional powers in society, whether police, administration, or military, act as the primary definers, setting the limits of discussion. The media stand in secondary, structured subordination to these primary definers. In Hall and colleagues' study of "moral panics" in Britain, police claim near-monopoly definitional power in the realm of crime through their special professional expertise (Hall et al., 1978). The military in the Gulf War could claim similar advantages, leaving those who might wish to contest its terms of reference in a weaker position. The military was covered within a frame of its own making and was therefore able to claim success on its own terms.

But military information management extended beyond the Gulf to local communities. Recognizing that newspapers and television value hometown news for its audience appeal, for example, the military would readily grant reporters from local news organizations interviews with soldiers from their communities. The military recognized that the locals were safe and wouldn't ask embarrassing questions of the troops (such as "why do you think you're here?").

The impact of the Gulf crisis led local stations around the country to give it extensive coverage. From the time U.S. troops landed in Saudi Arabia until their return, this "international" news story was also "local." Not only did local affiliates send their own news crews to cover the action

in the Persian Gulf, but the deployment of "civilian" reservists, an increase in activities at local military bases and a vocal "antiwar" movement also created a unique opportunity to "localize" an unfolding story of global proportions.

KVUE-TV ACTION NEWS

KVUE had the most-watched local newscasts in the Austin market during the period of the Persian Gulf conflict. On a given night, its 6 P.M. local newscast reached about 95,000 viewers. We take this station to be representative of local television in its routines and professional norms. An ABC affiliate, KVUE carried all of that network's news programs during the period of the war. Yet its own local 6 P.M. and 10 P.M. newscasts (highest rated in the market) each outdrew the network's evening newscast, which was the most-watched network evening news program in Austin during the survey period. Austin is home of three network affiliated local news departments and the marketplace is described by veteran newspeople as "highly competitive." Forty-eight people are employed by KVUE's news division, including reporters, producers, anchors, news managers, news photographers, and video tape editors. No attempt was made to analyze reporting of the troop build-up and shooting war from the national and international perspective since much of that came via the network or the AP. Thus, local news items selected were those covered by the station's own newsworkers within 50 miles of Austin. We examined transcripts, newscast rundowns and video tapes broadcast from the period August 1, 1990, to February 15, 1991, including anchor-read stories or anchor-introduced package reports. The newscasts included the 5:00, 6:00 and 10:00 programs. Particular focus was given to the single month of January. Many of the excerpts chosen are from anchor introductions to stories. These often-overlooked features of the newscast are nevertheless important from our perspective. The lead-in, typically written by the anchor or producer, introduces the story without giving away its main points. Lead-ins promote the story with colorful verbs, adjectives, and adverbs to keep viewers watching. Because lead-ins encapsulate stories in a compelling manner, they can often reveal the prevailing frames of reference more directly than the stories themselves.[3]

ACTION NEWS COVERS THE GULF CRISIS

In the following analysis of coverage, we consider how stories were presented, and the extent to which this represented a coherent body of coverage that supported Gulf policy. As much as possible, we explain this coverage by linking it to the routines of newswork. The analysis is ideological in the sense that the routines are shown to produce a coherent frame of reference for the Gulf war.

Overall Coverage

Judging from the number of stories about the Gulf War on KVUE, the station's coverage tracked the networks, with the crisis dominating coverage. Stories pertained to the incursion into Kuwait, the troop buildup, domestic events relating to the war, and the war's aftermath. The coverage began with 64 stories in August

and 57 stories in September, increasing significantly to 101, 83, and 96 stories in October, November and December, respectively. During January and February, these numbers increased dramatically to 230 and 212.

An analysis of coverage during this period indicates that certain "typified" patterns of content emerged (Tuchman, 1973). The stories about the Gulf were the kind that journalists "rehearse and build a story template for" (Berkowitz, 1992). These templates became explicit in the planning for the January 15 deadline. The majority of story ideas dealt with the military bases, with the remainder covering other local angles: expert reactions, ham radio networks helping out, the effect of the crisis on families. The only idea for anything remotely resembling a peace or protest theme (1 of 22 listed ideas) was "David Connally—prays for peace but says he supports the war—available mornings" (internal station memo).

Before the Storm

Because of our interest in coverage of policy opposition, we wanted to know how it was treated prior to the bombing. Surprisingly, coverage of local "peace" activities was heavy and often respectful in the weeks prior to the shooting war. One newscast on January 13, 1991, devoted four minutes (a large chunk of time in a half-hour broadcast) to peace efforts in the Austin area. Leading the newscast:

(January 13) Anchor: The day after Congress gave President Bush the go-ahead to send American forces into combat, citizens are voicing their fear of all out war. In San Antonio, college students plead for peace. The marchers urged President Bush not to launch an attack after the Tuesday deadline, but to keep seeking a peaceful settlement to the crisis.

(January 13) Anchor: . . . Hundreds packed a small church in Dallas for their own peace rally. Inside the church they paid homage to a flag-draped coffin in hopes that their prayers will be answered and no coffins will be needed.

Coverage of local peace groups during the period prior to the bombing of Iraq might best be described as neutral or even respectful.

