

Militarized journalism

Framing dissent in the Gulf Wars

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War has become an increasingly common tool of U.S. national policy. Rather than Congressionally declared States of War periodically punctuating otherwise harmonious periods of peace, military conflict has become a condition of modern life. Now the National Security Strategy of the United States has formalized the case for pre-emptive unilateral military action, a policy of great significance for international relations. This plan, advocated for years by neo-conservatives who ascended to key positions in the latest Bush administration, was put into practice most recently in Afghanistan and Iraq, and even contemplated with respect to Iran and Syria. Advocating overwhelming U.S. world military superiority to prevent the emergence of rivals follows in line with other administration steps away from multi-lateral international agreements on arms control, the environment, and other issues. This unilateralism of military force is rationalized by its architects as “power that can be trusted” (e.g., Armstrong 2002). Although anti-war voices have been at work, American military action has taken place largely against a backdrop of public support, or at least acquiescence. To understand how this support is developed and sustained we look to the relationships among the military, state, and media.

At a basic operational level, many analysts have looked at specific media censorship, public relations, and other manipulatory actions taken by military and administration officials in shaping media coverage. At a broader systemic level, others have considered how the ideological leadership of the media serves the interest of the U.S. “empire.” It is helpful, however, to combine these insights to examine from a sociological perspective specifically how news organizations enter into routinized relationships with military and other newsmakers, and how news of conflict is placed into particular frames of reference, which serve to anchor war in familiar cultural terms. These “routinized frames” are revealed through the recurring combination of visual and verbal elements within media coverage, showing what organizing principles are at work in the decisions of news managers and news sources. In this way, we may better see how the media perform their jobs in communicating news of war, national policy, and public debate over it. U.S. media performance in this arena becomes ever more crucial given the country's lone super-power status, and the administration's decision to act alone if need be in wielding military force. Of course, the attacks of 9/11 in New York and Washington launched a new “War on Terrorism,” a loaded and elastic frame used to help justify and fast-track the new unilateralist foreign policy. Patriotic post 9/11 television news graphics provided short-hand labels describing how “America strikes back” quickly mutated into “America's new war,” with that “war” invoked as a main justification for the 2003 American invasion of Iraq. That is why implying the dubious connection of Saddam Hussein to those attacks was so strategically important in justifying military action against him. To the extent they can help examine such claims and facilitate reasoned discussion of these policies, the American news media have major implications for the rest of the world.

Chapter purpose

In this chapter I return to the Desert Shield/Desert Storm operation in the Persian Gulf War of 1990/1991 (Gulf I) and consider how specific frames within news coverage at the local level create an implicitly pro-policy position, delegitimizing and marginalizing dissent.¹ The structured routines of newswork give rise to certain predictable ways of making sense of military conflict, particularly in the public debate that follows. We need to understand coverage of front-line conflict, but a broader “war at home” takes place away from the scene of actual combat as the government tries to build support for the policy behind it and policy opponents attempt to mount their challenges. These two processes are carried out in large part via the media. Although most analysis of the news media in wartime has focused on the front-lines war, these actions are connected to and color the coverage of the domestic front. Thus, it is important to consider how these two wars are organized for public consumption by the news media, how one feeds the other, and how that coverage works to advance or prevent a healthy public debate.

I focus here specifically on a local television news station as a lens into how coverage of the conflict in 1991, even far way from the front-lines, created a no-win situation for the anti-war position. In Gulf I, the local community was an important site of public debate, including rallies for and against the war and the ubiquitous yellow ribbons. Although the national debate and network level media drew much of the scholarly analysis, people found support for and gave voice to their opinions in local schools, churches, and locally organized political speech. Furthermore, local television showed the commercial imperative of audience appeal writ large, which highlighted the processing by which news converts military action into an audience-friendly story line. Of course, this happened at the national level too, but within a single community the news organization's decision-making in connection to specific events, relationships with sources, and the resulting coverage can be easily explored. Entertainment values too make this analysis even more relevant. In the recent 2003 war in Iraq, stories such as the “Rescue of Private Jessica Lynch” were packaged for cross-platform promotion in news, talk-shows, magazines, and books, becoming stories that were mutually beneficial to both the military for its image management and to news organizations seeking drama for audience appeal.²

Some of the more telling examples of framing in local news coverage show the powerful ideological domestication of dissent when military logic is combined with cultural patriotism—a phenomenon just as relevant to understanding the more recent War in Iraq (or Gulf II).³ I have defined “frames” as “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese 2001: 11). Taking this sociological approach involves examining the responses of newswriters, media texts, and cultural context to determine how these principles manifest themselves in issue discourse. In my analysis here, a close look at language in news reports shows how concepts and cultural elements are linked together into frames, which are significant in shaping the “definition of the situation” and subsequent audience understandings. Thus, in reviewing this case in one community, we can see how military logic reaches far beyond the front lines to color the entire public discourse.

