Embedded journalism as a strategic enabler in US contentious foreign policy-making domestic legitimization

Evidence from the 2003 invasion of Iraq

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Abstract

This article argues that in controversial conflicts, such as the 2003–2011 Iraq War, the US government can strategically utilize the influence it exhibits over the information the mass media have access to in order for war reporters to be (primarily) exposed to information that legitimizes war, and subsequently shares the latter with national audiences via their coverage of the conflict; so as to facilitate the (potential) generation of domestic public support for war, which has been demonstrated to be particularly crucial in contexts of contentious conflicts. Through the interviewing of eight reporters who worked as embedded or unilateral journalists during the Iraq War, and the thematic coding of 40 embedded and unilateral articles from The New York Times and the Washington Post published during this period, this study finds evidence suggesting that, compared to unilateral reporters, the information embedded journalists had access to during the Iraq War was controlled and limited by the US military, and was particularly oriented toward the legitimization of the conflict. Moreover, that this resulted in embedded journalists' reporting of the Iraq War being, overall, more justifying of the conflict than unilateral reporters' coverage. This article therefore contributes to the wider understanding of the ways in which the US government can utilize the leverage it possesses over the material the mass media have access to, in order to legitimize contentious foreign policy-making, and possibly gather (critical) favorable domestic public opinion for the latter.

Keywords: war, journalism, Iraq, media, strategy, legitimacy, foreign policy

“The Bush administration’s decision to embed reporters on a large scale with military units to provide real-time coverage of the Iraq War represents a dramatic shift in U.S. military-media relations” (Althaus, Cortell, & Eisinger, 2009: 660). Following the Vietnam War and its resulting deteriorated relations between the military and the mass media (Hallin, 1989;
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Carruthers, 2000; Kumar, 2006), the US administration undoubtedly struggled to navigate how to enable mediatic coverage of (contentious) wars, without undermining military campaigns (Brandenburg, 2007; Buchanan, 2011). Mediatic coverage of conflict has certainly been demonstrated to occupy a critical position in foreign warfare policy-making, as it produces narratives of war which can shape national and international public opinion of conflict (Aday, 2014; Hashmi & Javed, 2021), and because the latter can, in turn, alter the course of war (Aukofer & Lawrence, 1995; Carlson & Katowski, 2003). Furthermore, this has been argued to be particularly the case in contentious conflicts, including the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, in which domestic public support – or the lack thereof – displays a significant effect on war conduction, outcomes, and aftermaths (Mueller, 1973; Hallin, 1989, 1997; Brewer & Voeten, 2006). Therefore, following the end of the Vietnam War, the US military’s contentions that “its technological superiority in weaponry and long-distance logistics [had been] fatally undermined by a lack of popular support at home” (Buchanan, 2011: 105–106), and that the latter directly resulted from journalists’ negative depictions of the conflict (Hallin, 1989; Carruthers, 2000), engendered difficulties for the Pentagon to comprehend how to authorize mediatic coverage of future contentious conflicts, while ensuring that negative portrayals of war will not provoke a decline in domestic support for war (Belknap, 2002; Porch, 2002). Although the veracity of the US military’s statements about the responsibility of the mass media in the defeat in Vietnam was, and remains, greatly contested (Mueller, 1973; Sigal, 1973; Hallin, 1989; Porch, 2002), it undeniably resulted in a series of attempts by the US government to limit and censor mediatic coverage of war so as to avert negative representations of conflict (Denton, 1993; Belknap, 2002; Althaus, Cortell, & Eisinger, 2009; Kirat, 2014). Therefore, “the US military decision to embed journalists in combat units during Operation Iraqi Freedom was ... a sharp contrast to past conflicts in which access of journalists was restricted” (Donnelly et al., 2004: 83). In Iraq, embedded reporting was indeed “envisaged as the principal means of generating news about the war” (Brandenburg, 2007: 955), which resulted in the sending of over 750 embedded journalists throughout the conflict (Buchanan, 2011). This appears particularly arduous to understand considering how divisive the 2003 invasion of Iraq was among the US domestic population, and thus how consequential potentially adverse mediatic coverage of this war could have been (Buchanan, 2011).

The Pentagon’s decision to embed such a significant number of journalists, as well as to publicly discourage unilateral reporters from traveling to Iraq to cover the conflict (Brandenburg, 2007), in fact, represented an attempt to gather public support for the contentious invasion of Iraq by ensuring the positive portrayals of the US military during this conflict, and the discrediting of Saddam Hussein’s undesirable propaganda (Kahn, 2004; Okrent, 2004; Tuosto, 2008; Seib, 2013). Brandenburg certainly emphasized that embedding reporting “generates publicity for military operations, not publicity of military operations”, and therefore that it constitutes “an enabler of ... public affairs objectives” instead of a practice aimed at “fulfilling the role of enabling public opinion formation” (2007: 960). Regarding the case of the Iraq War, this analysis found support in a myriad of studies whose results suggest that embedded coverage of this conflict depicted, overall, more favorable portrayals of the US military, compared to unilateral reporting (Donnelly et al., 2004; LeBlanc, 2013).

Nevertheless, scholars have not yet explored precisely how embedded journalists’ relatively positive portrayals of the US military may have contributed to the legitimization of the contentious invasion of Iraq, compared to unilateral reporting. Furthermore, the literature has not yet considered the exact (and potentially active) role of the US military in shaping this embedded coverage of the Iraq War. This paper aims to investigate the specific ways in which embedded journalism can be said to constitute an effective strategic means for the US government in contentious foreign policy-making domestic legitimization, by focusing
on the case of the Iraq War. Considering the scope of this research, it will principally concentrate on the period between the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom on 19 March 2003 and the end of “major combat operations” on 1 May 2003 (Bush, 2003). This article will argue that, during the divisive Iraq War, the US military – and by extension government – strategically used the influence it exerts over the information the mass media have access to, so as to control the material embedded reporters were presented with. In order for the latter to be predominantly introduced to information that justified the necessity of the invasion of Iraq, as well as how this conflict would be successfully unfolding; and to share this material with national audiences, and therefore possibly stimulate domestic public support for this controversial war. Furthermore, it will argue that this resulted in embedded reporting being, during this period, overall more legitimizing of the necessity of the Iraq War and explanatory of US military successes, compared to unilateral journalists’ reporting.