(January 13) Anchor: Representatives from 16 different political action groups gathered in front of the Austin Federal Building this afternoon to petition for peace.

(January 13) (Catholic Priest) "I've heard it said this week we don't want to send our men and women to die in the Middle East. No, we don't. And no way do I advocate a senseless war or senseless killing."

Many stories centered on peace activities and included, for example, a plea from the local chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility to give sanctions a chance to work. An extended piece on a local university "teach-in" explored how the troop buildup was in response to oil interests and had little to do with the Bush administration's view of "naked aggression" against a "freedom-loving people."

(January 14) Anchor: . . . University students met to discuss ways to solve the Persian Gulf crisis without military action. Professors and members of the Austin Coalition for Peace in the Middle East talked about the link between oil and the American military presence in the Persian Gulf. (Student) "I would like

to see both sides of the issue. I don't think I can make educated decisions about whether our policy is right or not unless we get all points of view."

(January 15) (Student protesting U.S. involvement) "President Bush, why don't you go down in history as a president who stopped a war instead causing another generation of Americans who must live through the horrors?" (another student) "Why the hell are we over there? I don't know why."

The community has several colleges and universities where stories focused on such teach-ins and peace vigils. Weekend coverage frequently highlighted church services as worshippers offered prayers for peace. Stories might best be termed "reactive" in that they avoided examining the complexities and possible hidden motivations for the Bush administration's military build-up. Local coverage appeared to be an endless parade of peace vigils and heart-tugging interviews with families torn asunder, facing direct involvement with a bloody war. Economic constraints gave rise to many such stories. The peace rallies and "families facing war" stories were generally "one-location shoots" that required little investment of time and staff, making them cost-effective. And these same constraints created a team of general assignment reporters, who had no special expertise in military coverage. Such constraints helped contribute to a sameness and a thinness in stories about the local bases and military personnel.

After the bombing began, however, coverage of dissenters fell off abruptly as the news team wrapped itself in the U.S. flag. (At Buffalo station WKBW, the anchor desk was literally wrapped in a gigantic yellow ribbon!) Then those who searched for peace were branded "protestors," and "support the troops" rallies received a large amount of coverage. News features built around flag sales, VFW members, and yellow ribbons took center stage. Soundbites urging a cease-fire or withdrawal, or questioning the war effort at all were largely absent once the bombing began, despite the presence of numerous peace groups which had been featured on newscasts prior to the fighting. The only type of objection considered acceptable was to the possible loss of life, especially among the minority community.

(January 20) Anchor: . . . Black community leaders are especially concerned about the war. Officials say about 30% of all troops in the war are Black or Hispanic. (Man) "With the war going the way it is, I think we'll lose lots of young people."

Much of the station's early coverage was rooted in the community, with the "common" man or woman—not elected or military officials—at center stage. Typical stories included coping with the stress brought on by the hostilities, "person on the street" opinion interviews, the rising price of gasoline, and increased security at the local airport.

Local News Sources

Above all, local stations rely "routinely" on certain sources, usually community elites, which play a major role in structuring how local news is presented. These include government officials, law enforcement personnel, and local corporate spokepersons, who figured prominently in localizing the Gulf story.

Military. Obviously the station re-

lied heavily on military sources. An air force base and an army base, both within 50 miles of Austin, accounted for many stories, with themes of preparedness, increased security measures, and the movement of troops and material. Sources were always "military officials." Those military base sources quoted, but rarely seen on camera, helped foster a steady stream of reports about training exercises and military readiness. KVUE newsworkers said most of the story ideas during the period studied came from phone calls and press releases from military public information officers. And military sources seemed more than willing to help with those stories originated by the station. One news editor said: "The military bases were real good about letting us do stories with the families of servicemen."

Just as the networks generally relied on military experts for commentary about the progress of the war ("Who spoke on the Gulf?", 1990), so did KVUE. When coverage strayed from the usual action pictures and soft features, most in-depth interviews were from retired local military officers who provided regular commentary in the days immediately after the bombing began. Despite the possibility that there were other experts in the market, none was used. In one of many such interviews, a retired colonel who was former chief of staff of U.S. Army forces in the Mideast, and was now an Austin resident, predicted: "Fighting will start between the 18th and 20th" (January 15). Concerning the reliance on military officials for stories, a KVUE news producer said:

Who else would we talk too? I mean they WERE the story. I mean all the action was on the other side of the world, but we got plenty of information about which troops would be leaving, where they would be going.

But the military model would dominate every other aspect of the crisis as well, imposing a context perhaps best termed "doing the job, and heroically at that."

Political. After the bombing started, political elites closed ranks. As a result, so did local coverage which routinely relies on political leaders for uncritically received soundbites. Before the bombing, for example, Senator Phil Gramm said he, "hopes against hope that Iraq will withdraw before the shooting begins" (January 15). Afterwards, he confidently added that, "Allied military action will bring a quick end to Saddam Hussein's stranglehold on Kuwait" (January 19). Newscasts on the January 16 dutifully reported the dogma of political leaders, including members of the state legislature and others.