Military Logic: from Gulf I to the War on Terrorism

War does not stand alone, but becomes interpreted within local idioms, community structures, national myths, and routine journalistic frames for making sense of the world. There was an

“illusory” quality to Gulf I, which others have examined in detail (Gerbner 1992; Graubard 1992; Kellner 1992; Smith 1992). To understand this illusion requires that we focus on how it emerged from the routine workings of the press. In Stuart Hall's terms, the media's power lies not in transmitting unchallenged government propaganda but in rooting those definitions in culture, drawing from it and reinforcing consensual norms, adding to their “taken for granted” quality in a “spiral of amplification” (Hall et al. 1978). “The troops,” for example, became an irresistible underpinning to the Gulf I conflict, especially given that news organizations needed a human face and a mythic story line that appealed to commercial values and community interest. This helped to integrate the logic of military conflict into the society, making it difficult to separate out the merits of the larger policy which became hopelessly woven into the larger story. Embedded journalists in Gulf II highlighted even further the human U.S. and U.K. face of troops, to add to the face of leadership more narrowly available in Gulf I in the persons in particular of Generals Norman Schwarzkopf and Colin Powell. To the extent that military logic became the prevailing way of making sense of world relationships, a large part of public debate was limited. The naturalization of the military option was advanced when familiar cultural myths were invoked, as the tendency to set deadlines for enemies like Saddam, which encouraged likening the president to actor Gary Cooper in the movie *High Noon*.

The strength of military logic in the broader conflicts of recent years, particularly post 9/11 is undeniable. Since Gulf I, the more formalized conflict of armies from that war has been supplanted by asymmetric warfare, yet with the same premises and approaches applied to this more fluid conflict in which the “enemy” does not agree to play by the rules of traditional combat. The “war on terrorism” frame for this new condition carries in its terminology a traditional Defense Department solution, which, although it may be partly accurate, overshadows other interventions in this jointly sociological, economic, political, and religious issue. (The “War on Drugs” worked similarly, privileging military and law enforcement solutions to an issue that was also a public health matter. The two became linked when government officials argued that using illegal drugs helped provide revenue for terrorists.) Military logic becomes mapped onto every other discussion, becoming the dominant organizing principle and short-circuiting debate. The success of military action as a policy response may, as a result, be said to be determined through criteria of the military's own choosing.

The dominance of this military logic frame was aptly illustrated in President Bush's famous photo-op jet landing on the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln last May 2003 off the coast of San Diego. Changing out of his flight suit, he addressed the cameras with a banner behind him, “Mission Accomplished.” The clear message was that in the military completing its major combat operations, the President's national mission had been effectively completed too—one being conflated with the other in this mediated imagery and symbolism. Though the military branch was an instrument of national political policy, the president wearing a flight suit visually overrode this distinction.⁴ The power of this “war on terrorism” and its associated “axis of evil” was further illustrated by the fact that the majority of American were reported to hold Saddam Hussein responsible for the 9/11 World Trade Center attack, even though no evidence supported such a link. He was also implicitly linked by his inclusion in the “axis,” against which the war on terrorism was arrayed. As mentioned earlier, this framing cast a pre-emptive strike national policy into a self-defense context, making it more intuitively palatable to most Americans.

The routines of newswork draw attention to the structured ways that journalists enter into relationships to obtain desirable goals (Shoemaker and Reese 1996). In front-line coverage these routines are often clearly delineated; military officials desire positive accounts of their activities, to “get their story out,” and to simply accommodate the demands of the many news organizations seeking access to the story. Systems are developed to meet those needs. Journalists, of course, want the most exciting material possible that will be of interest to their organizations and audiences. The Vietnam-era memory of these relationships, particularly among military officers of that generation, is adversarial, with journalists “not on the team.” The more typical modern characterization of this relationship is symbiotic, and a perceived anti-military attitude risks a journalist being excluded from interview opportunities and other desired access. These routine structures impose their own logic, working against alternative frameworks of interpretation. In the case of war reporting, they contribute to what Kellner (1992) called the “militarization of consciousness.” Law enforcement and military institutions are particularly important agents of social control in society and act as “primary definers,” on which journalists have come to rely heavily for sources or news. Hall et al. (1978) argue that the media stand in structured subordination to these institutions, which in the case of the military is able to exert great definitional power—not only on its own realm but in a way that carries over into others.