**Contentious foreign policy-making**

Domestic public opinion of foreign affairs significantly shapes and restrains foreign policy-making, including war-related issues (Morgan et al., 1993; Aldrich et al., 2006). Aldrich et al. (2006) demonstrated that internal public attitudes toward foreign affairs influence populations’ voting preferences, which incentivizes democracies’ political leaders to adapt their foreign policy agenda depending on, among other factors, national conventional wisdom – to maintain domestic public support and political power. Concerning war specifically, Chan and Safran (2006) challenged such claims by asserting that internal (oppositional) public opinion can be disregarded by democracies’ office-holders, as democratic institutions can reduce the impact public views display on incumbents’ perspectives of re-election. This, Chan and Safran (2006) highlighted, partly elucidates the Bush administration’s resolve to launch Operation Iraqi Freedom in March 2003 despite between 35 and 43% of the US population being opposed to it then (Lindsay & Smith, 2003). Nonetheless, congruous with theories of retrospective voting, Feaver, Gelpi, and Reifler (2005/2006) “found strong evidence linking voters’ attitudes about whether President Bush ‘did the right thing’ by attacking Iraq to voters’ choices in November 2004” (Aldrich et al., 2006: 490). Such findings substantiate the existence of a causal mechanism between domestic public opinion of foreign policy-making and population’s political behavior, and therefore indicate that, especially regarding war, democratic political leaders ought to consider internal public attitudes for their political agenda to remain popular (Aldrich et al., 2006; Buchanan, 2011).

In cases of contentious foreign policy issues, however, considering public opinion may prove difficult for office-holders. To pursue a divisive foreign political agenda while remaining popular, political leaders therefore ought to overcome polarization by generating and preserving public support (Freedman, 2006c; Waldman, 2019). Building on George’s (1989) theory of policy legitimacy, the literature emphasized that gathering public support for contentious conflicts can be facilitated through the creation and sharing of strategic narratives of war (Freedman, 2006a, 2015; De Graaf, Dimitriu, & Ringsmose, 2015). More specifically, Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle underlined the existence of issue narratives, which are precisely aimed at “set[ing] out why a policy is needed and (normatively) desirable, and how it will be successfully implemented or accomplished” (2014: 76). Such narratives constitute effective political tools to address public dissensus since they enable incumbents to legitimate contentious foreign policy-making, and hence gather domestic support toward an initially unpopular policy project (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, & Roselle, 2014, 2015). Whereas Porch (2002) and Waldman (2019) argued that the creation and delivery of strategic narratives is inherent to operational military strategy,
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Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle (2014) approached it as a form of soft power, used in conjunction with military force. One can argue that these two perspectives fit together as “information warfare” (Porch, 2002: 101) constitutes a soft power resource the US government and military can utilize – in combination with hard power elements – to build an operative war strategy. Legitimizing conflict through the sharing of strategic narratives – and therefore (potentially) generating public support for war – is certainly profoundly consequential in contemporary armed conflicts (Carlson & Katowski, 2003; Brewer & Voeten, 2006; Waldman, 2019).

Scholars indeed demonstrated that, during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, a significant part of US military planning focused on gaining domestic population’s support (Esser, 2009; Hashmi & Javed, 2021) through presenting the conflict as a “war of necessity” (Freedman, 2006b: 68). Concerning national security, the US government framed Operation Iraqi Freedom as required since “part of the ‘war on terror’” (Freedman, 2006b: 68). Moreover, from an international security perspective, the invasion was introduced as mandatory because it constituted a military response to Iraq’s “non-compliance with a series of UN resolutions requiring the elimination of all WMD” (Freedman, 2006b: 68). Thereafter, contiguous with the overthrow of the Ba’ath regime and with the lack of evidence regarding both the presence of WMD in Iraq and the existence of links between Saddam Hussein’s government and al-Qaeda, the invasion was progressively framed as vital to liberate the Iraqi people from systematic oppression and human rights abuses (Freedman, 2006b; Esser, 2009; Hashmi & Javed, 2021).

US government’s limited domestic legitimacy: implications

Despite being crucial, especially in cases of contentious conflicts, governments’ delivery of issue narratives to their domestic public may be undermined if the leadership itself lacks national legitimacy (Freedman, 2006c). Communications theory scholars underlined that for narratives to be effective – i.e., relevant, trusted, and hence possibly endorsed by internal audiences – they must display both “coherence (or probability); and fidelity (or resonance)” (Waldman, 2019: 163). When governments exhibit scarce domestic backing, the resonance of their direct communications with the internal public may be incidental (Goddard & Krebs, 2015), and therefore domestic support for contentious policy-making may prove difficult to generate and maintain through exclusively government-led sharing of issue narratives. Concerning the US, Hendrickson and Tucker (2004) demonstrated that – due to a myriad of contextual factors including a historical absence of international lawfulness, a lack of foreign policy moderation, and repeated breaches of global peace – the political leadership has systematically displayed restricted national legitimacy regarding foreign policy matters since the Cold War. In the run-up to the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom for example, despite important government-led communications campaigns aimed at legitimizing the operation – through promoting the issue narratives outlined earlier in this section – and notwithstanding the Bush administration’s significant efforts intended at discrediting “denigrating opponents and critics of the war” (Brown, 2005: 74), the US political leadership floundered to gather public support for the invasion (Freedman, 2006a). The domestic public indeed perceived the invasion of Iraq as an additional unilateral breach of international law (Cox, 2003), and consequently around “30 percent [of the U.S. population] firmly believed that a war could not be justified” (Lindsay & Smith, 2003).

Drawing on the principal-agent literature, Waldman demonstrated that, during war, government and military can engage in “surrogate warfare” – i.e., “the delegation of core aspects of war-related activities to external state and non-state actors in order to actively influence the course of an ongoing conflict” (2019: 161). Although Waldman concentrated on
the “US sponsorship of armed auxiliaries” (2019: 161), the literature established that additional subsets of war, including communications strategy, can be delegated to agents (Cunningham, 2010). Considering the limited domestic legitimacy the US government has been argued to exhibit regarding foreign affairs communications, delegating the delivery of issue narratives to the internal public to external actors that display more national accountability therefore appears relevant to gather public support for contentious war. Scholars have pointed out that, during the 2003 invasion of Iraq for example, the White House externalized part of its communications strategy to a myriad of external actors, including associations (Rampton & Stauber, 2003), think-tanks, public relations agencies, and the media (Kumar, 2006). This enabled the Bush administration to effectively share issue narratives of war to the domestic public in spite of its restricted national resonance, and therefore to maintain a certain level of public support for the invasion despite the persistence of a significant anti-war domestic sentiment (Kumar, 2006).

The mass media: a strategic proxy?

Through the legitimacy theory, the media agenda-setting theory, and the Model of Mass Media Propaganda, the literature demonstrated that the mass media hold the legitimacy necessary to influence public opinion (Aday, 2014; Hashmi & Javed, 2021). Aday (2014) certainly found evidence suggesting that the US public is highly reliant on mass media – rather than on others means including direct governmental communications – for access to information. Furthermore, Armstrong et al. (2004) highlighted that this is especially the case concerning foreign policy matters, including contentious conflicts. Drawing on the dependency model of media effects, this can be demonstrated by the fact that “under conditions of social change or conflict … people tend to be more dependent than ever upon mass media for information” (Moy et al., 1994: 7). Concerning the US specifically, this can be further explicated by the limited domestic legitimacy the US government displays concerning foreign policymaking, as examined earlier in this section. Accordingly, the mass media constitute a particularly pertinent proxy to which the sharing of strategic (issue) narratives of war to the US domestic public can be delegated: building on the CNN effect theory, Belknap emphasized that the media represent a “strategic enabler” (2002: 101) for the US government and military, as they “provide the military the means to ensure the American public is informed and engaged” (2002: 112).