Commercial. Local television is a profit-making enterprise, dependent on other commercial interests for advertising revenue. This gives stations a strong interest in the economic health of their community. Reports of new business ventures and announcements from employers are a staple of local newscasts. Commercial sources and their frame were readily available for Gulf angles. These included reports on sales of gas masks, video games, and patriotic items, but also local business ties.

(January 21) Reporter: . . . Here at CompuAdd (Computer Company), workers have been keeping a close watch on Desert Storm. That's because their comput-

ers are keeping track of troops and weapons.

(January 25) Anchor: An Austin company will send oil eating microbes to clean up Saddam's oil spill.

A reporter on January 21 spoke with pride about how "smart bombs" used a computer made in Austin. This commercial frame turned the Gulf War into a business issue, distracting attention from the policy's merits and further tying it to patriotism. Local media were not the only ones seeking to wrap themselves in the flag. Many local businesses appropriated the positive community spirit invested in imagery such as the yellow ribbons, using it in their advertising and sponsoring special events "for the troops." A local real estate company began putting yellow ribbons on their yard signs. Business efforts to align themselves with the "troops" and local television's routine of granting them coverage further entrenched the commercial frame's blending of policy and patriotism.

CONFLICT, CONTROL, AND CONSENSUS

To evaluate coverage of dissent, and its opposite, policy support, we turn to three specific frames, and describe how they are rooted in media routines. Local television must above all maintain its economic viability, an objective that structures many of its routines, and thus its coverage. We identify three major frames used to manage dissent and contruct a coherent body of coverage supportive of administration policy.

The Conflict Frame is valued for its audience appeal. It's a routine of newswork to highlight the conflictual elements with the most dramatic video available. News videos of peace vigils, and both anti-war and "support the troops" rallies contained striking visual images, only the most dramatic soundbites, and focused on confrontations. Action emphasis is an editing norm that concentrates on the most dramatic to heighten impact. The Conflict frame was used to manage dissent by adroitly arranging a conflict between two unlike sides: anti-policy vs. pro-troops—a no-win situation for the anti-war side. The "balanced" story is a similar routine, positioning the reporter between two opposing sides (with the truth presumably to be found somewhere in between). This form helps protect the reporter from charges of bias (Tuchman, 1973), but a false balance arises when two sides are not equal in strength. Stories using the Conflict frame helped minimize the anti-war stance by positioning it opposite, or in bolstering, a patriotic side. (Of course, consensual stories require no "balance.")

The Control Frame is based on the close relationship between local television and law enforcement. Police serve television's need for regular, accessible, interesting stories, which align the station with the representatives of social order. Placing anti-war dissent within this frame renders those opposed to Gulf policy a threat to the social order and equivalent to terrorists and other criminals.

Even more than newspapers, local television seeks community consensus. As a result, the line between community involvement and journalistic detachment is fluid, leading to news personalities participating in charity drives and other community events. Thus, local television strives to be seen as an involved member of

the community—in the Gulf this included airing mobilizing information (where to send packages to troops, give blood, etc.)—and wants to appear supportive to local community institutions. In this case these institutions included military bases. Using the Consensus Frame led reporters to identify and emphasize expressions of community solidarity. This yielded distortion when the consensus frame buried legitimate questions about policy under an avalanche of warm feelings. In the station's coverage we can see how each of these frames was carried out.

Conflict

If Bush's Iraq policy had been an issue in the "sphere of legitimate controversy" prior to the bombing, it quickly became moved much closer to the "sphere of consensus" (Hallin, 1986). The language used to describe public opinion either privileged the pro-war position, or denigrated the anti-war voices. When anti-war groups were more numerous, their efforts were minimized.

(January 16) Reporter: (on anti-war protest at the University of Texas) . . . Protestors outnumbered those supporting the war by 2 to 1, but supporters say that's only because the anti-war folks are more vocal.

(January 17) Anchor: . . . Even though anti-war protestors outnumbered Bush supporters two to one, conservatives say they are tired of staying silent.

(January 17) Reporter: . . . Anti-war protestors have demonstrated almost continuously since yesterday evening and conservatives felt it was time to defend themselves.

In other cases, the pro-war side is enhanced when mentioned in conjunction with the anti-war side. We have added emphasis in these and other excerpts to identify some of the more telling phrases.

(January 16) Anchor: There are many, many Austin residents who support President Bush's decision to bomb Iraq and they say they want to be heard. They plan a candlelight vigil in Waterloo Park tonight.

(January 20) Anchor: . . . In the beginning pro-war forces were relatively quiet, now they are gaining in momentum . . . [after shots of rally, in conclusion]. . . . Later the pro-war group *was confronted by* those opposed to the U.S. presence in the Persian Gulf region.

(January 17) Anchor: A stark contrast tonight to the overwhelming crowds that have gathered recently to protest the war. Tonight about 30 people stood by in City Park . . . a quiet candlelight vigil to support President Bush. They were small in number but their *feelings were just as strong*. . . . Those in attendance had to dodge rainshowers, but *that didn't dampen their spirits.*

Other stories downgraded the standing of dissenters in a variety of ways.