The post-Vietnam image of the military emerged with damage but was gradually rehabilitated both in the political and wider cultural spheres (Baritz 1985). President Reagan's policies emphasized a greater ideological justification for using the military and a willingness to deploy it in tune-up conflicts like Grenada. In popular culture, movies such as *Rambo* and *Missing in Action* carried a revisionist version of Vietnam history, advancing the notion that the military was undermined by spineless politicians and forced to fight with “one hand tied behind its back.” As the Rambo character said at the end of *First Blood*, “I did what I had to do to win, but somebody wouldn’t let us win!” President Nixon had been able to distract attention from the unpopular Southeast Asia policy by focusing public attention on the Prisoners of War issue, a matter in which there was much more fervent and exploitative strategic government gamesmanship than evidence (apart from Chuck Norris movies) for P.O.W.'s still behind enemy lines (Franklin 1992). With the advent of Gulf I, national officials were able to draw on this restored image of American forces to engage public support. The potency of this focus was seen in its power to invert one post-Vietnam principle of military policy. Before Gulf I, officers like Colin Powell advocated building public support before any large scale commitment of troops; paradoxically, however, the Administration showed that by committing the troops they could engage the public. Once significant forces had been deployed in Saudi Arabia and a January deadline set (“showdown”) for Hussein to leave Kuwait, the “support the troops” motif exploited a powerful cultural value, which found its way into news framing. They, the troops, engaged support precisely because they were there, effectively obliterating any challenge to the policy that got them there.

Framing dissent: Gulf I

Through two major frames a coherent body of local coverage emerged implicitly supportive of the government’s policy, which I label Conflict and Consensus. Dissent was managed through the Conflict Frame by pitting two non-equivalent sides against each other: anti-policy and pro-troops. This frame, rooted in the news routine of “balance,” ostensibly protected the reporter from charges of bias but worked against the dissenting position by contrasting it against the pro-troops, “patriotic” side. Local news, and particularly television, strove to adopt the voice of

the community and be its supportive advocate. The Consensus Frame led reporters to emphasize community solidarity.⁵

The quotations below were all taken from transcripts of news stories broadcast by KVUE-TV, which at the time was the ratings leader in Austin, Texas. Interviews were conducted with station producers and reporters, and raw footage of several community public demonstrations was also examined. Anchor introductions to stories were emphasized, because these lead-ins displayed the most obvious encapsulation of the frame by compressing the essence of the story into a few attention-getting words.

Conflict

In 1991, a variety of public protests and demonstrations were going on throughout the community. Once the January 15, 1991, deadline for Hussein set by President George Bush (Bush I) arrived, public opposition to the conflict was framed to domesticate its focus. The language in news reports clearly worked to downwardly adjust perceptions of anti-war protest strength. Indeed, anti-war protest was probably more vocal in this relatively liberal city, making the framing job perhaps more clearly necessary. (My italics are added below for emphasis.)

(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.

Other references upgraded the pro-policy position, treating it respectfully.

(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 rain showers, *but that didn't dampen their spirits.*

Other reports presented a less positive view of dissenters, calling attention to disruptions, minimizing their strength, and challenging their symbolism.

(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.

This attempt by the anchor to “correct” the symbolism of the protestors, which presumably referenced deaths on both sides, implicitly restricted war dead to American casualties.

Station officials reported that audience complaints often made them sensitive to airing footage of protest, arguing that it allowed them to “consider all sides.” One producer said, “The people who supported the troops were a kind of silent majority.” Thus, in this case the opposing sides became the anti-war position, on the one hand, and the “support the troops” position, on the other—not an anti-policy and pro-policy side. Examining the linguistic composition of these frames shows how strongly intertwined the “pro-troops” position and the related stance of “get behind the president” became in coverage.

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.

In a story from an area public school, the reporter even overtly made a point to separate policy and troops before implicitly joining them again.

(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 distinction between troops and policy further eroded, with local officials adding their voice of support—again implicitly joining the two.

(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.