Theories of media coverage of foreign policy-making emphasized that, despite the media being responsible for delivering information to the internal public, the generation of this information and its access by the media and journalists remains under elites’ and government’s control (Chomsky & Herman, 1988; Bennett, 1990, 1994; Entman, 2003, 2004, 2006; Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007). Through the Model of Mass Media Propaganda and the Cascade Network Activation Model, scholars explained that the White House is the primary actor in charge of framing information and messages that are thenceforth transmitted to the media, and subsequently to the domestic public; and hence that the US government constitutes a filter through which information can (or not) be made accessible to the mass media, and by extension national audiences. As a result, the mass media may appear to constitute a safe proxy to which the US government can delegate the sharing of issue narratives of war to national audiences: in addition to exhibiting domestic legitimacy, and therefore displaying the ability to influence public opinion as emphasized above, the mass media is, to a certain extent, itself influenced by the government through the information the latter provides access to. Nonetheless, Belknap pointed out that the mass media also constitute an “operational risk” for government and military, since “inaccurate depictions of operations can have a devastating effect on ... the will of the American people” (2002: 111),
and therefore negatively influence domestic perception of war. Numerous scholars have found evidence that, during the Vietnam War, the contradictions that arose between US military statements and the mediatic coverage of the conflict (at least partly) resulted in unsupportive public opinion for the conflict (Freedman, 2006c; Hallin, 2013). Consequently, while the mass media appear to constitute a relevant and safe proxy to which the sharing of issue narratives with national audiences can be delegated, evidence suggests that they can also represent a risky one.

Embedded journalism as a strategic enabler

Although theories of media coverage of foreign policy-making demonstrated that the US government displays a certain leverage over the information the mass media are exposed to (Chomsky & Herman, 1988; Bennett, 1990, 1994; Entman, 2003, 2004, 2006), negative mediatic coverage of war still constitutes a risk for the US government and military (Belknap, 2002), especially in contentious conflicts (Freedman, 2006c; Waldman, 2019). Building on this account, and on the principal-agent theory, this section argues that in cases of divisive conflicts including the Iraq War, the US government can strategically use the influence it exhibits over the information the mass media are presented with. In order for war reporters to be predominantly exposed to material that supports government-established overarching issue narratives of war – i.e., information that legitimizes why conflict is necessary and how it will be successfully conducted (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, & Roselle, 2014) – and share this material with national audiences through their coverage of the conflict. Indeed, as the literature review highlighted that the US domestic public is especially reliant on the mass media for information on war (Armstrong et al., 2004), the delivery of issue narratives to national audiences through the mass media could therefore significantly facilitate the generation of (consequential) public support for controversial conflict.

Drawing on this account, embedded journalism constitutes a way through which the US government can strategically use the control it exerts over the information the mass media have access to during contentious war. According to the US Department of the Army:

Embedding is the act of assigning a reporter to a unit as a member of the unit. The reporter eats, sleeps, and moves with the unit. The reporter is authorised open access to all sections of the unit and is not escorted by public affairs personnel. Rather, the unit is the reporter’s escort. Reporters file their stories from unit locations and security is accomplished at the source, by establishing with the reporter what can be covered and reported on and what cannot be reported on, or when material can be reported. (1997: 25)

Consequently, by definition: (1) as they are part of a military unit and remain with this unit until they do not, embedded journalists rely on the military – and by extension the government – for access to information; (2) the information embedded journalists are exposed to and may share with domestic audiences is relatively influenced by the military itself – and by extension the government. Therefore, although embedding “facilitate[s] maximum, in-depth coverage of US forces in combat and related operations” (DoD, 2003a), it is subject to constraints that unilateral reporting does not involve (Tuosto, 2008). Such constraints result in embedded journalists being exposed, by the US military, to information that somewhat supports government-established issue narratives of war – i.e., material that justifies why conflict is needed, and how it will successfully unfold (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, & Roselle, 2014) – compared to unilateral reporters. Furthermore, that this engenders embedded coverage of war to be rather supportive of these overarching issue narratives of war – i.e., inclined to legitimize why war is
required, and how it will be successfully conducted (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, & Roselle, 2014) – compared to unilateral reporting.

Two hypotheses emerge from applying the two-fold argument presented above to the case study of the Iraq War:

H1: Compared to unilateral journalists, the information embedded reporters had access to during the Iraq War was restricted by the military, and tended to support US government-designed issue narratives of war.

H2: Compared to unilateral journalists’ reporting, embedded reporters’ coverage of the Iraq War was overall more supportive of US government-generated issue narratives of war.

Data collection

In order to understand the effect of being embedded (or unilateral) on the type of information journalists had access to during the Iraq War, the author has conducted interviews. Denzin (2001) and Seidman (2012) emphasized that interviews enable the compilation of information on specific issues, through studying interviewees’ own experience of these matters. These semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted with a sample of eight journalists who worked for The New York Times and the Washington Post during the Iraq War (see Appendix A). These two publications were purposively sampled because of the in-depth coverage of the Iraq War they carried (Carpenter, 2007); since they were particularly highly circulating newspapers during this period (Gale Research, 2004); and because of the significant number of embedded journalists’ slots they were accredited by the Pentagon (see Appendix B). The interviewees were also purposively sampled: a similar number of embedded and unilateral reporters were selected to have a representative sample of the journalists who covered Operation Iraqi Freedom. Each interviewee will be anonymized as “Participant X (PX)”. The purpose of conducting these interviews was to gather data on journalists embedded or unilateral experience of the Iraq War (see question guide and the interview transcript sample in Appendix C).

To comprehend the effect of being embedded on the likelihood of writing articles that contributed to the strength of US government-generated issue narratives of war during the Iraq War, this research entails the collection and examination of qualitative content “sampled from available sources” (Schreier, 2014: 180). More specifically, it encompasses the random selection and subsequent thematic coding of 40 articles from The New York Times and the Washington Post, written and published between 19 March and 1 May 2003, by 20 embedded and 20 unilateral reporters. The use of the NVivo software has enabled the first cycle coding of these articles into codes which can successively be organized into categories (see Appendices D and E), and the second cycle coding of these categories into three themes corresponding to topics raised in issue narratives established by the US government to legitimize the Iraq War (see Appendix D).

Once collected through interviews, the data on reporters’ embedded or unilateral experience of the Iraq War were analyzed through different criteria: type of information embedded and unilateral journalists each did and did not have access to, the role played by the US military in facilitating or restricting this access, and whether any kind of censorship took place before and as journalists were writing and filing articles back to their publication. Strategic issue narratives of war contain information legitimizing why a specific policy is necessary, and how it will be successfully delivered (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, & Roselle, 2014). Analyzing the data collected through this theoretical frame and through the above-listed criteria enables the comparison of whether the information embedded and unilateral
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Journalists had access to during the conflict was more supportive of US government-established issue narratives of war, compared to unilateral reporters, and whether this was resulting from restrictions imposed by the US military; and hence to verify or invalidate H1.

