

**EMBEDDED IN IRAQ, MIRED IN POLITICS: AN ANALYSIS OF NEWS FRAMES IN  
AMERICAN TELEVISION COVERAGE OF THE 2003 IRAQ WAR**

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**ABSTRACT**

The 2003 Iraq war was the first conflict concurrent with a large-scale government program that “embedded” media with the military, affording journalists an unprecedented view of the battlefield. Despite the promise that the journalists would capture the war in all its vagaries, there is virtually no consensus among media scholars and critics as to how adequately the war was covered, especially with regard to the motivation behind the program and the effectiveness of embedded journalists. Coverage by embeds has been faulted for the tone it adopted and for deficiencies in its content. While some assert that the program yielded coverage that was propagandistic and sanitized, others maintain that coverage was frightfully negative and inaccurate. This study aims to contextualize these arguments in two ways. First, interviews with members of the media and the military will account for the voices of those who were intimately involved in the program, yet underrepresented in literature regarding the coverage. The interviews will provide a more complete picture of the relationship

between soldiers and embedded journalists during the war while providing counterpoint to the arguments held by remote observers.

Second, a content analysis of news coverage aims to determine the extent to which news frames employed in segments by embedded journalists have led to the competing claims as to how the war was reported. Because news frames, which imply deficiencies, enable journalists to simplify complex issues like war, the research has modified the four “information biases” as defined by W. Lance Bennett in *News, the Politics of Illusion*. The methodology allows inferences to be made as to how the content, context, and closure of news segments may have led to the conflicting perceptions of the coverage.

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To Clarivel, Beth, and Mary:  
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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

The media do not merely relay current events. Rather, news outlets act as raconteurs, constructing narratives that situate people, places, and events within simplified frames. The 2003 Iraq war, waged against an unconventional and unpredictable enemy, more than ever aroused the need for a news hole that would arrange a complex cast of characters, remote settings, and seemingly disjointed military actions into comprehensible chronologies. The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) responded with a journalistic mammoth, a program that trained the media to work alongside the military, effectually transmitting “the good, the bad, and the ugly” (Katovsky and Carlson 212) to awaiting satellites. On the battlefield, newsworthiness was at the sole discretion of the embedded journalist. Yet, far from omniscient, and often faultlessly myopic, embeds offered narratives only from their individual vantage points. As they crusaded through sandstorms and blistering heat to deliver intelligible stories, audiences were left to withstand elements of another sort, namely, the deluge of media voices from the warfront.

While the content of war coverage was certainly colored by the nature of the journalists’ assignments, explicitly, the ordeals of the military units in which they were embedded, it is the framing of those stories that is of concern to this study. News frames “simplify, prioritize, and structure the narrative flow of events,” (Norris 15)

allowing news outlets to reduce the complexities of modern warfare to interpretations that match their audiences' preexisting notions of the world. Linguistic studies of human cognition suggest that understanding the world requires mental acts of categorization: "each time we have an experience we label it in various ways, so that it can be sorted and grouped with similar memories" (Schank and Berman 290). These acts are fundamental in the telling and receiving of stories. Storytellers first comprehend and index events in their own minds, and then "transfer information into the heads of the listener...by adding appropriate details to bring the story within the listener's frame of reference" (Schank and Berman 308). On the receiving end, listeners are primed to extract cues from stories, which "trigger similar scenes from our memory structures that we bring to bear on the new situation" (Schank and Berman 292). Thus, their understanding of stories is informed by their aptitude as interpreters and categorists of cues, which in turn, determines their own ability to relay those stories to others. If a news frame itself acts as a cue, then listeners are conditioned to expect such reference points from stories. In terms of this cognition model, the simplifying and framing of complex events for the sake of relaying stories is a seemingly organic process, an outgrowth of the linguistic need to interpret and share experiences.

This cognitive model does not account for the extent to which storytellers, and specific to this study, journalists, relay stories as their own minds have categorized them, or instead, how actively they consider how listeners *ought* to receive those stories, through carefully selected news frames. The answer is outside the scope of this study, perhaps buried in the psyches of reporters everywhere, each “a vortex of interacting environmental and predispositional factors” (Lasswell 48). Just as the audiences cannot know why journalists select one frame over another, they also cannot determine the thought processes that lead to the final news product: “What does he drop out? What does he rework? What does he add? How do differences in input and output correlate with culture and personality?” (Lasswell 48). Yet these questions are especially important to bear in mind when considering embedded coverage of the 2003 Iraq war, in which personal opinions on the war, close proximity to the military, and the expectations of editors and newsrooms back in the U.S. have been speculated as factors in reporters’ decisions to frame stories in particular ways.

The reliance on certain news frames in the coverage of large-scale events like the Iraq war has raised questions as to the quality of the news product. In outlining its policy on embedded journalists, the DOD was confident that “media coverage will shape public perception of the national security environment now and in the years ahead” and that “the embedded media will live, work, and travel with the units in

which they are embedded to facilitate maximum, in-depth coverage of U.S. forces in combat and related operations” (Tumber and Palmer 16). However noble the cry for serious, detailed coverage, there was no guarantee that journalists could avoid the pitfalls of “information biases,” described by W. Lance Bennett as faults not with the stories themselves, but with “how those stories are told” (Bennett 41). When news is reduced to installments of personalized, dramatized, and fragmented blurbs, audiences become disconnected from those stories’ “larger social, economic, and political contexts” (Bennett 41). The result is news that is “episodic,” which catapults the viewer into an already developed situation. The DOD recognized the “need to tell the factual story—good or bad—before others seeded the media with disinformation and distortions...” (Tumber and Palmer 16). No doubt the “others” represented unilateral reporters not associated with the embedded program, as well as the news outlets of foreign nations. Yet, many media critics of the embedded journalist program quip that the American journalists themselves inadequately reported the war, by offering news that was distorted and diluted.

Although the critics are quick to point out that the program was flawed, they differ markedly in their logic. Many assert that “embeds” were inclined to side with their newfound comrades in the military, and fearing chastisement as “anti-American,” presented news that matched the government’s pro-war agenda. These journalists,

claim the critics, did a disservice to the American public by failing to sufficiently scrutinize both the government's decision to go to war and subsequent military efforts. Other critics remark that journalists in Iraq, in a testament to the notion of the "liberal media," presented only negative news from the warfront, and failed to adequately address the military's important strides toward a democratic Iraq. This study, born out of a desire to contextualize these arguments, does not aim to determine which side is right or wrong, but rather, is curious as to the extent to which an overuse of particular news frames can lead to such competing claims. Chapter Two delves deeper into these opposing stances, which are largely speculative in nature, and analyzes the rationale that faulty coverage was an inevitable consequence of a program that so tightly intertwined the government, the media, and the military.

While Chapter Two is largely concerned with how media coverage from the warfront was interpreted by audiences, Chapter Three assesses the coverage from the perspective of the media and the military. Interviews with those who were closest to the embedded journalist program shed light on the nature of the relationship between the military and the media and provide counterpoint to the arguments put forth by media critics in the previous chapter.

Chapter Four reviews relevant studies regarding the news coverage of embedded journalists during the Iraq war. It will outline the findings of complementary

studies, such as “Too Close for Comfort?” by the School of Journalism at the University of Cardiff, which is a comprehensive study that employs interviews of the media and the military, content analysis of UK media outlets, and survey research. The chapter will highlight the findings of The Project for Excellence in Journalism’s *Embedded Reporters: What are Americans Getting?*, which provides a content analysis of American cable and network news during the first three days of war. Two other studies, which deal primarily with how news coverage of the war was framed, will also be discussed. While *Embedding the Truth. A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Objectivity and Television Coverage of the Iraq War* seeks to determine the difference in news frames employed by American and Arab media, *Embedded Journalists In Military Combat Units: Impact on Newspaper Story Frames and Tone*, compares the tone of coverage across two wars, Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom, to determine if the presence of embedded reporters did, indeed, lead to more favorable coverage of the military.

Chapter Five describes the methodology and findings of this study, setting it apart from previous studies in its assessment of the information biases through which viewers are allowed to interpret, and subsequently, form opinions on the war. Content analysis will be performed on American television coverage from two major networks, ABC and NBC, and from two cable news networks CNN and FOX. The research will

analyze news segments by embedded journalists and news correspondents for the four “information biases,” as laid out by W. Lance Bennett. It will determine how coverage varies by type of reporter, news outlet, and time frame during which the war was reported.

Chapter Six will summarize the findings and provide final thoughts on the virtues and shortcomings of the embedded journalist program.