(January 17) Anchor: At the State Capitol today, anti-war protestors were *anything but peaceful.*

(January 19) Anchor: Police and war protestors had estimated that a peace rally at the State Capitol this afternoon would reach some 20,000. Instead 1,500 to 2,300 showed up, *far short* of the anticipated crowd.

(January 26). Anchor: . . . Anti-war protestors carried flag-draped caskets symbolizing war dead. . . . But (notes the anchor) so far, U.S. military officials say one American serviceman has been killed in combat.

The story above undercut an objection to policy by claiming only one

had died. Of course, deaths spoken of are Americans, not the untold number of Iraqis already killed in the conflict.

Station officials were clearly sensitive to audience reaction when airing anti-war material. According to a station news producer, "The phone would ring every time we aired a protest. People would complain and say we only cover one side." She did not report similar objections when pro-war stories were featured. This producer argued that the viewer calls "got us to consider all sides of the story and not go so heavy on one side. The people who supported the troops were a kind of silent majority." Here again, we see that in the minds of the newsworkers the anti-war groups constituted one side, while the other was not the pro-policy forces but "support the troops"—a no-win situation for the voices of dissent. When asked whether the station gave the "support the troops" side progressively more favorable coverage, the producer replied, "I think the anti-war movement just sort of died away when *our* side started winning [our emphasis]. They were drowned out by the others and by the success of the war." Of course, the merits of the policy and the success of its execution are two different matters.

One of the most important linguistic techniques aligned the pro-war with the pro-troops position. Stories centered on pro-troop rallies which prominently featured interviews urging everyone to "get behind the President."

(January 16) Reporter: (about school kids' reaction) . . . In the meantime the students are following through on their commitment to support not the war itself but rather the Americans in the Middle East *fighting for peace.*

This remarkable inversion means that to support those who fight for peace, means to support peace. To oppose the policy is therefore to support war! One anchor lead-in aligned the pro-war side with "patriotism" and minimized an anti-war group by calling attention to its numbers.

(January 23) Anchor: 150 demonstrators supporting the war effort demonstrated at the University of Texas and listened to people *speak about patriotism.* As a counterpoint, these five protestors at the State Capitol are all who are on hand for a war protest that began on the 15th.

This distinction between troops and policy would quickly erode in stories to follow, as separating opinions about the war itself from support for the troops became increasingly difficult. In one of many examples, local officials implicitly linked support for the troops with support for the policy. Indeed, to not support them implied support for the actions of Hussein.

(January 23) Anchor: Austin County Commissioners came out in support of American men and women serving in Middle East and against the actions of Saddam.

Similarly, in a story about a pro-troops rally:

(January 26) Anchor: . . . The group says it supports George Bush's decision to attack Iraq, a decision supported by a majority of Americans. Most who came today say they hope President Bush went into this war to win, not just to fight.

One story on the possibility of a draft featured a Vietnam protestor who resisted and was imprisoned. This subversive notion was quickly cor-

rected by the reporter, this time aligning the policy with the country's welfare.

(January 23) Reporter: ... There are others who say they don't necessarily want to fight in a war either but will do whatever it takes to *protect their country's interests*.

These frames show the taken-for-granted quality of Gulf coverage; the remark presumed war was in the country's interests. The anti-war position is perhaps most effectively marginalized by pitting it against "the troops."

(January 17) Anchor: ... The peace protests are hard for families whose loved ones are in the Persian Gulf. One military wife says she can handle the stress and anxiety of knowing her husband is in the thick of things, but it's harder when she's confronted by scenes of angry protestors demonstrating against the war. (Woman) "There are lots of families hanging on to every word that the news is putting out and I think its really destructive to them."

(January 17) Anchor: ... The anti-war sentiment is unsettling for families who see loved ones are involved in Operation Desert Storm and for those who back President Bush's decision to go to war.

Here, of course, families with loved ones are grouped with Bush's supporters. Thus, the policy is inexorably absorbed into the consensual sphere of families, loved ones, and "the troops." In the following days the binary opposition between the anti-policy position and the pro-troops and patriotism stance was further reinforced.

(January 19) [over shots of protestors] Anchor: People converge on the State Capitol shouting their pleas for peace *while* a patriotic group of small town residents sing their support for American soldiers at war.

(January 24) [over video of veterans rally] Anchor: The U.S. must show 100 percent support for our troops in the Middle East. That's the message from veterans who say they are upset over the number of anti war protests. They say it sends a bad message to the troops in the Middle East, that we don't support them.

(January 24) (Wife of serviceman) "It's time for all Americans to unite behind the young men and women who serving their country." Anchor: ... Many are upset over the number of anti-war protests and say they should stop.

The pro-troops position became firmly linked to patriotism in a general consensual glow.

(January 19) Reporter: [over pictures of flag-waving rally in adjoining town] They are the images of Americana. ... The pictures of heartfelt pride and support for soldiers in the Middle East. The war in the Middle East has revived patriotism here.