This article uses the two components of Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle’s (2014) concept of issue narratives – why a particular policy is needed, and how it will be successfully achieved – as criteria to analyze whether embedded articles tended to support more government-established issue narratives during the Iraq War than unilateral articles. The two-step coding of newspaper articles enables the identification of whether these two criteria were present in the sampled articles, i.e., whether the selected newspaper articles introduced elements that justified why the Iraq War was required, and how it was meant to be successfully conducted. Each article containing such elements will thereafter be coded as “positive”, “negative”, or “neutral” toward the two key criteria. For example, an article explaining that evidence has been found that the Ba’ath Party oppressed specific Iraqi religious minorities, and therefore needed to be overthrown, can be coded as “positive” toward justifying why Operation Iraqi Freedom was necessary. This enables the analysis of whether embedded articles were more supportive of US government-established issue narratives during the Iraq War, compared to unilateral articles.

Results: data collected through interviews

Embedded journalists

Concerning the type of information they had access to, all five embedded journalists interviewed explained that being embedded with the military provided them with extensive and detailed material on US military-related elements of the war. These encompassed “(sometimes classified) information on ongoing and future combat operations” (P5, 2023), updates on strategic achievements, and discussions over upcoming military objectives to attain (P2, 2023; P3, 2023). Such information was mainly disclosed during daily operational briefings which P2 (2023) and P3 (2023) were permitted to attend. P1 (2023) and P3 (2023) also mentioned that, pre-invasion, certain embedded reporters joined training camps organized by the US military, during which the latter provided thorough information on the tactical purposes of Operation Iraqi Freedom, as well as security measures journalists ought to follow once in Iraq. Although three of the five respondents signed an embedding agreement outlining that specific material, including evidence that could jeopardize the safety of the US military, could not be reported on (P2, 2023; P3, 2023; P5, 2023), the five interviewees explained that they felt that the US military was overall quite cooperative in letting embedded reporters access military-related information. As mentioned above, P2 (2023) and P3 (2023) had access to quotidian operations meetings. Moreover, four respondents out of five were permitted to follow their units during risky operations, and to subsequently report on it.

The five embedded journalists interviewed nonetheless emphasized that they only had access to “a tiny piece of a much larger operation” (P2, 2023), and that embedding with the military provides reporters with a “soda straw” perspective of the war (P2, 2023; P3, 2023; P5, 2023), i.e., a very detailed but limited vision of the conflict. All five interviewees indeed agreed on the fact that, since the principal objective of embedding with the military is to focus reporting on military-related content (P3, 2023; P5, 2023; P8, 2023), their access to other types of information, including the number of civilian casualties, was particularly limited (P1, 2023; P3, 2023; P8, 2023). As P3 (2023) for instance expressed, “when on an operation with the unit, [embedded reporters] couldn’t see the Iraqi casualties, [they] were focused on
the mission”. Furthermore, P1 (2023) highlighted that having to remain with the unit he was assigned to, despite being inherent to embedded reporting, was especially restricting concerning the material he was presented with: “as an embedded journalist, you only have access to where your unit takes you, to what [it] shows you”.

Regarding censorship, all five respondents explained that the US military did not exert censorship per se over the information they could access nor on what they were writing. P2 (2023), P3 (2023), and P5 (2023) emphasized that the material they could not report on – specified in the embedding agreement they signed – seemed reasonable since it mostly concerned information that could compromise the security of the military unit, or the completion of future combat operations. P3 (2023) however highlighted that the principle of embedding itself, that is to “live in the same tents as the people you are writing about”, resulted in a “subtle pressure” over what she could report. P3 (2023) explicated that “if the military did not like what [embedded reporters] wrote, they would let you know”, and therefore resulted in a somewhat subconscious limitation upon what she could report on.

Unilateral journalists

Compared to embedded reporters, the three unilateral journalists interviewed explained that, during the Iraq War, they had access to an extended range of material, including “information that would question official US military declarations” (P6, 2023). P4 (2023) and P6 (2023) emphasized that unilateral reporters were particularly inclined to visit local hospitals, prisons, and churches; as well as to discuss with local Iraqi civilian populations and to conduct interviews with civilians, to have their perspectives on the conflict for instance. All three respondents highlighted that, as unilateral journalists, and compared to embedded reporters, they had an “almost complete freedom of movement” in Iraq (P6, 2023), with the only self-imposed restriction being the danger of specific combat zones, which enabled them to “drive off wherever [they] wanted” and subsequently report on “whatever [they] wanted”, within the limits of their own safety (P7, 2023). Although the three unilateral journalists emphasized that, in Iraq, unilateral reporters were not subject to any kind of censorship – concerning what they had access to, or what they could write – they however indicated that their coverage of military-related material, as well as of dangerous areas of the Iraqi territory, was acutely limited. Since they “did not benefit from US military protection” (P6, 2023), contrary to embedded journalists, all three respondents explained that unilateral reporters had reduced access to unsafe territories of Iraq, and therefore that they did not considerably cover these areas. Moreover, as they were not embedded, following closely combat operations and other US military-related information was especially arduous for unilateral journalists (P6, 2023), and thus their coverage of such topics remained restricted (P4, 2023; P7, 2023).

Data collected through newspaper articles

Although the comprehensive results of the two-step thematic coding of embedded and unilateral articles are presented in Table 3 in Appendix F, the following sub-sections provide a summary of the main findings.

Embedded articles

As depicted in Figure 1 and Appendix F, the 20 embedded articles sampled primarily discussed information relating to the US military, compared to material concerning WMD and the Ba’ath
Party which was significantly less included. The theme “US Military” was indeed, aggregately, covered 141 times in the sample, compared to 49 times for “WMD”, and 39 times for “Ba’ath Party”. Moreover, “US Military” was mentioned in 95% of the embedded articles – i.e., in 19 articles out of 20 – in contrast with 40% for “WMD” and 35% for “Ba’ath Party”.