## **Chapter 2. Arguments**

### **An Elephant in Iraq**

The Iraq war cannot be neatly encapsulated. To some, the conflict was a mission, to others, a disaster. For the embedded journalists, the war provided an extraordinary, perhaps esteemed, news beat. With journalists stationed at points throughout the war zone, however, “the media field became the proverbial story of the blind man touching the elephant. Individuals had different reactions depending on whether they were touching the trunk, the legs, the hide, or the tail” (West 114). Here, the elephant is an especially apt analogy for war in general, majestic and primal all at once. Marked by a lumbering pace interrupted by bouts of unpredictable swiftness, beast and war alike are enigmatic forces, governed by instinct and capriciousness. Into the fray jumped the embedded journalists, who from their individual lookouts, scrambled to tell the story of war through all its highs and lows. Wartime reporting is challenged by the fact that “coverage is much faster than the action that it covers...twenty four hour news is confronted with the reality that war is boredom punctuated by fear...” (Brown 48). In other words, while advances in communications technologies allow for images and information to instantaneously traverse the globe, conflict on the warfront, nevertheless, continues to transpire erratically. The Iraq war

marked the union of a controversial battle and a fantastically “high tech” media, allowing journalists to produce massive amounts of news coverage from the frontlines. How those stories were interpreted by the public, however, is the focus of this chapter.

First, this chapter will demonstrate how news frames contribute to the collective perception of events. Then it will lay out the specific arguments that have been generated as a result of the contest of new frames employed in the Iraq war. Politically, some say, the party represented by the “elephant” helped to tint war coverage in hues of red, white, and blue. Yet others claim that coverage was negative and unrepresentative of the progress made in Iraq. Nearly impossible for journalists, and hence, the audience, to know the war in its totality, the conflict was best understood one frame at a time. Perhaps that was the nature of the beast.

### **The News Frame Fracas**

News frames offer ready-made perspectives on complex situations, allowing journalists to package new information in familiar boxes. In creating these self-contained narratives, they “select and highlight some facets of events or issues, and make connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution” (Entman 417). Although journalists are expected to be bastions of objectivity and truth, it has been suggested that their choice of news frames is often motivated by “the symbolic and rhetorical devices deployed by political elites”

(Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 224). These perspectives, in turn, help to color public sentiment about political issues. Political scientist Robert Entman recognizes that the staying power of certain frames is variable, as “the framing of a given actor, issue, or event during a defined period can be arrayed along a continuum from total dominance by one frame to a completely even handed standoff between competing frames” (Entman 418). In politically contentious times like war, the presence of competing news frames is important in telling “people how to weight the often conflicting considerations that enter into everyday political deliberations” (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 226). Just as they make informed choices when shopping for goods and services, consumers of news products must “deliberate competing values, beliefs, and emotional attachments to make the ‘right choice’ on divisive political issues” (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 226). Making the “right choice,” however, entails that there are options at all. In contrast to instances of frame dominance, in which one interpretation crowds out other viewpoints, “frame parity describes the condition that free press theories prefer: two or more interpretations receiving something like equal play” (Entman 418). News consumers can meaningfully reflect on issues when “news offers *counterframes* that put together complete alternative narratives, tales of problems, causes, remedies, and moral judgments...” (Entman 418). Media scholars, critics, and even some journalists charge that coverage of the Iraq war was terribly one-sided, and

did not allow for counterframes to emerge. Yet, opposing viewpoints on how the war was framed seem to suggest otherwise; that indeed, frame contests existed in the coverage. The duration of this chapter will outline the competing claims that war coverage was either overtly propagandistic or frightfully negative.

### **The Propaganda Proposition**

Many critics contend that elite messages from President George W. Bush's administration permeated war coverage by embedded journalists. Because the embedded journalist program itself was the brainchild of the Pentagon, goes the logic, it necessarily reflects the politics of the government that breathed life into its very existence. The large-scale program that trained journalists to hunker down with troops was considered an arm of "the Bush propaganda machine" (Massing viii). Elite control over messages from the warfront was no surprise, they argue, since "political elites devote considerable effort toward influencing not only what information gets on the air, but how it is presented" (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 224). Those most critical of the war coverage posit that embedded journalists acted as mouthpieces for the government, for "Pentagon strategists wanted proud, positive, and patriotic coverage over the national airwaves." (Schecher 19). Coverage that ballyhooed the war effort and praised the troops without critical discussion of the rationale for war was characteristic of coverage channeled through the propaganda frame, "which serves as a

bridge between elite discourse about a problem or issue and popular comprehension” (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 224). Critics attribute the seeming lack of critical coverage to the government’s resistance to the display of alternate perspectives in the media. As Michael Massing, contributing editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, noted, “the notion that the President or some other high ranking official might vigorously defend the right of the Press to challenge the government...was almost an unthinkable one” (Massing viii). Thus, claim the critics, the quality of the coverage is sacrificed when potentially intricate war narratives are whittled down to a manageable dichotomy, namely, “the forces of light versus the forces of darkness, which is typical of all war propaganda” (Schechter 21). *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman went so far as to say that U.S. outlets “behaved like state-run media” (Schechter 37). Norman Solomon, Executive Director, Institute for Public Accuracy, echoes this sentiment, and sites political ties as a determinant of the coverage’s tone: “While NPR seems more and more to stand for “National Pentagon Radio...this should be no surprise. NPR’s president and CEO, Kevin Klose, once served as director of the International Broadcasting Bureau, the U.S. agency responsible for the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, and Radio and Television Marti” (Solomon and Erlich 24). Geneva Overholser, of the Poynter Institute, similarly, was struck by the limited scope of the coverage, and pointed out the shortcomings of

propagandistic news frames: “What I sense is a narrowing of the discussion, a ruttedness—call it an echo chamber of conventionalism. Sure we have the appearance of controversy, what with our shouting heads and pundits. But real debate—substantive representation of viewpoints not currently in vogue, of people not currently in power, of issues not currently appearing in our narrowly focused eye—is almost absent” (Schechter 37). A diversity of viewpoints, claims Massing, did not have a chance to crystallize, when “much of the press seemed unduly accepting of U.S. claims, uncritically repeating commanders’ assertions about the huge numbers of insurgents killed while underplaying the devastation of the city” (Massing 32). The antidote to selectively deceptive news, writes Nancy Franklin of *The New Yorker*, is a more conscious effort to produce news stories as they actually happened, replete with airtime for opposition to the war, as well as mention of Iraqi casualties. A fundamental change in mindset, she maintains, will bring about more honest, even-handed coverage: “...reporters will have to try not to become intoxicated by the unprecedented access they have been granted, and the organizations they work for are going to have to try to remember that patriotism has nothing to do with slapping an image of the America flag on the screen beside their logos, and that freedom of the press is ultimately something that can’t be taken away or given by the Pentagon” (Schechter 124). Thus, those claiming that the war was funneled through the propaganda frame insist that embedded

coverage overlooked the most fundamental aspect of war—the devastation, in order to deliver a friendlier, more sanitized version of events.

Support for the war was never popularly garnered, as linking Saddam Hussein to Al-Qaeda's lifeline and its weapons of mass destruction was far from an easy sell: "the Bush and Blair administrations are fighting a two-front war: one against Iraq, another for public opinion at home" (Solomon and Erlich 13). Thus, argue the critics, "media spinners" in the government worked quickly to establish a "language" of the war that would brand operations in catchy phrases amenable to U.S. efforts, since "no product requires more adroit marketing than one that squanders vast quantities of resources while slaughtering large numbers of people" (Solomon and Erlich 33). This is far from a novel concept. The Gulf War of 1991 was tagged "Operation Desert Storm," which, "to the casual ear sounds like an act of nature, or perhaps, an act of God" (Solomon and Erlich 33). Then, in Afghanistan in October of 2001, "Operation Enduring Freedom was well received by U.S. mass media, an irony-free zone where only the untowardly impertinent might suggest that some people had no choice other than enduring the Pentagon's freedom to bomb" (Solomon and Erlich 33). When the media pick up on these convenient tags, and display them in banners and boxes across television screens and in headlines in newspapers, the government's deceptive war messages are reinforced: "since the 1980s, the intersection between two avenues,

Pennsylvania and Madison, has given rise to media cross-promotion that increasingly sanitizes the mass destruction known as warfare” (Solomon and Erlich 32). While “Operation Iraqi Freedom” sounds as noble as the others, critics worry that while “Americans know its reassuring code name, they would never know the names of the Iraqi people killed in our names” (Solomon and Erlich 33). Thus, the titles of war and battles act as frames in themselves, by oversimplifying the war in terms favorable to those who waged it.