(January 20) Anchor: As the battlefield gets more intense, more Americans are working to show their support for the troops *who are under attack* in Saudi Arabia.

At times the point was made unambiguous. A January 20 newscast led with a soundbite from a person at a pro-war rally claiming those against the war were unpatriotic.

Case Story: The Distortion of Balance

One story, in particular, aired January 17, exemplified the efforts by local reporters to handle anti-war protest, allowing it to be neutralized by pro-war supporters, and placing it at odds with more "authentic" patriotic sentiment. Through language,

editing, and juxtaposition of images the conflict angle is played up creating a form of "false balance."[4] The pro-war rally was sparsely attended, outnumbered 10 to 1 by the anti-war group, judging from the numbers of people directly involved behind the microphones. The photographer had filmed one pro-war speech, arguing that the Gulf War would lay the shame of Vietnam to rest, and four speeches during the anti-war rally, which focused on more specific rationales for their objection: environmental damage, numbers of minorities among front-line troops, and others. Yet the report made the two events sound much more even.

Reporter: On one side of the U.T. campus, several hundred people who are opposed to the war carried on a protest that began last night.
(Anti-war speaker) "During the war in Vietnam we lost over 58,000 young American lives."
(Pro-war speaker) "The legacy of Vietnam will die with this conflict."
Reporter: A few feet away supporters of the President held their own rally.
(Same person) "Because Iraq is not Vietnam."
Reporter: It was smaller but *feelings ran just as strong.*
(Chanting males) "USA, USA."
(Student) "How many troops do they have compared to ours?"
Reporter: With two groups so close together there was inevitably conflict.
(Students) (Unintelligible argument)
(Student) "The sheep can preach the virtues of vegetarianism until hell freezes over, but the wolf isn't listening. You've got to deal with people in a language they're capable of understanding and Saddam Hussein only understands violence."

This seemingly self-evident metaphor is a voice in favor of the policy and the longest comment from either rally included in the story. Next, the reporter moves the rhetoric beyond this bipolar frame, to reach a consensual voice supporting the troops. The voice selected, however, is implicitly pro-policy.

Reporter: Some who came here were motivated by a deeper felling, a sense of commitment. [Said over shots of anthem and flag] Rita Jones has a brother in the Gulf.
(Rita) "When your family's over there all you know is to support them."
Reporter: Students raised during a time of peace are now debating their generation's war [over shots of signs, peace signs]. Some of the slogans have changed, some haven't. But the emotions raised by patriotism and violence [Saddam Hussein's?] run just as strong. (Reporter outro).

What first seems like a typical, balanced story, pitting anti and pro-war groups against each other, on closer inspection becomes a clearly policy-supporting report. Not only is the numerically and rhetorically stronger anti-war group made to appear equal to the smaller pro-war group (through tight shots of speakers as well), but it is pitted against the high ground given the family member Rita, the one said to have a "deeper commitment," a remark spoken over shots of the national anthem being sung to the American flag. Is the girl meant to carry a neutral "pro-troops" message? A look at the actual interview with her shows that the reporter sought a pro-troops soundbite within an implicitly pro-war context. Rita not only supported the troops, she explicitly supported the actual policy and mounted a short rationale in her interview, adding that Bush was doing a "fantastic job." Not satisfied with this, however, the

reporter sought her personal feelings toward the anti-war protestors.

Reporter: Why are you here today?
Rita: I'm here to give the troops and the president support because they've done a fantastic job. I think we've had too much protesting and its very much after the fact and I don't think it does any good not to support them at this time.
R: Does it hurt personally. I mean you've got family members over there. Does it hurt you to see such strong anti-war attitudes in the people that are speaking out so much over here?
Rita: It hurts me to see the ignorance they're talking with because they don't realize Saddam Hussein is a Hitler in the making and that he's ruthless—anyone who has pregnant ladies stabbed in the stomach is very ruthless and deserves to die. Somebody's gotta stop him and I'm glad that we are.
R: Do you take it personally though when you hear what they're saying?
Rita: I do because my family's involved. How else am I supposed to take it. *When your family's over there all you know is to support them,* and President Bush has done a fantastic job (story soundbite emphasized).

Clearly, judging from the reporter's questions and Rita's answers, to oppose the war is to oppose Rita and her family. Supporting them is shown to be the more patriotic choice.

This kind of framing is not done at the personal whim of the reporter. Responding to his coverage of the anti-war movement in Austin, a reporter said, "I might not agree with what they were protesting, but I wanted to be fair" (December 1992). The frame exhibited in the story above is a standard device that can be easily applied without even knowing much about the positions involved. Clearly, local television reporters were not expected to have any expertise on the policies being questioned. As a routine, preparation was not possible nor needed. As the reporter said, "We didn't have much time to do any background work, I mean we were all given a piece of the big story that day and mine was the protestors." The important thing was to present the "form" of balance, while finding a presumed consensual middle ground.

Control

Local television has traditionally relied on law enforcement officials for news, and gives heavy coverage to crime and disorder news. Several stories used law enforcement in action, the Control Frame, for Gulf war story ideas.