When covering material relating to the US military, embedded articles mostly focused on US military successes, compared to US military failures (see Figure 1). The category “US Military Success” certainly arose, in aggregate, 108 times in the sample – i.e., around five times per article on average – whereas the category “US Military Failure” was mentioned 33 times overall in the sample. More specifically, when covering US military successes, embedded articles emphasized successful US military operations, US territorial advancements, and the difficulties faced by the Iraqi Army. The code “Successful Operation” arose 33 times aggregately in the sample, “Territorial Advancement” 27 times, and “Unsuccessful or Weak Iraqi Army” 19 times. Then, when discussing US military failures, embedded articles predominantly highlighted the difficulties the US military expected to face: “Expected Difficulty” certainly arose 22 times overall across the sample. “Iraqi Civilian Casualties” and “U.S. Military Casualties” were also covered, but significantly less, i.e., four times each aggregately. Subsequently, when raising WMD, embedded articles virtually only underlined the presence of WMD rather than their absence (see Figure 1): whereas the category “Presence of WMD” was mentioned 51 times, the category “Absence of WMD” was only included once in the sample. When covering material related to the Ba’ath Party, the embedded articles sampled mostly discussed the “Repression of the Iraqi Population” (see Figure 1): the latter was indeed mentioned 30 times aggregately in the sample, whereas the category “Link with Global Terrorism” was mentioned nine times. Within the category “Repression of the Iraqi Population”, “Political Oppression” was the prevalent code, mentioned 12 times overall.
Unilateral articles

As represented in Figure 2 and Appendix F, the 20 unilateral articles sampled principally covered material relating to the Ba’ath Party and the US military, compared to information on WMD which was barely touched upon. The theme “Ba’ath Party” was mentioned 89 times in aggregate in the sample, and the theme “U.S. Military” 73 times, compared to three times for “WMD”. When discussing information regarding the Ba’ath Party, unilateral articles predominantly mentioned the repression of the Iraqi people (see Figure 2). More precisely, the category “Repression of the Iraqi Population” was mentioned 82 times overall in the sample – i.e., around four times per article on average. When mentioning the repression of the Iraqi population, unilateral articles essentially focused on the political, religious, and ethnic oppression of Iraqis, which respectively arose 36, 21, and 19 times aggregate. One time out of three, the repression of the Iraqi people was mentioned by quoting Iraqi civilians directly. Furthermore, concerning the link between the Ba’ath Party and international terrorism, unilateral articles solely highlighted the “Belief of Presence” of a link, and did not mention any evidence of this connection. Finally, when covering the US military, unilateral articles significantly underlined the failures of the US military, rather than their successes (see Figure 2). “US Military Failure” was indeed mentioned 54 times in the sample – i.e., almost three times per article on average – compared to “US Military Success”, which was mentioned, in aggregate, 19 times – i.e., less than once per article on average. When discussing US military failures, unilateral articles mainly pointed out civilian casualties: “Iraqi Civilian Casualties” indeed arose 22 times overall in the sample – i.e., a little more than once per article on average. Iraqi civilian casualties were, two times out of five, confirmed by official sources in the articles. Furthermore, the articles sampled also focused on the “Expected Difficulty” of upcoming US military operations, which were mentioned 11 times aggregate. Concerning the category “Military Success”, it was mainly raised when touching on the “Liberation of Oppressed Iraqi Population”, which was discussed four times overall.

Figure 2  Hierarchy chart of unilateral articles
When comparing the results obtained via the thematic coding of embedded and unilateral articles (see Figures 1 and 2, and Appendix F), the following observations can be made:

(1) In comparison to embedded articles, the unilateral articles sampled displayed a noteworthy focus on information relating to Iraqi civilians, especially concerning the oppression of Iraqi civilians by the Ba’th Party, and on Iraqi civilian casualties resulting from US military actions.

(2) Regarding the coverage of the US military, the embedded articles sampled covered extensively the ongoing of (mainly successful) operations and on the expected (successful) delivery of future operations, whereas unilateral articles mainly focused on Iraqi civilian casualties, and on the difficulties the US military was expected to encounter during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

(3) The embedded articles sampled displayed around 16 times more information regarding WMDs than unilateral articles.

(4) Concerning the link between the Ba’ath Party and transnational terrorism, neither embedded nor unilateral articles sampled appear to have covered it extensively.

Analysis

Differences in access to specific types of information

The findings suggest that, compared to unilateral journalists, the information embedded reporters were presented with during the Iraq War was more supportive of US government-designed issue narratives of war. As outlined in the previous section, embedded journalists seem to have had, during the Iraq War, principally access to US military-related material (Columbia Journalism Review, 2006). Using Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle’s (2014) concept of issue narratives, it appears that this material provided embedded reporters with justifications for why the invasion of Iraq was required, and on how the latter would be successfully achieved. Interviews with embedded reporters certainly highlighted that, during pre-invasion training camps, the US military shared information legitimizing the necessity of Operation Iraqi Freedom: P3 (2023), for instance, explained that the US military would emphasize how critical the invasion of Iraq was regarding the War on Terror. According to the DoD (2003b), around 250 national and international reporters took part in these camps, i.e., around a third of the total number of reporters embedded during the Iraq War. Moreover, as P1 and P3 (2023) underlined, daily operational briefings, which embedded reporters were usually permitted to attend, would consist of the US military presenting specifically what the purposes of each combat operation were, how exactly missions would be conducted, and (potentially) result in strategic successes (Kumar, 2006). Although it appears that unilateral journalists also had access to information justifying Operation Iraqi Freedom, especially through their direct interactions with the Iraqi civilian population, the findings suggest that unilateral reporters were not presented with material demonstrating how the conflict was being (successfully) carried out by the US military (Brandenburg, 2007; Fahmy and Johnson, 2007; Lindner, 2008). P4 (2023) indeed explained that, as unilateral journalists had the opportunity to interview numerous Iraqi civilians, “it wasn’t hard to find justification about the idea that the Iraqis had been repressed by the Ba’ath Party”. Nonetheless, as the previous section outlined, the three unilateral reporters interviewed suggested that unilateral journalists had a limited perception of how the Iraq War was evolving militarily speaking, especially since they did not have significant contact with the US military, nor access to hazardous combat zones (Kumar, 2006). Consequently, whereas embedded journalists appear to have been presented with information on both why Operation Iraqi Freedom was necessary, and on
how this operation was being (and planning on being) successfully carried out by the US military (Kumar, 2006), the findings indicate that it was not the case for unilateral reporters. Since issue narratives of war essentially encompass the two elements embedded journalists seem to have been presented with, then, compared to unilateral reporters, the information embedded journalists were presented with during the Iraq War appears to have been more complete and supportive of US government-designed issue narratives of war.