### **Assuaging the Antipathy**

Defending the embed program, and purporting that it was not created to meet such an overtly political objective, Bryan Whitman, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Public Affairs, explains that the Pentagon did not simply invent a new type of coverage. “Embedded coverage has always been in existence,” he maintains. “During WWII we had reporters that were embedded. On D-Day between thirty and forty reporters went ashore with U.S. forces and reported on activities” (Katovsky and Carlson 211). By the 2003 Iraq war, however, advances in information technology allowed for a much grander embedded journalist program, which “provided a framework under which commanders and reporters worked to ensure both could accomplish their mission without compromising the journalists’ integrity and without compromising the success of the military mission” (Katovsky and Carlson 213). This

new style of reporting undoubtedly antiquated the “pooling” system of coverage that was prevalent during Gulf War I, or Operation Desert Storm, in 1991, which allowed journalists to report mainly from formal press briefings. Under this system, a handful of journalists were chosen to cover certain missions, who then “pooled” their reports so other news outlets could reference them. These journalists did not enjoy the same level of mobility as those in 2003, and as a further hindrance, “had to subject their copy to formal security review” (Tumber and Palmer 3). According to Whitman, the current embedded journalist program, in contrast, was progressive in the access it granted to journalists: “We view an embed as an opportunity to stay with a unit for an extended period of time,” he explains. “So we’re not talking about a couple-day jaunt out to the field and returning back to a media center somewhere. We’re talking about a long-term commitment on the part of news organizations as well as the reporter to be able to go out with the unit and stay with it for weeks, months, however long it might be out there” (Tumber and Palmer 15). Living and working within such close proximity to the troops would enable the media to capture all aspects of the war. According to U.S. Colonel Guy Shields, Public Affairs Officer, the embedded program worked according to plan: “embedded journalists caught some pretty significant events going on. Western media covered the good and the bad...and showed both sides” (Katovsky and Carlson 76). Reporters did their best to report what they saw, explains Whitman: “we saw a lot

of reporting about just how well they [the military] did their job. But bad things are going to happen because soldiers are human, and we did see bad things happen and they got reported on” (Katovsky and Carlson 212). On March 31, 2003, William Branigin of the *Washington Post* covered a disturbing incident in which troops fired on a civilian vehicle that proceeded through an American checkpoint without heeding warning shots. Whitman lauds Branigin for his integrity in reporting, and considers the story an example of the comprehensive coverage from the battlefield: “He [Branigin] reported—again the beauty of embedding—exactly how bad those soldiers felt about what had just happened and how it was the darkest day of their lives and how they brought so much to bear on themselves for this tragic incident to happen. So you got the full news package, as opposed to some sterile account from the Pentagon...” (Katovksy and Carlson 212). Whitman was certain that embedded reporting would expose war for all its foibles and glories. The sheer scope of the program promised an increase in the number of eyes and ears on the battlefield: “Nearly one thousand media personnel—on the ground, in the air and at sea—would miss nothing. It would be the biggest news-gathering operation in history...”(Knightley 528). Unwavering optimism in the program’s potential, however, was not universally held.

## **Eye on the Embeds**

Despite confidence by those in the government that embedding journalists with the media would yield honest and accurate accounts of events, to others, the program appeared inherently flawed. According to Syracuse University TV scholar Robert Thompson, "... the verb (to embed) itself is enough to make journalists uncomfortable. It implies becoming part and parcel, and really implies in a more glib way going to bed with" (Schechter 97). The unavoidable outcome, then, is coverage that favors the military and its war plan, and hence, perpetuates pro-war viewpoints. At the root of the argument that coverage by embeds is susceptible to propagandistic tendencies is the notion that journalists would become too close to the subjects of their stories. In essence, a substantial loss of objectivity would result if journalists became hesitant to produce reports that looked unfavorably upon their newfound comrades in the military. Assuming that journalists would find it too difficult to separate their emotions from their ability to report even-handedly and objectively, many critics of the program were concerned that the dangers, woes, and uncertainties of the battlefield would promote a Stockholm Syndrome of sorts, in which hostages become sympathetic to their captors. Although the media were not literal "captives," they did rely on the military for protection, guidance, and travel. Jeff Gralnick, a journalist with experience in Vietnam, recognizes the fallibility of journalists, and acknowledges that kinship and emotional ties can develop quite unconsciously: "...once you get into a unit, you are

going to be co-opted. It's not a purposeful thing. It will just happen. It's a little like the Stockholm Syndrome" (Tumber and Palmer 51). In assessing the ability of today's embedded journalists to hold fast to objectivity in the face of battle, Phillip Knightley, former investigative journalist for the *Sunday Times*, looks to the past, specifically, to embeds during World War I. Although embedding has evolved from a handful of journalists to a modern-day enterprise, Knightley alludes that human nature, on the other hand, has not changed as dramatically. Although a mere six journalists were "embedded with the British Expeditionary Force in France" (Knightley 531) during World War I, they were no less susceptible to the pitfalls encountered by journalists of today, namely, the conscious framing of stories prompted by personal motivations. In 1932, Sir Philip Gibbs, embedded during WWI, described how close association with the troops impacted reporting: "We identified ourselves absolutely with the Armies in the field...we wiped out of our minds all thought of personal scoops and all temptation to write one word which would make the task of officers and men more difficult or dangerous..." (Knightley 532). Chris Hedges of *The New York Review of Books* notes that this type of selective coverage yields a news product that is topical in nature, and neglects the deeper, complex realities of war: "[embedded reporters] give us a feel, however circumscribed, for minute acts of folly and brutality. But these reporters are often the least equipped to deal with broader moral and political questions about war.

They are swallowed up by systems, whether of dictatorships or of the military. They must write stories that do not antagonize their handlers and get them expelled from the unit or the country they cover” (Hedges 14). Hedges implies that almost by default, journalists are assimilated to military culture, and consequently, become compliant with the positions held by personnel and government officials. While some assert that the embedded journalist program provided the perfect environment for propaganda frames to take hold, others claim quite the opposite. The latter believe that journalists, who are first and foremost motivated by the desire to sell exciting stories to audiences, would have few qualms about reporting events that were negative, so long as they filled the requirement for drama.

### **Negativity Theory**

Contrary to the perception that propagandistic news frames prevailed in war coverage is the equally strident view that coverage was negative and unrepresentative of the important developments made in Iraq. Journalists were critical of the war effort, some maintain, since their work is necessarily guided by an “if it bleeds it leads” mentality. In other words, the news gathering process compels reporters to retrieve stories that spawn exciting headlines. Matthew Kerbel, a former radio and television newswriter, remarks that journalists rely on convenient formulas when packaging news: “the important thing is that once you have discovered the right kind of conflict in

stories you are obligated to do, you can write these stories over and over without succumbing to boring details” (Kerbel 81). He implies that over time, journalists become proficient in discerning the most exciting ways to tell particular stories. Karl Zinsmeister, embedded with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne in Iraq, ironically a self-named “embedded-reporter dissenter,” is convinced that reporters become complacent when covering wars: “part of it is laziness. Explosions and fires are simple stories; it takes time, and creativity, to tell the deeper, protracted story of Iraqi reconstruction” (Zinsmeister 230). Philip Seib, Professor of Journalism at Marquette University, acknowledges that overemphasizing particular elements or storylines leads to the loss of the bigger picture: “combat is only one part of war; the rest of it is politics, diplomacy, economics, and other dry sciences” (Sieb 60). Brent Bozell, founder and president of the Media Research Center, concurs, and asserts that in determining the proper news frames for the Iraq war, journalists fell into the pattern of emphasizing negative aspects of the conflict: “there was a story of real heroism to be told, of the altruistic American spirit at her finest, but that apparently was too boring. Instead we got negative spin on positive stories” (Bozell 241). He is disheartened that stories dwelled on casualties and military mistakes at the expense of those that would shed light on the progress made in Iraq: “rather than celebrating the removal of a murderous dictatorship, the new freedoms for an enslaved people, the schools, hospitals, roads

rebuilt and reopened, and the emerging democratic process amid the turmoil of Islamic oppression, the news media instead focused on the headline America's enemies created almost daily: "Another American Soldier Killed" (Bozell 241). The dilemma, allege some critics, was not the presence of these stories, but the *reliance* on negative frames. Most problematic is that the desire to evoke an emotional response often superceded the obligation to present coverage that was even-handed and useful to viewers' understandings of events.