(January 16) Anchor: There is very real concern that people loyal to Iraq might carry out terrorist acts. Robert Mueller Airport is under tight security.

(January 16) Anchor: Austin police investigated three bomb threats, but no bombs were found.

The Control Frame also becomes an easy one for reporters to use in covering dissent. Legitimate public speech quickly becomes a threat to social order. In one of the largest local peace rallies after the bombing began (January 16) the confrontational aspect of police versus the protestors was played up. Even though only a few dozen protestors tried to block a city street (while perhaps a thousand more stood on a sidewalk), only those being arrested by police were shown.

(January 16) Reporter: . . . By rush hour the peace protest spilled into the streets.

A *loosely organized crowd of about two* hundred marched down Congress Avenue in an attempt to block traffic. The protestors, mostly students, were quickly stopped by police. Police brought in reinforcements rapidly. There appeared to be no violence.

Further, there were no interviews with the protestors—only an interview with a police official who talked about the consequences for those who blocked traffic. In addition, no attempt was made in this or subsequent stories to interview protestors, to find out why they were in the peace movement. Another report placed protestors in an even more extremist realm.

(January 18) Reporter: . . . Police have had some tense moments in the last couple of days. Assistant Police Chief Ken Smith says the possibility of terrorist threats does not alter their routines. *(Smith)* "They *deal in hostages,* we've dealt with hostages before. They may have bombs, we've dealt with that too. They may snipe, but its all part of what we deal with."

By using video of protestors to accompany the story, the reporter in effect equates those in opposition to the war with terrorists. The Control Frame means that stories are presented from a law enforcement point of view. Some stories were built around police doing their jobs. One showed shots of police officers videotaping a peace rally and reported that police surveillance had been commonplace at such rallies. Despite the possibilities that the taping may have constituted harassment and could be used against the activists, the story included only the police department's perspective for an easy rebuttal.

(January 25) *Anchor: When anti war* protestors gathered at the State Capitol last week, their presence was recorded by a police photographer as well as the media. . . . Anti war protestors worry that police may be either trying to compile a list of agitators or to simply intimidate those present. . . . *A police spokesman says that's not the case.* (Police captain) "The purpose of the video tapes is not to take pictures of individuals. . . . We did this strictly in the same manner that we do tapes on Halloween on East Sixth Street or other large groupings of people." Anchor: The police department says the tapes will eventually be recycled and that portions may be used in training films.

Consensus

As already indicated, the support-the-troops frame, by establishing a clear consensual foundation for community solidarity, proved to be one of the most potent means of managing opposition to Gulf policy. As Kaniss (1991) has found, local television stations' large and fragmented news audience leads them to seek means of establishing a sense of community through common symbols and interests. The patriotic, support-the-troops movement allowed local television to restore the community solidarity threatened by divisive opinion over policy. The pro-troops frame was internalized by the reporters, as one admitted:

Look, almost everyone had strong feelings about the war . . . not like they were "pro-war" but that everyone backed the troops. They wanted the troops not to get hurt over there. No one wanted them hurt. I have to admit maybe I was too close to the story. I had relatives—close relatives—over there fighting.

Prior to the bombing, the troops were not carrying such a heavy symbolic burden. Many stories centered

on civilians who faced the possibility of a military "call-up" and the potential impact on their jobs and families. Most of these were human interest features which sought reaction to separation and the possibility of war. In the weeks preceding the shooting, coverage of local events seemed to focus more on a theme of "families torn apart." Especially given the holiday season, there were many tearful interviews from families with relatives shipped out to the Saudi desert, dreading the worst.

(January 14) Reporter: Each second makes the waiting more difficult for Dorothy Gomez. Five months ago her son left Austin to join Operation Desert Shield. (Gomez, referring to phone call with soldier/son): "He said 'this is it mom'. He sounded like I would never see him or hear him again." Reporter: Several churches are holding prayer vigils for peace as war seems imminent. . . . Dorothy Gomez just wants to awake tomorrow and find peace.

Reporters worked hard to express community opinion. One story tried to explain the war to children:

(January 7) Reporter: Most people have difficulty understanding why the United States would go to war with Iraq. But how do you explain it to a sixth grader?

This implies that if even a grownup has trouble understanding the "rightness" of the policy, how much more difficult for a child. When the reporter was asked to re-read her script and then tell what may have been behind her statement, she said, "No one wanted the war to start and I was just saying what was on everyone's mind."

"The troops" became the consensual glue used by reporters to hold the community together.

(January 22) Anchor: . . . Although both sides of the war issue are still battling back and forth, one thing seems to hold the factions together: support for the men and women in Saudi Arabia . . . (Referring later to flag sales) Although everyone may not choose to show their support in the same way, at least for some, the support for the troops is there no matter what the belief about the war itself.

(January 22) Anchor: . . . People may be divided about how they feel about U.S. involvement in the Middle East, but one feeling seems to be shared by everyone: support for the troops who are over there now.

Of course, as a consensual story, "troops" stories did not require balance.

(January 23) Anchor: . . . Those who support the American forces in the Persian Gulf War are trying to make themselves more visible. . . . Among other things, the students signed a huge happy Valentine's card to be sent to the troops and passed out yellow ribbons.