The US military’s role in providing and constraining such access

Although they did not experience censorship per se, the information embedded reporters had access to during the Iraq War seems to have been controlled by the US military. Indeed, while a certain pressure over what embedded journalists could report on was sometimes felt by the latter during this conflict (P3, 2023), especially since they were relying on the individuals they were writing about for both their safety and daily necessities (Payne, 2005; Babin et al., 2006), and some limitations existed to the diversity of material they were presented with, the findings suggest that embedded reporters were not faced with any tangible censorship from their military units (Brandenburg, 2007; P1, 2023; P2, 2023; P3, 2023; P5, 2023; P8, 2023). Nevertheless, in contrast to unilateral reporters, the information embedded journalists had access to during Operation Iraqi Freedom appear to have been determined by the US military (Brandenburg, 2007; Althaus, Cortell, & Eisinger, 2009). As outlined in the preceding section, embedded reporters seem to have been provided, contrary to unilateral journalists, with extensive and detailed US military-related material, which was facilitated by US military units themselves by allowing embedded journalists to attend operational briefings and join missions (Althaus, Cortell, & Eisinger, 2009; P2, 2023; P3, 2023; P5, 2023; P8, 2023). Moreover, the findings suggest that, unlike unilateral reporters, embedded journalists’ access to non-US military-related information was particularly limited, especially since they had to follow their unit’s actions and therefore displayed restricted freedom of movement (Donnelly et al., 2004; Kumar, 2006). As emphasized in the previous section indeed, “being reliant on the military as to where [embedded reporters] are going is a real limitation of what you can report on” (P1, 2023). Consequently, the results presented in the preceding section indicate that, during the Iraq War, embedded reporters’ access to information was, compared to those of unilateral journalists, acutely influenced and constrained by the military unit they were assigned to, and by extension by the US military (Kumar, 2006). Building on this finding, and on the analysis that, compared to unilateral reporters, the information embedded journalists were presented with during the Iraq War seems to have supported US government-designed narratives, H1 is therefore validated. In comparison to unilateral reporters, the material embedded journalists had access to during the Iraq War certainly appears to have been controlled and limited by the military, and to have leaned toward the support of US government-designed issue narratives of war.

Legitimization of the Iraq War

The findings suggest that, compared to unilateral coverage of the war, embedded reporting of the Iraq War displayed more, with regard to both quantity and diversity, information justifying the conflict. The previous section highlighted that, although unilateral articles appear to have widely included material relating to, and evidence of, the repression of the Iraqi population by the Ba’ath Party (Fahmy & Johnson, 2005), they did not seem to have extensively covered other elements justifying why Operation Iraqi Freedom was required – which, as outlined in the literature review, consisted of the potential existence of a link between the Ba’ath Party and transnational terrorism, and of the suspected presence of WMD in Iraq. In comparison, the findings suggest that embedded articles provided material on both the belief of the presence of WMD in Iraq and the repression of the Iraqi people, even though, as
unilateral articles, they did not cover considerably the potential connection between Saddam Hussein’s regime and global terrorism. As the preceding section pointed out for instance, the expected presence of WMD in Iraq was mentioned 51 times across the selection of embedded articles coded – i.e., more than 2.5 times per article on average – whereas it arose only once aggregately in the sample of unilateral articles. This resulted in 15 embedded articles being coded “positive”, 5 “neutral”, and 0 “negative”, toward justifying why Operation Iraqi Freedom was necessary; in comparison to 11 unilateral articles being coded “positive”, 9 “neutral”, and 0 “negative”. Consequently, applying Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle’s (2014 and 2015) theoretical concept of issue narratives to the findings presented in the previous section, it appears that embedded article presented more, in terms of both quantity and diversity, material legitimizing the necessity of the Iraq War.

The Iraq War’s (successful) unfolding and planned progression

Compared to unilateral ones, embedded articles provided more, regarding both quantity and diversity, material elucidating how Operation Iraqi Freedom was successfully unfolding, and was planning on successfully evolving. The preceding section indeed pointed out that embedded articles seem to have displayed a significant focus on the US military, more precisely on the successful unfolding of military operations, whereas unilateral articles appear to have done less so (Donnelly et al., 2004; Babin et al., 2006). While the successes of the US military were mentioned 108 times aggregately in the embedded articles sampled, they were only covered 19 times across the selection of unilateral articles. Moreover, when unilateral articles presented information relating to the US military, it seems to have been predominantly material that undermined the latter (Fahmy & Johnson, 2007). The unilateral articles sampled for instance particularly insisted on Iraqi civilian casualties, which constitutes a major failure of the US military (Fahmy & Johnson, 2005). While the embedded articles selected only mentioned Iraqi civilian casualties four times aggregately in the sample, unilateral articles covered it 22 times overall. This resulted in 14 embedded articles being coded “positive”, 5 “neutral”, and 1 “negative”, toward highlighting how Operation Iraqi Freedom was successfully evolving, and was planning on successfully progressing; compared to two unilateral articles being coded “positive”, 15 “neutral”, and 3 “negative”. Therefore, applying Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle’s (2014 and 2015) notion of issue narratives to the results outlined in the preceding section, the conclusion arises that embedded articles appear to have presented more, in terms of both quantity and diversity, information emphasizing how successfully the Iraq War was proceeding, and was planning on successful progress, compared to unilateral articles. Building on this assessment, and on the evaluation that embedded articles seem to have included more, regarding both quantity and diversity, information justifying the necessity of Operation Iraqi Freedom, H2 is validated. Embedded journalists’ reporting of the Iraq War seems to have been altogether more supportive of US government-generated issue narratives of war, compared to unilateral reporters’ coverage.

The validation of both H1 and H2 provides empirical justifications for the argument according to which the US government, during contentious conflicts, can strategically utilize its ability to influence the information the mass media have access to, for war reporters to predominantly be presented with material that supports government-established overarching issue narratives of war. In order for these war reporters to frame their coverage of the conflict around to the support of issue narratives of war, share the latter with national audiences, and therefore potentially generate supportive domestic public opinion for divisive conflict. This section certainly demonstrated that, during Operation Iraqi Freedom, the US military – and by extension government – appears to have displayed the capacity to control the information embedded journalists had access.
to, which seems to have resulted in the latter being mostly presented with material that tended to support government-created overarching issue narratives of war. This appears to have subsequently engendered embedded reporters to include more of such material in their coverage of the conflict, compared to unilateral journalists. Embedded reporting during the Iraq War seems to have been more inclined to justify why the conflict is necessary, and how it is and will be successfully unfolding, in comparison to unilateral reporting. As a result, embedded journalism can be argued to constitute a powerful strategic enabler, for the US government, in contentious foreign policy-making domestic legitimization. As this section demonstrated, embedded coverage appears to be more supportive of government-established overarching issue narratives of war, compared to unilateral reporting. Moreover, issue narratives of war represent an effective tool to address national public dissensus, and therefore generate favorable public opinion for initially contentious conflict. Consequently, the high probability of embedded journalism to positively frame such issue narratives of war, and effectively promote and share the latter with domestic audiences through its coverage of the conflict, makes embedded journalism a strategic enabler for the US government in the contentious foreign policy-making domestic legitimization realm. This therefore explains why embedded journalism was promoted and used so extensively, by the US government, during the contentious 2003 invasion of Iraq and following war (Althaus, Cortell, & Eisinger, 2009), whereas unilateral coverage was not encouraged (Brandenburg, 2007).

The findings substantiated the argument that the US government, in contentious conflicts such as the Iraq War, is able to strategically use its capacity to influence and control the material the mass media have access to; for war reporters to mainly be introduced to information that supports government-designed overarching issue narratives of war. So as to ensure that journalists will produce and share, with domestic audiences, depictions of the war that favor such narratives, and thus possibly stimulate auspicious national public opinion for originally divisive conflict. This subsequently permitted the endorsement of the idea that, during the Iraq War, embedded journalism represented an effective strategic enabler for the US government, and thus that it may be the case in contentious conflict internal legitimization more broadly. Indeed, through favorably framing government-created overarching issue narratives of war and sharing the latter with national audiences through its coverage of the conflict, embedded journalism constitutes a powerful tool for the US government in its controversial foreign policy-making domestic legitimization strategy. As Buchanan stated, “embedded reporting is ... a weapon in the information war that runs parallel to combat” (2011: 104).