Diametrically opposed to Chris Hedge's observation above that journalists merely impart information without mention of larger issues is the notion that journalists rely primarily on commentary and sweeping themes, and too little on details that comprise well-rounded stories: "the temptation to confuse advocacy with reporting has snared far too many contemporary journalists. They experience the heady thrill of playing critic, expert, pundit, then drift beyond the boundaries of their fact-gathering profession, stepping into the realm of policy-making" (Zinsmeister 234). The emphasis on human interest angles and emotional appeals is due in part, says Zinsmeister, to reporters' inability to fully comprehend the erratic nature of war. Therefore, cynicism and unrealistic expectations abounded in coverage, much to the chagrin of military: "right from the earliest days of the Iraq battles, one of the main media criticisms had been that the war 'plans' were inadequate. Such statements make

soldiers laugh. They know that warfighting is, by definition, a messy, unpredictable, free-form, constantly changing process. You have to adapt on the fly....game plans, boundaries, rules, and referees are for the suburban soccer matches of reporters' kids" (Zinsmeister 234). Perhaps Zinsmeister's assessment of journalists' limited knowledge of basic military strategy lends credence to Michael Ryan's observation, revealed on TomPain.com: "as the war grinds on, a strange transformation has occurred: many of the generals have become more objective and reality based than the journalists embedded with the troops" (Schechter 153). For Ryan, it was an unusual happenstance that the generals, who presumably would hold a pro-war slant, were more factual than the reporters in their recounting of the war. While discerning the exact motivations of journalists to report in a certain way may be next to impossible, the pressure to deliver exciting stories, coupled with limited knowledge of warfare were seemingly to blame for coverage that left the public disheartened about the war. Critics speculated that journalists purposely tailored their stories to the anti-war crowd, under the assumption that "the more congruent the frame with schemas that dominate the political culture, the more success it will enjoy" (Entman 422). The staying power of these pessimistic frames, claims Congressman Jim Marshall (Democrat-GA), a Vietnam veteran who served on the House Armed Services Committee, is worrisome. Upon returning from Iraq in 2003, he was concerned with the far-reaching effects of pessimistic news: "I'm

afraid the news media are hurting our chances. They are dwelling upon the mistakes, the ambushes, the soldiers killed, the wounded. Reporters are not balancing this news with the rest of the story. This falsely bleak picture weakens our national resolve, discourages Iraqi cooperation, and emboldens our enemy” (Zinsmeister 225). Right from the outset, claim critics, disparaging headlines dominated the news, suggesting that the battle plan was flawed, and that the war appeared to have no end in sight: “ ‘Veterans Question War Strategy,’ *Guardian*, March 26, ‘Former Commanders Question U.S. Strategy,’ *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, ‘War Could Last Months, Officers Say,’ *Washington Post*, March 27, ‘Tactical Analysts Feel No Awe,’ *Australian*, March 27, ‘Rumsfeld Faulted For Troop Dilution,’ *Washington Post*, March 30, ‘Critics: U.S. Took Guerillas Lightly,’ *Chicago Tribune*, March 30” (Kusnetz 78). These headlines stand in stark contrast to the view that news coverage was sanitized and patriotic. Critics do not seem to have been tuned into the same war, given the vastly different perspectives on the tone of the coverage.

### **News Outlets--Ready-Made Biases**

Some critics have traced the discrepancies in the war coverage to the differences among news outlets, claiming that reporters tinged their stories with the political leanings of their respective associations. In other words, the outlets harbored easily identifiable and preexisting political leanings, which in turn, were embodied by

the reporters. According to Darrell West, a political scientist at Brown University, political differences among reporters are often manifested in news coverage: “Due to the increasing competitiveness of news outlets and the concomitant loss of industry professionalism among reporters, journalists are not producing the same coverage. Consequently, what people watch and read often determines the type of story they hear” (West 95). Massing ascertains that political persuasions colored the coverage of the Iraq war, and analogizes the coverage to a familiar political dichotomy: “In some ways, the coverage of the war featured a battle as fierce as the political one between Democrats and Republicans, with the ‘red’ medium of Fox slugging it out with the ‘blue’ outlets of the *Times* and the *Post*, CBS and ABC. CNN seemed somewhere in-between, careening wildly between an adherence to traditional news values on the one hand and a surrender to the titillating, overheated nationalistic fare of contemporary cable on the other” (Massing 32). As a so-called “red medium,” Fox News has been charged with overtly championing the war effort, and is perhaps the outlet toward which the most scornful criticism has been directed. Massing asserts that the network was a shameless promoter of governmental objectives: “indeed, in cable television networks like Fox, we see the ultimate marriage of news and PR to create a flow of guileful propaganda capable of creating a virtual world that is so well packaged and presented that most people have a difficult time understanding how false its

representations actually are” (Massing xvi). Like Massing, Danny Schechter, a television producer and filmmaker, is brazen in his assessment of Fox News: “it’s an unabashed 24-hour-a-day booster of the war...its aggressive coverage pandered to its audience, simplified the issues and attacked competing media outlets and correspondents who deviated in any way from the ‘script’ they were promoting” (Schechter 21). The other cable news networks did not escape the critics unscathed, either, however. Author Russell Smith declared that “CNN was more irritating than the gleefully patriotic Fox News because CNN has a pretense of objectivity. It pretends to be run by journalists. And yet it dutifully uses all the language chosen by people in charge of ‘media relations’ at the Pentagon” (Schechter 39). The factors that led critics to draw these rather sweeping generalizations about the networks and their news coverage may be innumerable. While the above views of the news outlets are quite scathing, and may be grounded more in emotion than fact, of interest to this study is the notion that coverage may be evaluated by impressions of where its news outlet falls on the political spectrum. If this is the case, then news coverage from particular outlets is labeled a certain way even before being viewed.

## **Conclusion**

While some observers charge that coverage was overwhelmingly positive or negative, or pro or anti-war, some had trouble finding their bearings at all in the

groundswell of reports from the warfront. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld speaks to the mercurial nature of the media: “we have seen mood swings in the media from highs to lows to highs and back again, sometimes in a single twenty-four-hour period. For some, the massive volume of television—and it is massive—and the breathless reports can seem to be somewhat disorienting” (Kusnetz 78). Similarly, Howard Kurtz of the *Washington Post* explains that “despite the investment of tens of millions of dollars and the deployment of hundreds of journalists, the collective picture they produced was often blurry” (Schechter 40). The conflicting views of war coverage referenced in this chapter lend credence to the oft-referenced analogy that embedded journalists allowed viewers to watch the war unfold through “600 soda straws.” While this chapter addresses the interpretations of the coverage beamed from those straws, the next chapter deals with who is wielding those straws, or in some instances, who is assembling them.

## **Chapter 3. Interviews**

### **Point and Counterpoint**

War, quite possibly the most complex human drama, is best understood in the interplay of opposites; allies and enemies, strengths and vulnerabilities, wins and losses. Although the Iraqis and the coalition forces were the primary combatants during the 2003 Iraq war, the military and the media posed another significant dynamic that helped to define the conflict. Before the war was even underway, the relationship between these two diametrically opposed cultures was expected to impact the media coverage, and in turn, color the public's perceptions of the war. But while some argue that the disparity between the military's need for secrecy and the media's penchant for transparency was of utmost concern, others hold that it was the media's close proximity to the troops and the subsequent loss of objectivity that was most detrimental to the coverage. Because the nature of the relationship between the military and the media is at the very heart of the arguments regarding the quality of coverage from embedded journalists, this chapter is devoted to taking a closer look at what actually transpired between these two groups, through interviews of those who knew the situation intimately.

During their individual interviews, a cadet, two public affairs officers, a cable news cameraman, a newspaper reporter, and a Washington bureau chief challenged the

media critics, considered the Stockholm Syndrome, addressed changes in the tone of coverage, and most importantly, spoke candidly about media/military relations. The limitation of transferring face-to-face interviews to paper is the unfortunate loss of communication cues—expressions, mannerisms, and intonations in voice. What is retained, however, in the simplicity of everyday parlance, is an extraordinary frankness in the sharing of anecdotes and opinions. The interviews are not by any means an aggrandizement of all possible reflections on the war. They simply provide a sampling of experiences of individuals who were closest to the war and to the embedded journalist program. These first-hand observations help to temper the criticisms by remote observers laid out in the last chapter. In certain instances, portions of the interviews actually provide notable counterpoint to opinions raised by media critics regarding the motives for the embedded journalist program. Notably, the interviews dispel confusion as to why Iraqi civilians are underrepresented in the coalition coverage. In essence, the personal reflections, in all their tangents, are a reminder that war is about perspective, a concept that is as variable as war itself.

### **Strange Bedfellows**

During the war, the media and the military may have had a common enemy in the Iraqis, yet many scholars assert that fundamentally, the two groups have little else in common in terms of culture: “whereas the military is all about order and

cooperation, journalism is competitive, fragmented, and also anarchic. When the two cultures clash, the result is often antipathy toward and confusion about each other” (Morrison and Tumber, as quoted in Palmer and Tumber 3). Robert Kaplan of the *Atlantic Monthly* understands that the differences between the groups can be traced to socioeconomic factors: “whereas the military is a lower-middle-class world in which a prominent sense of self is frowned on, the journalistic world too often represents the ultimate *me, me, me* culture of today’s elite” (Kaplan 40). He attributes the latter’s aloofness to the rise in journalistic professionalism: “the blue-collar element that once kept print journalism honest has been gone for some time. Journalists of an earlier era may have been less professional, but they were better connected with the rest of the country” (Kaplan 40). Karl Zinsmeister, similarly, agrees that today’s journalists are out-of-touch: “far too homogenous and nationally unrepresentative in their backgrounds and ideologies, journalists are culturally separated from the objects of their scrutiny (as most reporters are from soldiers) and lack practical expertise (as too many media pontificators do)” (Zinsmeister 235). Kaplan argues that journalists, lacking proper insight into the military’s perspective, may “assume the mantle of professional objectivity, but a writer brings his entire life to bear on every story and situation. A journalist may seek different points of view, but he shapes and portrays those viewpoints from only one angle of vision: his own” (Kaplan 40). Ultimately,

Zinsmeister and Kaplan imply that journalists, as embeds, were not likely to have been subverted by the military. They suggest that journalists are too concerned with advancing their own personal objectives than with becoming mouthpieces for the military. Humorously, Zinsmeister relates: “you have to remember that most of these journalists spent their high school years being stuffed into lockers by the kinds of males who are now running our military operations in Iraq. The soldier’s life is unfathomable to a typical journalist. But of course the journalists control the pens, cameras, and microphones, so they get the last word” (Zinsmeister 231). This view of the aloof, pretentious media is at odds with the notion of the “subverted” media, which readily identifies with the military. While the self-centered view of the media may be rationale for sensationalized news, the subverted media, as explained in Chapter Two, is an explanation for news that is overly patriotic. Interviewees were asked to share their thoughts on how the relations between the military and the media shaped coverage from the battlefield.