Several stories came from small towns surrounding Austin and served as an opportunity to depict traditional values: small town rallies in support of the war effort with shots of flags flying and bands playing. Other stories explored the growth of the ubiquitous yellow ribbons and stories about entire neighborhoods where flags were flying. From a January 22 newscast: "Only the Fourth of July can rival the number of flags being flown right now!"

Veterans from past wars basked in the same glow. In a January 16 story about veterans reactions to war, most of the report was taken up by the men saying how hellacious war was: "War produces dead bodies. Let's hope this one's over quickly. War is

hell . . . it's just you can't describe it." But lest anyone think the veterans questioned the wisdom of war, the reporter reassuringly added:

> Despite the knowledge of how horrible war can be, for every ounce of fear among members if this group, there's still a ton of patriotism. . . . These men have been there. . . . They know first hand the turmoil, the desperation of war. . . . But all are very proud tonight and holding their heads up high.

The veterans were heard with video of a dramatically-lit shot of the U.S. flag waving in slow motion. The juxtaposition conveyed a message rich in symbols, effectively appropriating patriotic imagery for the Consensual Frame.

It did not take long for the soldiers to become the "heroes of Desert Storm." A reporter's January 18 story glorified Bergstrom Air Force Base reconnaissance pilots as the unsung heroes of the war. At the same time, the U.S. troops were said to be doing their job. But if one is simply doing one's job, how can it called heroic? The hero label served political purposes by investing the policy—and its architect—with the same heroic attributes attributed to those who carried it out. Although some soldiers were obviously exposed to danger, most saw little direct conflict, and the carnage of Iraqi troops was vast compared to the light casualties suffered by U.S. forces. In literature, heroes emerge by facing worthy adversaries, which, given the speed of the U.S. victory, Iraq clearly was not. The hero theme figured prominently in coverage, however, in an effort to give drama and meaning to the unfolding crisis. Making the soldiers the center of Desert Storm moved the merits of the policy itself to the background. It's hard to opposed someone who is at worst doing their job, and at best a hero. On February 20, one three-minute photo essay consisted of shots of troops returning and flags flying to the beat of heroic music. The elevation of the troops to hero status was a natural extension of the way local news framed the Gulf War.

AFTERMATH: IMPLICATIONS OF THE LOCAL NEWS WAR

This study has presented an analysis of Gulf war coverage from the standpoint of local television news. By focusing on a single station, we can better explain how the practices of newswork add up to coherent frames of reference, that we argue worked to support Administration policy. This case study approach allows us to take advantage of interviews with newsworkers, close analysis of coverage, and our own knowledge of how the organization works. We have examined a few of the more important frames, especially as applied to the debate over policy. These can be found embedded in coverage through source selections, story construction, visual imagery and editing, and linguistic elements. These frames are not peculiar to this particular station, community, or crisis—they indicate enduring symbolic patterns. They say something about the media and the culture producing them, and they mean something to citizens obliged to make political decisions within that culture. We have tried to show here how public values and news routines aligned with government, military, and corporate interests to shape a coherent ideological field. The "rally

'round the flag" phenomenon does not nearly capture the interlocking forces that operated through news accounts to legitimate government policy in the Gulf. As we have seen, local news amplified the definitions of the Gulf policy advanced by the government. This amplification became a spiral when adopted by the public and reported as news of public opinion. The frames of reference produced by local news weakened anti-policy voices by criminalizing expressions of dissent and pitting them against—while aligning the pro-war side with—patriotism. The power of local news derived from its rooting in the community, drawing on consensual images, such as "the troops," to form a framework for coverage.

When we observe the kind of ideological consensus forged during the Gulf War, we must ask how such unity can emerge from the many complex values and social divisions in U.S. society. As Hall argues, the power of ideologies is to "translate into convincing ideological terms the outlooks of classes and groups who are not, even in a collective sense, its 'authors'. . . . How is this traditionalist ideological 'unity' constructed out of disparate and contradictory class formations?" (Hall et al., 1978, p. 140). Military action invokes strong consensual values in ways we cannot adequately address here. In giving events meaning for the public, the media appeal to a common notion of what it means to be American. Perhaps in an age of declining economic conditions and uncertain geopolitical alliances, a conflicted public responds to appeals to a special American role in the world. From the country's beginning, a potent "City on the Hill" myth has attributed to the United States a unique moral stature to lead the world in action and example (for example, Baritz, 1985). Such a myth led to national failure in Vietnam, a failure Presidents Reagan and Bush tried to redeem, not by changing the myth and policy but by changing the execution (no longer with "one hand tied behind our back"!). During the Gulf War, the media celebrated military prowess, American technology, and the patriotic support of U.S. corporations, drawing on deep cultural values to forge a coherent pro-policy consensus.