Most reports of public expression continued to focus on the “pro-troops” position and families.

(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*.

(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 it's really destructive to them.”

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

Later reporting further served to reinforce this clear pitting of the anti-policy stance against the pro-troops/patriotism position in a binary opposition.

(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.

Of course, in the aftermath of 9/11, patriotism took on new significance in the culture, but looking back on this reporting reveals how actively local reporters worked to link patriotism with the troops, especially in the highlighting of community patriotic rallies.

(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.

The Distortion of “Balance”

A closer look at one particular story showed how a stronger anti-war protest was neutralized by its juxtaposition with a pro-troops, “patriotic” activity-following the “objectivity” routine in creating what could be considered a “false balance,” given the disparity of 10 to 1 in attendance at the two events. This story aired January 17th, based on events at the University of Texas. The final story was examined against the original raw footage.

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.”

The reporter moved from this bi-polar pairing of positions to reach a consensual, but ultimately “pro-troops,” and therefore “pro-policy,” theme.

Reporter: Some who came here were motivated by a deeper feeling, a sense of commitment. [Said over shots of anthem and flag] (woman) has a brother in the Gulf.

(woman) "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).

Thus, again the anti-war position was pitted against the high ground of those with a "deeper commitment." Indeed, opposing the war was tantamount to opposing the woman interviewed and her family. But this framing was part of a routine package that made it possible for news organizations to handle protest stories easily and with a minimum of audience complaint. Reporters were not expected to have expertise in the policy issues. They were able to present the "form" of balance as an easily followed format, which would then yield a consensual "patriotic" middle ground.

Consensus

The "support the troops" concept became a crucial element in the conflict and consensus frames and a way to manage public dissent over government policy. Particularly with regard to local television, Kaniss (1991) argued that given the nature of the large and fragmented audiences stations are driven to find unifying symbols and themes, such as sports franchises, which help to promote a sense of community solidarity.⁶ Thus, the "support the troops" message was tailor-made for news coverage seeking to restore community threatened by the divisive disputes over war policy. Frames derive their power in large part because they are internalized "organizing principles" that news workers can apply routinely. Interviews with station reporters showed how this occurred for the pro-troops element. 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.

"The troops" became the nation's home-town team, indeed the consensual glue used by reporters to symbolically hold the community together, especially when trying to frame expressions of conflicting public opinion.

(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.

News routines show that not all stories require balanced voices. According to Hallin (1986), those stories that deal with subjects within either the sphere of deviance or sphere of consensus

are by their nature not ones that require even treatment. Those, however, within the “sphere of legitimate controversy” do. Thus, as a consensual story, “support the troops” stories came to no longer require balance, as in this report on efforts at a local school.

(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.

Of course, there was no shortage of stories from the community and surrounding areas that served to exemplify traditional values: placement of yellow ribbons, rallies, flag-flying, and veterans meetings. Even the veterans themselves were processed through the consensus frame to eliminate any troubling qualms about war in general. As one veteran was quoted as saying:

(January 16) “War produces dead bodies. Let's hope this one's over quickly. War is hell....it's just you can't describe it.”

The reporter, given this threatening notion of war's consequences, quickly reassured the audience:

Despite the knowledge of how horrible war can be, for every ounce of fear among members of 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.

With military success, the pro-troops element soon morphed into the “heroes of Desert Storm,” a label that continued linking the troops to the policy. A reporter's January 18th story glorified local Bergstrom Air Force Base reconnaissance pilots as the “unsung heroes of the war.” The characterization suggests one who embarks on a worthy undertaking, so it is difficult to celebrate the heroes without also endorsing the mission on which they were sent. This theme was a valuable resource for routine story construction by providing an easily constructed story-line, drama, and meaning to the conflict.

In this chapter I have largely centered my attention on how war and its public debate were handled within a specific geographical community. The routinized structure of media/military relationships rooted conflict in frames of reference that held audience appeal and accessible cultural meaning. Coverage of this conflict as seen in the first Gulf war was closely related to coverage of dissent at home within an overall military logic, finding particular expression in support for “the troops.” During the interval between this Gulf conflict and that which followed, the local community was superceded in many ways by global public communities, which had implications on public support for military action.