### **On the Media Critics...**

Kim Hume, Fox News’ Washington Bureau Chief, worked with the Pentagon to coordinate the network’s reporters for the embedded journalist program. Below she takes on the media scholars and proposes an explanation for their harsh criticism. She

understands that the opinions of academics are not representative of the population as a whole.

I think there is an anti-American bias among academics and intellectuals. And I think that there is a sense that one country having as much power as we have is out of balance, and there are no checks on that system and that there is a bias in that that much power and money must be bad. Unfortunately that point of view is concentrated in certain places. It's not a point of view held by a broad portion of society. It is a point of view held by a narrow intellectual group. There is a tendency in a certain segment of society to have what I call "the Hate America First" attitude, that whatever is wrong in the world is wrong because of American force and power. The roots of it are somewhere in the Vietnam War and that it is a typical reaction, which is, the country that I live in and benefit from and have gotten my education from and has served me all of my life must somehow be bad. And I've never understood that. Why anybody would think it was cooler to hate their own country than to love their own country. I don't understand that as a point of view. Fox news has the point of view that we are an American network. We are not a global network. We are not an international network. That may come at some point. But our job is to serve American people. And we serve American viewers. And we are not apologetic about having the attitude that we are going to be skeptical about America's actions in the world. But we are not going to assume that America is bad. We're going to give America the same shot as we would give anybody else. I think that is misinterpreted because there is so much of this, you know, somehow a powerful country that does good in the world, there must be something wrong. So many academics feel that way and you see it in Europe, the same attitude that there is something wrong with America. My theory about it is that it has to do with power. We have power and there is this general sense that anybody who has too much power is going to be bad. And that's the source of it, but if you look at what we try to do, we try to not go with conventional wisdom or with an unproven premise. We try to look at the facts of the situation. And the facts of the situation when they're looked at in any sort of clear-eyed way is that America's military force in the world for decades has not been used for conquest but to help the world. We did not go to France for example, and lose thousands of our soldiers in order to take over Normandy. We were not interested in running Normandy. We were not interested in providing Normandy as an American beach vacation land. We went to Normandy and our men died in Normandy for the purpose of trying keep a force of evil out and to help the world be a freer place. We didn't stay there, we didn't tell them how to run things. We left when it was over. Every place in the world where we

have helped the forces of liberty, if you will, we were not trying to build an empire. We go, we help, we leave our men dead in the field and we leave. So I think that there is a clear-eyed way of looking at the way the American military has been used in the last several decades and that if you look at the facts of it, there have been a lot of errors and mistakes, but there also has been a lot of good done. And if you balance those things instead of just concentrating on the bad, then you come across with an attitude which is the American military might not be as bad as everybody says it is...everybody in academia says it is. And I think that you will find that same attitude reflected in much of the American public, that the elites may think that the military is a bad force, a force for evil, somehow, or that there is something wrong with what they do. But I think that most of the people in this country respect the military. Partly it's through experience. They may know someone or have a base in their town. They may have children in the military, or neighbors, and they recognize that these people, and while there may be exceptions, they are good people who are trying to do the right thing for their country. And that's why they have a more favorable impression than a lot of people in academia have. I think it's fair to be critical of the media. We're all human and we all make mistakes. But what we try to do is so broad. Of course we aren't going to have expertise in every single thing we do, and to do it the way we do it, we can't have perfect context for everything. But it's the point of trying to do it well and have context and be fair. If we fail one day, we try harder the next day. There's no agenda here. The agenda is to try to get it right. And it's not always easy and we're not always perfect at it.

Christian Galdabini, photojournalist for Fox News, has been to Iraq seven times. His two longest assignments, nine weeks with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Light Armored Reconnaissance out of Twentynine Palms, California, and four weeks with the 2/4 Marine Corps out of Camp Pendleton, California, have afforded him the first-hand experience to challenge the voices of the critics. He recognizes that all too often critics are quick to point out flaws of the embedded journalist program, while overlooking the benefits.

I have a big problem with the media critics because, number one, they are always going to be upset about something. If you really are that worried about what is going on and what you should know, get on a plane and get over there and check it out yourself. That goes for everything from the Iraq war, to the Michael Jackson trial to whatever. There are people on the ground who are doing a very difficult job. I don't care who you are, what media outlet you work for, there's gonna be bias. It's human nature. When people ask me if there is bias in the media, my answer is, of course there is. You're a human being, you know what I mean? You have different points of view than the next person. If you and I walk out of here onto the street and watched an auto accident on the corner, a cop could separate us, ask us what happened, and we could come up with two different stories about who is at fault. Both of us could be right. It depends on things. Have you been a victim in the past? Did you injure someone in the past? There are all sorts of factors. I think most journalists do a great job. They do their best to stay objective. I can say right now that there has never been any time that I sat in meetings in Kuwait...they [the military] never told us what to say. And I think that the military have really gotten used to us being there. Sometimes they beg for a journalist to go with them. They want their story told. They're proud of what they do. The attitude is getting better and better by the day as far as them wanting coverage. People ask me what I think of the embed program, and you know, I don't see how anybody's lost. The military's won, journalists have won, the American people have won. The Iraqi people have won. These people are doing a great thing over there, and the fact that there are journalists recording what they do influences them. They are going to work hard at not making mistakes. I can't see how it hurts anybody. I can't find anything really wrong with the embed program. I think that the American people and the American journalists will stand for nothing less from here on out. Is it completely 100%, 'give me transparency for everything that's going on?' No it isn't. And the media critics will say that it falls short in this area or that area. My response to that is, you know, that's life. Nothing is ever perfect. It's such a big thing, and so many people are involved, it's difficult mentally and physically to be there. But there will be books written, by guys who will have spent five to eight years there by then, and they will be able to tell you a lot more about what went on there, rather than Vietnam and WWI and other places where people had to study transcripts and documents and piece together what happened. The eyewitness and transparency is unparalleled, and there's no going back.

He goes on to explain that despite its imperfections, the embedding program was far superior to the pooling system used in previous wars. Embedded journalists, he argues, provide much more perspective:

The pooling system is such that, they'll say, we cannot take three TV cameramen and reporters, 4 newspaper reporters and still photographers, and a magazine writer to this location. So what we'll do is take one TV, one newspaper, and one of each to the location. Then you come back and the agreement is you share all the information with the pool. So what actually happened in Afganistan, Rick Leventhal was part of a pool there. But he had to share all of his information and all of his video with the U.S. networks who wanted it. The downfall of that is that you have one set of eyes on something as opposed to 10 or 12 sets of eyes. Information is power.

Jonathan Finan, of the *Washington Post*, embedded for a month with the first battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, agrees that the pooling system is quite outmoded in comparison to embedding.

Is the embedding program better than the alternative? In this case, being no access, or as in the first Gulf War, when people gathered everyday in the hotel and the military told them what happened. I don't think anyone would argue that that is a better situation. To condemn the idea of embedding when the alternatives are so opaque and miserable, it doesn't make sense to me. We reported on what we saw, to a very large extent. The action you're describing is stuff you witnessed. There were no resources to you in the field for checking bigger picture facts like populations of towns and cities that you are going through, so a lot of that is left to editors on the desk back in Washington. Not that many facts got reported, it was mostly descriptive. I was lucky because my unit was an infantry unit, so they did a lot of fighting as they made their way to Baghdad, so there were a lot of things to see and write about. Once the war was going, I filed stories every day.

John McWethy, former Senior National Security Correspondent for ABC News, now Special Correspondent, concurs that the embedded journalist program's plusses outweighed its minuses. Although McWethy was embedded in Afghanistan, and not in Iraq, he did create reports for *ABC's World News Tonight* during the Iraq war in which the voices of embedded journalists, among others, were important to the well-roundedness of his news packages.