Appendix A

Table 1  Sample of Embedded and Unilateral Journalists Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Embedded</td>
<td>Participant 2* (P2)</td>
<td>Participant 1 (P1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant 5 (P5)</td>
<td>Participant 3 (P3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant 8 (P8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unilateral</td>
<td>Participant 4* (P4)</td>
<td>Participant 6 (P6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant 7 (P7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Some journalists worked in Iraq as both embedded and unilateral reporters, alternatively. For the purposes of this study, the interviews conducted with them focused on one type of coverage specifically, in order to collect data on their experience either as embedded or unilateral reporters during the Iraq War.
Appendix B

Figure 3  News organizations and their respective number of slots for embedded journalists (March 2003).

Source: Althaus, Cortell, and Eisinger (2009: 672).

Appendix C

Question guide and interview transcript sample: P1, embedded journalist for the Washington Post during the Iraq War, 25 June 2023

Interviewer: Do you consent to being quoted (directly or indirectly) in this research’s paper?

Participant 1: Yes.

Interviewer: How did you become an embedded journalist in Iraq – were you chosen by the US government, by your employer at the time, or did you apply yourself?

Participant 1: I had been doing that type of reporting for a while, both for the Washington Post and other publications, including military-oriented newspapers, so I already had experience being an embed and reporting on war in general. I had been embedded in the first Gulf War in 1991 and in the Somalia intervention with US troops. I also did military reporting in the Balkans, and in Rwanda in 1994. I had a lot of experience covering the military in general, by being an embed or just by writing about it. After 9/11, the US was prepared to attack Afghanistan, so the military (the Navy) had spots to go with them and I was selected then. In situations like that [in the run-up to a war], usually there is negotiation going on between top managers at newspapers who want to cover the operation, and the Pentagon. So newspaper editors talk to the Pentagon, and the Pentagon then allows a certain number of people to join the military. And then newspaper editors choose people in their employees to go with military. So it is a long build-up: the public affairs office at the Pentagon works with senior editors at news organizations and the Pentagon usually says “if we go to war, we are going to embed journalists with military, and we will take X many journalists with us”.

Interviewer: Did you have to follow any kind of journalistic or military training before traveling to Iraq to cover the conflict?

Participant 1: Because it was a long build-up, it was very organized. They [the Pentagon] had organized a media boot camp in Georgia, at the home of an infantry camp, before going to
Iraq. I did a 4/5 day-long camp in December 2002, with 40 to 50 other journalists from other big news organizations. During the camp, we [embedded journalists] had chemical training (for chemical weapons), where we learned how to put a gas mask on quickly and safely, in case of a WMD attack. We [embedded journalists] also had combat medical training, so we learned what to do if someone you are with is wounded for instance, and there is no medical personnel with you to help. And we [embedded journalists] had physical training – you are with the Army, so you need to be able to follow them, etc. Most reporters there [at the camp] already had experience covering the military or being “embeds”.

**Interviewer** Were you given any specific guidelines – by the US government, the DoD, and/or your employer – on what you could and/or should report on? On what you couldn't and/or shouldn't write about?

**Participant 1** Not really. There was an understanding that you [embedded journalists] were not going to reveal operations before they happened – that was something that all parties understood and were clear on. There was an understanding that you [embedded journalists] could not disclose information on future operations that would compromise the safety of people involved in the operation. But in terms of them [the US military] saying “we don’t want you to write about X, Y, Z” – that did not happen. There was no restriction on reporting on civilian casualties, for instance, or on writing on “embarrassing” things for the military. The military knew that the newspapers were big so they knew that these newspapers couldn’t agree to be part of a propaganda machine and to be limited in any way. The military then had a lot of experience with the press, so they knew how it [embedding journalism] worked. There was no review of stories by the military before publication – they [the US military] wouldn’t read what was being written before publication.

**Interviewer** Did you find yourself, consciously or not, reporting on specific subjects rather than others? Were there topics that you would focus on more than others?

**Participant 1** As an embedded journalist you find out things that you would not be able to find out when outside of a military unit. During the bombing campaign against the Taliban in the Afghanistan War, for example, I was able to find out things, and talk to pilots about special operations that were going on elsewhere or that were planned for later. I had access to information that was not known and would have not been known for a while. As a media, you are better off doing both [unilateral reporting and embedded journalism] during a war. If you [a media] can only have one, then have unilaterals: they have more independence, so they are able to get around, get the political side of the war, know what is going on with civilians. Also, [unilateral] journalists have more time and opportunities to stay with civilians for instance.

**Interviewer** When in Iraq, as an embedded reporter, did you feel limited in any way – by the military or anyone else – on the information you could access and/or report on?

**Participant 1** Without a doubt. When you [embedded journalists] are with a unit at a low level of command, you have a specific view of the war and you can’t have an overview of everything that is going on in the rest of the country. There is no way, when embedded with a specific unit, that you can report on the bigger picture of what is going on in the war. The *Washington Post* had so many reporters during Iraq – embedded journalists with different units and also [unilateral] reporters. So they [the *Washington Post*] had both which was really good because it allowed them to cover the war as a whole, and from a wide range of perspectives. I had a limited but detailed view of the war. I had access to great details for stories: I was witnessing specific things happening during operations. Also, by living with soldiers you gather so much information about their assessment of how things are going. If a news organization only had a few reporters embedded, they would not have a good picture of the war.
They need, if possible, both embedded and [unilateral] reporters. [Unilateral] reporters had a broader picture of the war.

**Interviewer** Did you ever feel like your scope of study/reporting was limited because you were mainly staying with one specific military unit – and therefore maybe not able to simultaneously observe what was happening in the rest of the country/with other military units?

**Participant 1** Being reliant on the military as to where you [embedded reporters] are going is a real limitation of what you can report on: as an embedded journalist, you only have access to where your unit takes you, to what [it] shows you. That’s what you [embedded journalists] want in that position though: being with the military 24/7 to see all the details (good and bad) of what happens within the military during the war.

**Interviewer** Did you, while in Iraq, feel connected to the US domestic audience?

**Participant 1** Not really. Part of the reason would be because I had limited battery strength on my laptop and on my satellite phone, and I didn’t want to waste time and power energy on reading what was being said back home. For the most part I did not see them [the comments from US domestic audience]. Sometimes you [embedded journalists] get feedback: you do a phone interview with journalists back in the US for example, so you chat with somebody who might give you some snips of what is being thought back home. But for the most part, I let the editors figure out what to do with the material I would send them.