Conflict and dissent in the global community: Gulf War II

In the years since Gulf I, the previously-existent community focus in news was increasingly intertwined with the changing patterns of news and its changing audiences. With greater competition among U.S. cable news networks, and the more forceful patriotic voice of Fox News, national news became more closely aligned with the commercial imperatives of local television. Indeed, the trauma of 9/11 drove news to appeal to the same sense of one community in the name of national solidarity that was typical of local news. This had impact on the extent to which conflicts were easily framed within military logic and dissent was marginalized. The local/national, “vertical” frames of reference came into increasing tension

with more globalized, multi-level “horizontal” orientations of world news gathering. Global communities, if not supplanting local ones, certainly added an important layer to the public sphere. The current Bush administration took an active role in framing national policy very explicitly in the shape of the “war on terrorism” and the “axis of evil.” These perspectives became more pointed and publicly resonant than the vague, negatively connotated sense of a “new world order,” employed by the earlier Bush Administration in Gulf I. But they were also more open to contestation. How might we compare the potential for framing dissent, as we reflect on differences between Gulf I and Gulf II? Although it is difficult to visualize a public sphere projected globally, some suggestive anecdotal outlines emerge in the way that world publics react and interact through media.

In many respects, a globalized public opinion came of age following the attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent U.S. efforts to engage militarily in Afghanistan and Iraq. Public protests around the world on February 15, 2003, were a particular watershed event, which created a boundary-spanning anti-war movement acting in its various locations but in a simultaneous global arena, supported by transmission of global news and other communication (from email to CNN, weblogs, news sites, etc.). The national media continued to cater to the parochial views of their officials and mass audience, and local media were still limited to coverage of locally based public protest actions. Global elites, however, increasingly took into account world opinion, driven by alternative sources of information to any specific locally based channels. Dissent was not so easily marginalized in this more diffused media environment.

The new ability of citizens to mount a globally coordinated expression of opposition produced corresponding political consequences. Thus, compared to the first Gulf War of 1990 and 1991, the U.S. administration had much greater difficulty operating free of constraint in implementing what amounted to a pre-emptive strike national security policy in the 2003 Iraq invasion (it is, of course, true that the international community was more unified behind Gulf I). An anti-war public in many countries made it politically treacherous for national leaders to support the Bush administration. Media and public opinion, particularly as seen recently in Europe, were less apt to follow government policy. Forging multi-lateral agreement for a unilateral policy came with greater difficulty in a world with global communication supporting different dimensions of public opinion, and where the purported rationale for policy was subjected to world scrutiny, though this helped expose disconnects between surface discourse and underlying strategic motives. The Qatar-based Al-Jazeera television news organization, for example, was increasingly in position in Palestinian territory, Afghanistan, and Iraq to show the aftermath of bombing and the resulting effects on civilian populations (e.g., El-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002). Compared to the relatively more sanitized view of Gulf I, CNN was joined by a host of international 24-hour news channels and many other news sources on the scene to show the wider “reality” of war.

Certainly, the military will continue to work to control access to the battlefield and manage the coverage that results. The U.S. and British defense officials’ plans to incorporate some 600 reporters within individual military units clearly gave greater access to the battlefield than was ever provided in the tightly restricted journalistic environment of Gulf I. In retrospect, this “embedding” strategy of assigning journalists to military units was a brilliant strategy—from the standpoint of the military. These attached reporters were inevitably drawn into the perspective of the soldiers with whom they traveled, and the dramatic, if often blurred and grainy, images from the scene gave a vivid impression from the point of view of the troops. Journalists shared

the perspective and tactical emphasis of the units they accompanied, and their group solidarity (“going native”) affected their independence. This “routinized” perspective was not new and was seen in other settings where journalists effectively took the perspective of police, by using, for example, television footage shot from the police side of an altercation or, in the case of reality-based programming like Fox’s “Cops,” following agents into homes and through neighborhood backyards.

For U.S. news organizations, embedding met professional needs for access to the story and, from their standpoint, was a step forward compared to Gulf I. Although BBC news executives had been distrustful of the program, they later regretted that some of their top journalists had missed out on the main action (Byrne 2003). Although the view from the military units was not the only part of the larger story, its historic immediacy, technology-enhanced drama, and first-hand vantage point gave embedded reports a quality that overwhelmed other perspectives. As a matter of framing emphasis alone, the war on terrorism became a military conflict with Iraq, which became ultimately the story of individual units seeking their objectives: immediate tactical details of casualties, speed, and logistics. Nevertheless, the multi-national character of the embedded journalists gave insights into the depth of the American national frame of reference. That embedding was to a large extent an image-management strategy was seen in the exclusion from desirable assignments of reporters from countries regarded as unfriendly to the “policy,” such as France and Germany (two major German television news organizations were “offered” the same assignment to an aircraft carrier far from the front; they refused). Non-U.S. journalists observed that the Americans seemed “completely signed up” to “America, Inc.,” with little critical distance.