This is my line of logic, for those critical of embedding. I simply ask them. As journalists, if we are given an opportunity to cover a war sitting in Washington at the briefing, and that's it, or we are given an opportunity to actually go with the forces that are fighting, it's a no-brainer. It gives us more data points. The more data points the better. All we want, as reporters who are trying to provide as full a picture as we can, are as many data points as we can possibly find from as many different points of view from as many different places on the battlefield. So you listen to as much as you can, and make sense of it, and you question government, you question officials, you question people in uniforms, cops, as to the veracity of their information. I'm so tired of hearing critics saying that embedding is stupid. Putting your head in the sand and saying I don't want to see the battlefield with any perspective is nuts. Whenever I hear critics say that journalists didn't do a good job of covering the war, I always say...exactly what would you have done? The idea of embedding always has its limitations. But its also has tremendous plusses. So if I got invited to go to the battlefield on one side, I'll go. I would hope that reporters could also go to cover the other side, but if the other side is not planning, does that mean I shouldn't go? The answer is no.

### **On the "Subverted" Media...**

Historian Philip Knightly laments the loss of the "traditional war correspondent," whose extinction, he charges, was concurrent with the inception of the embedded journalist program. Knightly argues that since the Vietnam War, the reporter gradually lost the ability to serve as an independent observer, as the government

became increasingly active in crafting and managing media messages. In his book, *The First Casualty*, Knightly posits a subverted view of journalists in which reporters act as “journalist-mouthpiece-propagandists” in presenting coverage from the battlefield. In this view, embedding journalists with the military was a purposeful attempt to frame coverage in terms of the Pentagon’s perspective: “It was Whitman who came up with the idea of “embedding,” where correspondents would be placed with military units in the field from where they would transmit “products” or information compiled at the Pentagon, foreign capitals, and ‘in theatre,’ with the assistance of mobile press pools, combined information press centers (CIPCs). It was a comprehensive and cleverly devised plan, but one in which—although not many realized it until it was too late—the traditional war correspondent had been by-passed” (Knightley 531). Knightly believes that the “plan” was governed by four unwritten rules: “1. Emphasize the dangers posed by the Iraqi regime. 2. Dismiss and discredit those who cast doubt on these dangers. 3. Do not get involved in appeals to logic but instead appeal to the public’s hearts and minds, especially hearts. 4. Drive home the message to the public: ‘Trust us. We know more than we can tell you’” (Knightley 529). In actuality, reporters were given guidelines, but none with such politically overt motives. Most journalists readily signed documents agreeing not to reveal their location on the battlefield or to release the names of fallen or injured soldiers before next of kin were

notified. A few additional restrictions were spelled out: "... no private satellite telephone or cell phones, no traveling in their own vehicles whilst in an embedded status, no photography showing level of security or an enemy prisoner or war or detainee's face, nametag, or other identifying feature" (Palmer and Tumber 16).

Jonathan Finer did not find these rules irrational:

We signed an agreement that we couldn't give away the position where we were until after we left. These requests that the military had were reasonable. Anyone could read our reports once they got put out on the internet. We wouldn't want to give away information that would make it easier for us to be hurt. Information about where we were or where we were going in the future was always left out.

Aside from these logistical rules, Fox News reporter Rick Leventhal did not feel coerced by the military or the government, or his news outlet, to capture stories from a certain perspective: "I was never influenced by Fox to shape my coverage a certain way. I had more freedom...than I've had in my entire broadcasting career. There was no pressure and no expectations. There was no mandate or directive except: "Listen, you're going to go embed, just be careful. Don't put your life in danger and when you can, report on what's happening" (Katovsky and Carlson 195). Similarly, Christian Galdabini stresses that there weren't any mandates from up-high that influenced what got reported or captured on camera. Rather, journalists did their best to report what they saw, and news editors used discretion when considering the decency of the material:

Every reporter over there had access to the good, the bad, and the ugly. Whether they reported it or not, is up to each individual reporter. The bulk of the journalists there, I think they had a lot of access to what they wanted. We were told that we have two rules. Only two rules that the military gave to us. We cannot give away our position or we can't talk about future operations. We can't say this is where we are and this is where we'll be tomorrow to tip off the enemy. The other rule is that we can't identify any soldiers that had been killed before the next of kin had been notified. They needed to be told first before they saw it on TV. But outside of those two rules, in all my time over there, I've never had anybody tell me, turn off that camera. You shouldn't shoot that. I've had times when they said, 'hey are you gonna use that?' I'd say, 'I think we might.' If they said, 'I'd appreciate it if you didn't,' I'd take it into consideration. For example, I've been on tons of night raids where they kick down doors. If they get a tip about someone who's doing something bad they'll go to his house at 3 a.m. and kick down the door. Put all the women in one room and search all the men. They get rough. It's like being a cop. They need to establish a presence, use a big voice and order them. You don't want to give them any ideas they can escape or fight back. But one time, this Iraqi, he was so scared he threw up. They said to me, 'Well, this guy deserved it. We just dug up x amount of mortars in his yard and he was using them for road bombs.' They said, 'I would appreciate if you didn't show him throwing up'. That usually wouldn't go on the air anyway. But this is one of the differences between American television and news from other parts of the world. Editors here are concerned about decency. They are concerned about nudity, for example, if a guy gets his shirt or pants ripped off. And also, blood and gore won't be shown on TV if it's not appropriate. Sometimes I'll shoot video that I'll send back and they can't use it. That's different in other parts of the world where the standards are driven by what news directors feel the viewers find ok or not ok.

I have a perfect example of that from the second major Fallujah operation. Some Marines went into a room and shot a guy point blank. Did you read that? Kevin Sites, a friend of mine from NBC was there. Three or four Marines were running through a building and there were two or three guys laying there and they were bleeding. They looked to be alive. The Marines had trouble with the booby trapping of the bodies and guys having hand grenades and blowing themselves up and anybody near them. One Marine said, 'he's moving!' So they shot him. A big to-do came up, and they decided if it should be played and they ended up playing it. But they also blanked it out so you couldn't see the actual shot. That was last fall.

As Director of Public Affairs at Quantico, Virginia, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Long of the United States Marine Corps worked with the Pentagon to spearhead the embedded journalist program. On the issue of subversion, Long finds such a proposition preposterous. He explains that the program was intended to provide accurate coverage that would counter fictitious stories about the U.S. that would inevitably circulate in international media.

We wanted to discount what was out in the world media that was erroneous. So we orchestrated press coverage down to the press conference. We planned that there would be a constant barrage of information from the media to dominate the environment. Some people took that out of context as we were trying to manipulate. No, it's not manipulation at all. It's hey, here's who we are, we're transparent, within the degree of security and propriety. A [symposium] at Berkeley accused the embedded reporters of not being objective. They call that being 'co-opted.' I think that it's kinda funny that you can co-opt 700 reporters. I think that's the total amount that was embedded. I can't co-opt one reporter, never mind 700! Reporters are people. They are human beings. We can go through the age-old philosophical argument of what is objective. But the bottom line is, it's a human being who is trying to be objective on what they saw. And I think that's what they did. They were just telling the truth. They were doing exactly what reporters do which is, 'Here's what I see. Here's what's going on. Here's what I know and here's what I can tell you.' That's it. They were being honest. And it's funny to me that people accuse them of being co-opted or brainwashed. If I could do that, I wouldn't be here. I'd be in another dimension in space and time. Now do I think that some reporters are an American first and a reporter second and that some of that patriotism bleeds into their reporting? Well, probably. Are there some reporters from France who are patriotic Frenchmen first? Well of course there are. I've done several interviews with French reporters that were just downright hostile. Each country's newspaper and reporter has its own biases. If you want true objectivity, then you need to read as much as you can possibly consume about the same event in order to get as close to totality as possible.

Knightley's "four points," which are quite superficial, imply that the sole objective of the embed program was to coerce American journalists to report favorably on the coalition, which in turn, would spark support for the war. His logic here appears quite foolhardy given John McWethy's interview below, which contextualizes the program as a lesson learned from the war in Afghanistan. As Colonel Long stated above, the embedded journalist program was created to enhance "public relations" efforts, certainly, but just as important was providing accurate reports to offset those from international media that were likely to have been flagrantly anti-American. Below, McWethy briefly describes the genesis of the recent embed program, which was born of a media experiment in which he took part during the conflict in Afghanistan.

Embedding is a direct result of how the U.S. handled, or did not handle, the war in Afghanistan. The war came up quickly, obviously, and was a response to the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. It was a very unconventional war. And the Pentagon did not have a clue as to how to manage public perceptions of the war. There were no reporters in the battlefield at all. Not any. There were some Arabic speaking reporters in the battlefield who worked for, or at least took information from, the Taliban and put information on Arabic satellite television, Al-Jazeera.