In the appropriation of patriotism examined above, support for the troops became synonymous—even if unintentionally—with support for administration policy. Even the antiwar movement focused on support for the troops, which backfired according to Elbaum (1991). "Support the troops" was such a potent symbolic construction that it could not have been better designed by Bush's own public relations staff. Indeed, using troops for political ends has a long history. The Nixon administration adroitly used public concern for prisoners of war and missing in action to shift attention away from the failed Vietnam policy and onto the North Vietnamese, who were said to be holding Americans captive (for example, Franklin, 1991). By 1990, Gulf policy critic H. Ross Perot had said that a president must first commit the country, then commit the troops. As it happened, he got it backwards: By committing the troops Bush effectively committed the country. Even before receiving approval from Congress or the United Nations, sending Americans to Saudi Arabia engaged a powerful cultural

apparatus that would ultimately—with media help—compel public support for the policy.

Ironically, the post-Vietnam shift of the military to an all-volunteer institution has reaped a new form of support among the public. Removing the coercive element of the draft legitimates military service for those who choose it. Reliance on volunteers and reservists weaves the military more tightly into the fabric of local communities. Soldiering takes its place among other jobs citizens are obliged to perform for their livelihood, while still retaining the patriotic overlay of service to the country. With the post-cold war cutbacks in military spending, communities around the country have faced the loss of the economic support provided by their local military bases. Thus, the value of the military as a local employer heightens its importance as a feature of local news.

We have not spoken much here of public opinion, which we have assumed to be largely controlled by the guidance of the Administration and a supportive media. Of course, counter-definitions did circulate among groups opposed to U.S. involvement in the war, but we would argue that the prevailing frames and images reviewed here made it difficult for the public to resist the drive to war. Local news did allow room for dissent prior to the January 15 deadline, but then, as we have noted, the frame dramatically shifted to exclude and marginalize the opposition. The deadline set by Bush, and dramatically amplified by the media, worked to define the opposition out of bounds. Then the question revolved around how best to execute the war, not whether to have one. Although we cannot measure these effects directly, we can see their result in the near-monolithic public support of the war in the spring of 1991. When images of support for military action saturate the media environment, oppositional voices must swim upstream. Public support in turn became a resource for the Administration, which used it as a continuing justification for their policy.

Public opinion also contributed to the spiral of amplification when reported by the news media. In our earlier case example, "Rita" said Hussein was a "Hitler in the making," an analogy invoked by the Administration with media help. (*The New Republic,* for example, doctored Hussein's cover photo to give him a toothbrush mustache.) Thus, the analogy, once advanced and accepted by the public as a useful frame for policy, became further objectified by being reported as "news" when it emerged as a free-standing example of public opinion. These accounts of pro-war sentiment and marginalized dissent played a key ideological role in shaping the illusion. Although highly structured in favor of Gulf policy, coverage was rooted in the community and public idiom, naturalizing the support for the war.

Much of the scholarly analysis of the Gulf War has focused on the national media, emphasizing the problems of government manipulation. Here we take local television to be in many respects a better object of extended study, for at the community level we can see all of the indirect, implicit supports for war that were part of the overall symbolic structure created by the media as part of the illusion of triumph. Com-

pared to the national media, the nature of local news makes it more subordinate to government power. Local television, for example, gladly and uncritically accepted the human interest material provided by the military about hometown soldiers. (Of course, "human interest" centered coverage around the American experience and further served to obscure the war's impact on the region.) Furthermore, local news represents the wave of the future in television. As the networks decline in importance, more viewers are turning to tabloid news and "infotainment." To the extent that these embody entertainment values they are closer to local news than the networks, and we must understand them for their impact on public opinion.

When the public is poorly informed about national policy, it makes it easier for political leaders to make decisions that are not in the public interest. The Persian Gulf War is a clear example of a flawed policy that was pursued in spite of deep initial divisions within Congress and among the American people. The media were instrumental in this "triumph of the image," so it is critical that we understand the system behind that image. Particularly at the community level, it is important to recognize the interlocking media, political, and commercial interests that seem to create such an effective climate for militarism. Clearly, the Gulf War will not be the last crisis to be precipitated and directed with the help of local television.

NOTES

[1]Indeed, in cities across the country, the government need not censor in order to enjoy highly supportive news. For example, an historical study of local television news footage of the Vietnam era anti-war movement in Madison, Wisconsin, revealed that "local TV reporters and photographers granted less air time to those opposed to the war in relation to the pro-establishment position" (Champ, 1992).

[2]In the Gulf, the United States clearly had geo-political, economic goals, including the projection of force into an historically important region and safeguarding the flow of petro-dollars to Western banking centers. The reasons given for public consumption, however, ranged from "teaching a bully a lesson," to then Secretary of State James Baker's exasperated retort to reporters: "It's about jobs."

[3]During the period of the Gulf conflict, the second author of this study, a long-time executive producer for KVUE, was at the station in a part-time capacity in news promotions. While his position generally excluded him from any decisions about how stories were selected and handled on-air, it provided a rich opportunity for interviews with personnel and access to KVUE's extensive video library of footage, news scripts, and newscast rundowns indicating the placement and approximate amount of airtime for each story.

[4]We viewed the entire raw footage shot by a photographer at two rallies on January 17 at the University of Texas campus and compared this raw footage to the final story package.

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