This perspective, however, allowed the American journalists to work in relative harmony with their units and for American officers to make assumptions about their coverage (while obliging them to monitor more closely the work of non-U.S. journalists—particularly, for example, from countries such as Abu Dhabi). Ted Koppel of ABC News Nightline was unable to resist seeking an embedded position (an enhanced one attached to the division commander) and prefacing one report with ominous heroic imagery from Shakespeare (“Unleash the dogs of war!”). An embedded reporter from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* exhibited this professional ease with the heroic theme by presenting a photographic retrospective of his work following his assignment, accompanied by an arrangement of Samuel Barber’s sublime “Adagio for Strings” (also used in the movie *Platoon*).⁷ Indeed, I would argue that the unilateralist policy that got the troops to Iraq made this perspective even more necessary, for it was a policy, after all, predicated on the assumption that U.S. military superiority would be used wisely and was “power that can be trusted.” Thus, perhaps it was not surprising that American journalists internalized this assumption and that non-U.S. journalists were more likely to at least make a distinction between taking the perspective of the unit and the side of “the American war machine.”⁸ Thus, although the embedding program worked to reinforce a military logic and a heroic frame, within the still emerging global norms of newsgathering there was evidence of a fault line between a nationalistic unilateralism and a multi-lateral world.

Thus, embedding was a form of control that created a strong dependency relationship between journalists and their units (not only for getting the story but for protection in a dangerous place). Even the training supervised by the military for aspiring embeds underscored the premise that “we know what we’re doing, and you don’t.” Nevertheless, on the ground of military conflict, it became more difficult to manage information in an environment more fluid

and porous than just 12 years prior, with satellite phones and other technologies making communication easier and quicker. In some ways, this more fluid communication field made controlling the “story line” more crucial, with the Pentagon and the Administration seeking foremost to frame the story as “mission accomplished.” The availability of satellite phones, for example, made it possible for many more journalists to instantly transmit their first hand observations to editors anywhere in the world. Peter Arnett was alone in transmitting via satellite phone from Baghdad in 1991; reporting from the same city in 2003 he noted far greater competition, with 200 to 300 such phones in the city and a dozen video uplinks and video phones (Blumenthal and Rutenberg 2003). In the first Gulf War, restricted coverage led many viewers to give little consideration to civilian suffering, while during that later war reporters had greater access to the impact of the conflict.

Even the powerful “support the troops” component within the frames of dissent cut the current Iraq conflict of Gulf II both ways. On the one hand, the media dynamic remained similar today, with news organizations clearly “on board” with the policy. A recent report from NBC Nightly News, for example, documented the hospital rehabilitation efforts of American soldiers wounded in Iraq. The account of men with missing limbs learning to walk again easily lead viewers questioning the wisdom of the policy behind their suffering, but anchor Brian Williams worked to block this possibility in his studio conclusion: “If you’re looking for anti-war spirit you want find it in this (hospital) ward. These men are anxious to get back to their unit” (31 October 2003). On the other hand, soldiers had families at home, who as the engagement lengthened became increasingly unhappy. Unlike in Gulf I, they were able to email and communicate their own impressions of the conflict in ways that their organization found difficult to control. A quick and decisive conflict with few military casualties allowed the “support the troops” atmosphere to work unchallenged by qualms over policy. But as they remained vulnerable in a protracted struggle, as rationales for the war became increasingly questioned and undermined, then the troops engaged a counter-dynamic at home, leading their communities to question the policy putting them at risk.

The work of unembedded “unilateral” journalists remains important, and their work is more globally available than ever before. Supported by technology, journalist Robert Fisk, for example, was able to base himself in Lebanon, reporting for a London newspaper, *The Independent*, with many more readers around the world via the Internet. Although his ideological stance gained him a wide audience on the Left and critics within the profession, reporters like him remained valuable for their first-hand accounts on the ground of world hot spots. These first-hand perspectives supported a broader perspective by readers who otherwise would not have had much available beyond their own narrow national frames of reference articulated, in particular, by network and local television.