The United States, to put it bluntly, got its butt kicked in the PR war in Afghanistan. The whole world reported what the U.S. was doing. But on a day to day basis, as the Taliban would pile up the bodies, the Pentagon was unable to tell us what the piles of bodies represented. Were they the results of a U.S. bombing? Or something else? The Taliban really with its primitive control of information was killing the United States on the global stage. As the Defense Department watched this process, and saw how badly the U.S. was losing in the PR battle, something started. Correspondents for various news organizations had various conversations with the Defense Department, like how stupid can you be? You've got to find a way to let us get closer to the

battlefield. They were saying no way, special forces and special operations soldiers would not play that game. This is not conventional war. They're not conventional warriors. Therefore, they're not going to let you go. Toward the end of that conflict, six of us were embedded with the Special Forces in various places. And the Defense Department, by doing this experiment, began to realize maybe it's not such a bad idea to have reporters looking at the war.

It was an experiment, and out of that, as the Administration campaigned to invade Iraq, Tory Clark, who was the secretary for public affairs, pulled together a proposal and sent it to Rumsfeld and initially he wasn't in favor of it but finally he realized that one of the ways that you fight the PR war is by putting people in the battlefield with the troops so they can see how the coalition forces fight. It is a time honored tradition that American reporters cover war...WWII... and they were all over the battlefield in Vietnam. So this didn't just come out of thin air. It came out of a failure to hold ground in the PR battle. So the program came to be from a combination of voices. There is never just one voice. In the Defense Department there are 25,000 people just in the Pentagon, and 2 million people in uniform. There were some very strong attitudes within the uniform services, especially within the public affairs apparatus, who knew that the best way to tell the story is to have reporters there. Some of the services had more experience with it than others. The navy, for example, has always embedded people on its ships.

Tori Clarke is a very sharp political operator and she comes from a PR background. She understood message. She was big on message. They [the Defense Department] tried like hell to manage messages. Tori understood that even if she couldn't control the message, if you put reporters with forces, the results generally, from their perspective, are positive. Even when there is a disaster, and there were plenty of them in the war, to have an independent set of eyes and ears seeing the disaster where the troops did something that was incredible stupid or incredibly cruel, you can make it a one or two day story because the reporter was on it, watching it happen, told the story, and that was that. So the story did not have what we call in our business, 'legs.' It may have been a negative hit for the administration, but because it was told straight up, the story got up, it got out, and it got over with. Even the very bad negative ones, like the checkpoint where the soldiers killed women and children. The independent eyes and ears that were watching that saw that there were warning shots fired, and saw that the vehicle didn't stop, and then they opened fire. That's different than the government in Baghdad saying that the Americans are brutal killers and they opened fire because they wanted to kill women and children. Well, the independent eyes and ears saw this unfold. And at least they can say that this is explainable, even if it isn't excusable.

The interviews also provide counterpoint to another of Knightley's evaluations, that the close proximity of media and journalists creates the perfect conditions for subversion: "In order for embedding to be a successful wartime media strategy, correspondents would need to bond with their unit—'get up close and personal.' Provide warm human interest stories about soldiers, go for maximum imagery but with little insight into the wider picture" (Knightley 534). The interviews challenge this assessment by suggesting that while soldiers and reporters did indeed bond on a certain level, this connection did not necessarily translate into subversion. In disregarding coverage by embeds as serious reporting due to its seeming lack of objectivity, Knightley neglects to mention the positive aspects of embedded reporting. Another point of contention with which interviewees grapple is Knightley's notion that the coverage by embeds was flawed because reporters were unable to gauge a sense of the bigger picture. Jonathan Finan explains his views on these assumptions:

The media certainly got close to the military. Whether it's too close is a hard thing to say. In some ways it was a conscious trade off that these organizations made. On the one hand you get sort of access that we never really had before. Maybe during Vietnam, but certainly not to the extent of having 600 reporters covering military at one time. So access to the very front, seeing things with your own eyes. Unfiltered, uncensored ability to write about whatever it is you happened to see. On the one hand that was great. On the other hand, inherently, when you're spending 24 hours a day in very stressful situations with people who are responsible for protecting your life, you become predisposed, favorable toward them. And the challenge was to try to keep those favorable impressions out of the reporting as much as possible. It was a trade-off. It had benefits to news organizations to have that perspective. If the opportunity to

send people to embed arises again, they certainly are going to take it. The pluses outweigh whatever costs in objectivity you have to sacrifice. You did the best you could. The key was, for readers back in the U.S., that the paper wasn't only presenting stories by embedded reporters every day. We also presented stories by people who were back in Washington. What you got if you read the bits and pieces, or all of the coverage, was a comprehensive, more nuanced picture of what was going on. If you only read the embedded stuff, than probably you did get a slightly one-sided view of what was going on. Because that was the nature of the limitations that we were working under. But similarly, if you only read the coverage of people in Baghdad, or only the coverage of people who were in Washington, you would also get a singular perspective. The key is to be a discerning reader. As an embed, you had absolutely no idea what was going on even a few hundred yards away from where you were standing yet alone what's going on in the wider war.

The best stories that people did during the war were almost pure narrative. One of the things that newspapers do well in some situations is that they can provide context, a bigger picture view of what is going on in a story. But in this situation, you were almost stripped of the ability to do that because our access to information was so limited. So what we had to do instead was write stories in the most traditional sense of what a story is, which is describing what we could see with our own eyes. The best stories were ones that did do that, painted a picture that was useful to readers. But certainly, it would have been almost impossible to avoid getting close, given how much time we spent with them. It was important for us in being able to do our jobs. A lot of times we'd have to rely on people giving us explanations for what they were doing or giving us help getting from one place to another on the battlefield. If it was a miserable working relationship between us, it would have been really hard. You may take from that that it would be harder to write more critical stories, but once the war started, no one we were with had any ability to read what we were writing anyway. None of the people we interacted with on a daily basis got to read anything we wrote until they got home.

McWethy, like Finer, tempers Knightley's criticism that embeds are too emotionally involved to write critical stories, and similarly, argues that stories by embeds are not typically viewed in isolation from other perspectives.

From the government's perspective or the military's perspective, it was certainly their goal to get positive coverage. And the effect of being embedded, where

you're riding along with them in a combat zone and people are shooting at you, and the military are shooting back, protecting you, there's no doubt there is a bond. There are different varieties of how bonded some of the reporters came. Some reporters got kicked out for violating ground rules in the signed agreements, in other words, not bonded at all, others were flag waving 'ra-ra,' and others covered what they covered. Here is what is critically important, though. We in this business understand that when you embed, what you get is favorable coverage, generally. Now, does that mean that my news organization takes those reports and that's it? No. My job during the Iraq War was to write the opening piece every single night for *World News Tonight* with Peter Jennings. He would open with a map-talk, maybe, then he would throw it to me. I would write very complex pieces about what had happened on the battlefield during the course of the day. I used in my pieces some chunks from embedded reporters. There were thousands of reporters embedded, and I used material from all—the BBC, Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabia, Abu Dhabi TV. They all have embedded reporters and I used chunks from them all. I had translations. Every step of the way, we had reporters in Baghdad, from our news organization and others, who were reporting on the perspective of the government in Iraq. So in my story, just because we had embedded reporters, did that mean that was the only perspective provided by the large news organizations? The answer is flat out no. The large umbrella of things in the newspapers and on the networks were written by people back here who were tapping into intelligent sources in our government, in Arab governments, in European governments. And listening to the Arabic-speaking translations to hear what was being reported out there. We did not have embedded reporters with Iraqi forces. They would not allow that. So I felt that what was I was able to give our viewers, 9-12 million viewers ever night, was a picture that was diverse and was accurate in terms of where the battle was on that day and what had happened on that day. Not of all the days were good news. Some of the generals in the field in talking to embedded reporters and said things that drove Rumsfeld out of his mind. The facts were with the guys on the ground, and the facts were with the reporters. They said things that annoyed Rumsfeld but were the truth. So, this is the long winded way of me telling you that just because reporters were embedded, it doesn't mean the story that I painted every night on our broadcast was reliant entirely or even on a majority of the material on those embedded reporters. What they did give me was an unbelievable sense of immediacy from the battlefield. There were times when I knew that a battle had erupted or there had been a disaster, like the day the Apache helicopters were shot down, and I knew that before the Secretary of Defense knew it. Because we had a reporter who was there. He got off the satellite phone, and I would go to Tori Clark's office or various other offices in the Pentagon, and they wouldn't know it yet. Often it would take them hours to find out.