**Appendix D**

**Table 2 Detailed Coding Sheet for Thematic Coding of Newspapers Articles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WMD</strong></td>
<td>Presence of WMD</td>
<td>Belief of Presence</td>
<td>Information implying that there are WMDs in Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actual Evidence of Presence</td>
<td>Evidence that there are WMDs in Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absence of WMD</td>
<td>Belief of Absence</td>
<td>Information implying that there are no WMDs in Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actual Evidence of Absence</td>
<td>Evidence that there are no WMDs in Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Ba’ath Party</strong></td>
<td>Link with Global Terrorism</td>
<td>Belief of Link</td>
<td>Information implying that the Ba’ath Party has connections with global terrorism (i.e., with al-Qaeda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actual Evidence of Link</td>
<td>Evidence that the Ba’ath Party has connections with global terrorism (i.e., with al-Qaeda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political Oppression</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evidence of the political oppression of the Iraqi population, by the Ba’ath Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious Oppression</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evidence of the religious oppression of the Iraqi population, by the Ba’ath Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnic Oppression</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evidence of the ethnic oppression of the Iraqi population, by the Ba’ath Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The US Military</td>
<td>US Military Success</td>
<td>Expected Successful Operation</td>
<td>Information implying that a future (planned or unplanned yet) US military operation will be achieved successfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Successful Operation</td>
<td>Evidence that a US military operation has been achieved successfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unsuccessful or Weak Iraqi Army</td>
<td>Evidence that the Iraqi Army/resistance is unsuccessful or weak, compared to the US military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Territorial Advancement</td>
<td>Evidence of the US military’s territorial progression in the Iraqi territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Destruction of WMD</td>
<td>Evidence that facilities believed to contain WMDs have been destroyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Successful Capture of Iraqi Insurgent Leaders</td>
<td>Evidence that insurgent Iraqi leaders have been captured by the US military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Expected Successful Capture of Saddam Hussein</td>
<td>Information implying that the capture of Saddam Hussein will be successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Successful Capture of Saddam Hussein</td>
<td>Evidence of the successful capture of Saddam Hussein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Liberation of Oppressed Iraqi Population</td>
<td>Evidence that the US military is contributing to the Iraqi population’s welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Military Failure</td>
<td></td>
<td>Expected Difficulty</td>
<td>Information implying that a future (planned or unplanned yet) US military operation will be achieved with difficulty, or fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Failed US Military Operation</td>
<td>Evidence that a US military operation has failed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Successful Iraqi Operation</td>
<td>Evidence that an Iraqi military/resistance operation has been achieved successfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Iraqi Territorial Advancement</td>
<td>Evidence of Iraqi military’s/resistance’s territorial progression in the territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>US Military Casualties</td>
<td>Evidence of the death or wounding of US military personnel during a US military operation or under external attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Iraqi Civilian Casualties</td>
<td>Evidence of the death or wounding of (Iraqi) civilians, attributed to US military actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Failed Capture of Iraqi Insurgents</td>
<td>Evidence that the people captured are not, in fact, Iraqi insurgents, or that the US military has failed the planned capture of Iraqi insurgents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Failed Capture of Saddam Hussein</td>
<td>Evidence that the planned capture of Saddam Hussein has failed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discreditation</td>
<td>Evidence contradicting official US military statements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. (1): for clarity, similar colors as in the hierarchy charts (Figures 1 and 2) were used.

N.B. (2): the preponderance of the theme “The U.S. Military”, compared to the two other themes, is compensated by its level of precision, compared to the two other themes.
Appendix E

Example of a thematically coded sample of an article (on Nvivo)

A lonely camel lopes through the dust under a Marine Huey helicopter, but across the vast stretch of Iraqi desert, the eye is riveted on two things: seemingly endless convoys of American and some British military vehicles grinding north and northwest on every paved highway, and bright orange plumes of flame and gray-black smoke from a half-dozen burning oil wells.

That all of this oil field -- one of the world’s richest -- is not completely ablaze is a result of a swift assault that began at dusk on Thursday, more than 12 hours ahead of schedule. It was an attack that was in part planned, in part improvised on the fly by elements of the First Marine Division.

“Initially, we were planning on going in this morning,” said Capt. Shawn Blodgett, whose company seized an oil-refining area, GOSP-4, the abbreviation for a gas-oil separation plant.

“We were at a staff meeting when the call came down,” Captain Blodgett said at a sand-blown base here this afternoon as four wells burned on the horizon.

Within minutes of the call last evening, more than 200 marines, along with a handful of British ordnance specialists, were headed north in a column of 28 Humvees, amphibious assault vehicles and other transports.

A second wave of the attack began at 6 a.m. today (10 p.m. Thursday Eastern time) with more marines breaching the border along a wide front.

By nightfall, nearly all of the division’s 20,000 troops were inside Iraq, driving some 60 miles to the Euphrates River and taking control of a large swath of territory, often simply bypassing smaller Iraqi positions.

The Iraqi Army’s 51st Mechanized Division crumbled swiftly, senior Marine officers said, and their commander formally surrendered.

“Our officers have cut and run,” a Marine intelligence officer said this morning, adding that many of the Iraqi officers appeared to have fled to the city of Basra.

Appendix F

Table 3 Comprehensive Results of the Two-Step Thematic Coding of Embedded and Unilateral Newspaper Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Number of Times the Code Is Mentioned</th>
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</thead>
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<td>WMD</td>
<td>Presence of WMD</td>
<td>Belief of Presence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Actual Evidence of Presence</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absence of WMD</td>
<td>Belief of Absence</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actual Evidence of Absence</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Number of Times the Code Is Mentioned</td>
</tr>
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<td>---------------------------------------</td>
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<td>The Ba'ath Party</td>
<td>Link with Global Terrorism</td>
<td>Belief of Link</td>
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<td>Actual Evidence of Link</td>
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<td>Human Rights Abuses</td>
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<td>Iraqi Population</td>
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<td>Expected Successful Operation</td>
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<td>Successful Operation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Unsuccessful or Weak Iraqi Army</td>
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<td>Territorial Advancement</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Expected Successful Capture of Saddam Hussein</td>
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N.B. (1): for clarity, similar colors as in the hierarchy charts (Figures 1 and 2) were used.

Notes

1 See Fiorina (1981), Hurwitz and Peffley (1987), and Nickelsburg and Norpoth (2000).
2 See Fisher (1984), and Betz (2015).
3 See Jensen and Meckling (1976), Fama (1980), and Jensen (1986).
4 See Brown and Deegan (1988).
5 See Chomsky and Herman (1988).
6 See Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976).
7 See Pahl (1994).
8 See Chomsky and Herman (1988).
12 See Greener (2011), and Schreier (2014).
14 See Gibbs (2012), and Turner and Vaughn (2016).
15 See Saldána (2013).
References


LeBlanc, A. (2013) Embedded Journalism and American Media Coverage of Civilian Casualties in Iraq, Master thesis, University of Gothenburg, University of Roehampton,