In addition to the freer information environment, and the associated link-ups of world publics around issues, casting the public sphere globally made it less susceptible to control and co-optation by a single “state.” State-controlled propaganda in the traditional sense was less viable when the global public had alternative sources of news beyond their national organs and could coordinate their efforts across international boundaries. Bill Dutton of the Oxford Internet Institute, for example, argued that “The most obvious thing that the web provides is access to a greater diversity of viewpoints and a more international viewpoint.” Adam Porter, of the British on-line current affairs quarterly, *YearZero*, said, “It's really patronizing to assume, as the mainstream media often does that ordinary people don't talk about Iraq, asylum or economics

down the pub. You can go all around the world and find similar things and it's the web that's bringing them together" (MediaGuardian 2003)

Issues as important as war can no longer be dealt with as phenomena isolated to national borders. Thus, it is natural that the public actively seeks a globally oriented perspective. One example may be seen in U.S. audiences tracking European news sites more closely for alternative points of view concerning the war in Iraq. According to Croad (2003), "Much of the US media's reaction to France and Germany's intransigence on the Iraqi war issue has verged on the xenophobic, even in the so-called 'respectable' press." As a result, she observed that the feedback to these European web sites suggested that people no longer rely only on their own national media, exercising instead their need for information on a global scale. Web-based autonomous media emerged such as Indymedia.org, a collective of independent media organizations and journalists, that provided a critique of war coverage in the mainstream press, reframed issues away from military strength to diplomatic relationships and, as it reported, promoted "global citizenship." So, information globalization means that citizens have access to the policy record in a way never possible before, and other countries have access to well-informed points of view around the world. Thus, greater transparency has developed concerning U.S. policy objectives, even if not from the government itself, making it harder for national leaders to "go it alone" with the expectation that the world public will fall in line.

As a globalized public sphere becomes more complex and interconnected, it will become important to theorize the implications for public support for military conflict. Local news organizations during Gulf I effectively structured support for the policy as they applied a military logic to local debates. As these debates over military conflict become globalized and denationalized, beyond the scope of any single local community, there remains the hope that these policies can be debated clearly through a more multi-lateral cultural media lens.

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Endnotes

¹ A fuller analysis is contained in a previous article (Reese and Buckalew 1995).

² Lynch was an American soldier captured and taken to an Iraqi hospital, where by all accounts she was treated humanely before being retrieved in what was hailed at the time as a heroic special rescue operation. The Pentagon has denied staging the rescue as a media event, but it provided to the media its video footage of the operation, acted no doubt as the source of many details in news accounts attributed to anonymous sources, and failed to later correct erroneous details that didn't conform to the story line (Lynch was captured without resistance, although early reports had her emptying her gun at the enemy before being overcome).

³ I understand that in the Arab world this most recent Iraq war is Gulf War III, with the Iraq/Iran War being the first.

⁴ News stories in November 2003 at this writing discuss the White House's attempts to distance the president from the "mission accomplished" banner, a jarring symbolic memory given the on-going presence of U.S. forces in Iraq. The president has blamed the Navy for posting the banner, but the administration's skill in framing visual backdrops for his speeches and controlling every other aspect of media interaction casts doubt on this innocence. What appeared to be a classic presidential photo-op and a golden opportunity for campaign advertising now ironically may be just that, for the opposition that is.

⁵ In the original study, another frame, Control, was also explored. It emerged from the tight relationship between local news organizations and law enforcement, making it easy to slip into a "police work" perspective and cast public dissent as a threat to social control. Dissent, as a result, was often treated as a matter of police work, keeping unruly crowds in check and focusing on procedures in place to manage public gatherings.

⁶ This interlock with sports continues on a national level, as seen, for example, in the National Football League promoting its "Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund" meant to support the families of military personnel "who have given their lives in the current operations in defense of our country" (www.nfl.com/heroesfund, 10 November 2003). My point is certainly not to diminish the loss of these individuals, but to suggest how deeply ingrained the troops are in the national psyche, reinforced in this case by initiatives supported by commercial enterprises. The frequent analogies of sports to war and vice versa is another lengthy subject.

⁷ My observations from this section are drawn from various comments at recent professional meetings. Insights into the foreign press are from the Newsworld International meeting for news professional in Dublin (20-23 October 2003). The Koppel and Atlanta details are from a symposium on war reporting at the University of Texas at Austin (4-5 November 2003).

⁸ The latter view was expressed by BBC correspondent David Loyn at the same Newsworld meeting referenced above (21 October 2003).