So we had, because of the embedded reporters, an unprecedented ability to be at the forward-edge of the battle. That was a tremendous advantage. And the factual material that we can pull out of people we had embedded with headquarters units that were moving forward, it was a gold mine of detail. It definitely was an American-sided flow of information, overall, but it was partly because American forces were basically calling the shots on the battlefield. What they tried to do tactically was move rapidly because they would disrupt the other side's ability to perceive what was happening. By the time the Iraqi forces figured out the Bridge over the Tigris river was taken, they were already 50 miles past that. So, tactically, the military was moving rapidly, but we in the press monitoring them had an unprecedented view of the battlefield. I've covered a whole bunch of wars. I've been involved in the coverage of more than two dozen wars. I've never seen anything like this. This was just amazing. So back to the point of are embedded journalists reporting favorably on the units they're traveling with. The answer is overwhelmingly yes. But does that mean that the coverage of the war is reported in those little soda straw views of the battlefield? Absolutely not. That's [expletive]. It's complete and utter boloney.

Like Jonathan Finan and John McWethy, Kim Hume understands that a natural bond forms between the military and the media. In response to the argument that journalists are inclined to have a pro-war bias as a result of this bond, she asserts that a far more onerous bias is held by international media, notably the Arab media, which are flagrantly anti-American and often given to fallacies.

I can see how it [the bond] would be a concern. It is true that if you are working with a bunch of people and your life is in danger and they are essentially your protection, then you are going to side with them. There is no doubt about that and what is interesting about that concept is that the military was very aware of that. What they did was an extraordinary breach of what they would normally do to safeguard their operational details. The entire process of allowing people into their units and taking the risk of the observer seeing it all, good, bad, they couldn't control it. The military could not control it. All they could do was put the person in the unit, and then whatever happened, happened. And that observer would observe it, good or bad. And it happened at the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne when the grenade was thrown into the tent. There

were observers in that unit and they saw that happen. And that was a situation that was exposed that very well might not have been exposed in the same way if there weren't reporters embedded in that organization. They were willing to take that risk, the military was. They trusted us not to give away information that was of operational details and we trusted them, basically, to protect us. And there is an affinity there that is going to be naturally set up. It is understandable that people would be concerned about that. But my impression about it is that it worked. That people were able to get a picture that they wouldn't ordinarily get by being in the middle of that real situation and actually being unrestricted in their observations of the good and the bad of what was happening in the unit. And it was obviously unprecedented. People assume that the media embedded with the army organization would be biased in the favor of the military unit. But there is no concern at all about the opposite, which is the propaganda coming from the other side...from the enemy and no ability to have any transparency about what was true or not about what these people were saying. And having news organizations pick up, as fact, whatever anybody told them on the other side, and there being no concern about that at all, in other words, it's such an unequal...and the premises and the perceptions that are created are unchecked on the side of the enemy. Again, the idea being that one assumes that the enemy is right in this situation and that the U.S. military is wrong. The assumption that whatever the person in Baghdad is saying is true, and whatever the general is saying is incorrect, now that is bias. There is no doubt about it. That is anti-American bias, or anti-military bias. If you go back and look at the coverage, you will see time after time after time that some reporters take the attitude that the military is incorrect and whatever is happening on the other side is more likely to be true, in the face of absolute fact that these people are lying. And it didn't matter that they were lying. Somehow they were more credible than the generals over here who were not lying. To me, it was a remarkable phenomenon that really showed you the true essence of the bias involved against the U.S. military.

Kim Hume challenges the notion that the government, anticipating the bond between the media and the military, purposely established the embedded journalist program for the sake of gleaning positive coverage from the battlefield. She concludes that the government did, indeed, have a specific motive in embedding journalists, although favorable coverage was not always the expectation. She explains that

journalists, who entered as embeds under the presumption they could report the good, the bad, and the ugly, made certain that the government would not fall back on its promise.

This is an interesting concept. [the notion that journalists were embedded for an overt political objective] The premise is wrong but the facts are pretty close. The premise is that the military did it on purpose and they did it for evil intentions. The truth is, the military did do this on purpose. And they did it for a very specific reason, which was to get their side of the story told in an equal way, to challenge the other side, the skeptical “America Must Be Wrong” story. And they took the chance of exposing themselves good and bad in order to do this. And I think that what was the beauty of this whole thing was that the military sort of against its own instinct opened up and allowed the media to come in and when they did, they were pleasantly surprised that what their view of those men and women in the military is shared universally. In other words, these are extraordinary people and their story is compelling. It is very hard to have a negative attitude about this. Journalists had always been kept from the action. They feel that if they are being kept from the action then secrets are being kept. The same with the journalists in the briefing rooms. Our constant aim in journalism is to get more access. We want to get in on it and be there. We have a constant fight with the White House for more access, so we can see for ourselves and we don’t have to take their word for it. It was an enticing prospect that they were going to let us see it ourselves. That’s how the deal got struck. We are going to give you what you want, and we will get what we want. You are going to show the rest of the country as a member of the media what these men and women are doing and what the facts of the situation are. It was a great balance. Everybody kept their word because of it. We had a set of restrictions that were quite intense about what we could and couldn’t report. And normally, the media does not agree to those things, but we agreed in this case because our lives depended on it. And if you have a reporter in a unit and that reporter says ‘we’re at longitude x and latitude y,’ he’s gonna get killed. So of course we agreed to these operational considerations. Because it was in our interest to do so. But they agreed to not keep things from us. They agreed to let us see what happened, and that was important. Now, there were some conflicts, and the conflicts almost always came in a situation when we had agreed not to publish or show casualties or to report the names of soldier unless they agreed. What we agreed to was that the Pentagon would put out notification of the names of people killed in action. And we had to wait for the Pentagon to release that before we could say what happened. So they asked us

not to show faces or give out names of people before the fact. When the soldier from the 101<sup>st</sup> threw the grenade into the tent, for example, there was a great deal of upset over that. Clearly, the military did not want the casualties for that to be shown. Truth to be told, they didn't want that situation reported at all—one of their own turning on them and injuring killing their own people. That was ugly. That was a terrible thing. And we had conflict over that because we were there and we wanted to report it and follow the rules and they were telling us that we couldn't show this picture and we couldn't show that picture. And when we did, they tried to kick us out. There were many people involved in 3 a.m. conversations about which rule did we break, and aren't you overreacting? These issues happened along the way, but as long as we were all honest about what the rules were for...the Pentagon took a lot of responsibility to make it work. They tried to keep their word about what they promised us. They worked with us on conflicts. They didn't just dictate.

### **On the Tone and Content of the Coverage...**

Because Chapter Two is concerned with how coverage was perceived by critics and the public, the study would be remiss if it failed to gauge a sense of how that coverage appeared to members of the media and the military. The interviewees were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the coverage and determine if there was a change in the tone of the coverage as the war progressed. John McWethy maintains that the tone is ultimately a reflection of the happenings on the battlefield.

There was something that embedding gave the military that they really liked. They really liked the fact that for the first time, families of soldiers were able to see in almost real time, representation of what their loved ones, husbands, wives, sons, and daughters, were doing. This is a little accounted for aspect of embedding. It is extremely important to the families of those in the service. Normally when you deploy, you go off into a black hole. You have no idea what is going on. When you have reporters embedded, yapping away that this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion....blah, blah, the families listen. So for the public that had people over there fighting, this is a tremendous thing. Also, the U.S. military feels strongly that by and large most of their soldiers will deport

themselves in a way that the military will be proud of. And that's the case. We happen to have a really, really, good military. They are very professional. They do resist pulling the trigger on things in ways that is observable. It's impressive. The military was willing to let the chips fall where they may. Their stories were overwhelmingly positive probably because Americans were not being killed in any numbers that were significant. It was just the bad guys who were being killed. But after three weeks, the war was over. The coverage changed because of what was happening on the ground. Fighting a war is the easy part. Winning the peace is the hard part. And this administration was in massive denial about the complexity of the task that would follow what would inevitably be an overwhelming victory. And I did an hour documentary on Rumsfeld where I took him to task on a series of things that they didn't do. The reason the coverage changed was because what was happening on the ground changed. Baghdad was liberated, and within days, Baghdad was in chaos because the planning was so bad that they didn't have enough forces to put them on every street corner to prevent the chaos. In the process of the chaos, the U.S. started losing the PR battle again. We lost the PR battle because the facts on the ground changed. The people in Baghdad exploded partly because the U.S. was unable to do three things. It was not able to stabilize the wild and chaotic environment on the ground. In other words, the looting. The way you stop looting is by putting guys on the ground. You put them everywhere. You make it next to impossible to let that happen. But they didn't have the forces because Rumsfeld insisted upon a light force that he was certain would overwhelm the enemy. And he was correct. They overwhelmed the enemy, but they didn't have enough to enforce the peace. There were two other critical things involved in the weeks that followed that the U.S. should have anticipated and didn't, and were unable to address for months that followed. One is electricity. And the other is water. For reasons that still baffle me, the U.S. did not immediately bring in a series of heavy-duty electrical generators to immediately provide power for Baghdad and some of the other important cities, Basra and Baghdad in particular. Rumsfeld, along with the President, argued that Phase Four, which is after you fight your war, you go into the rebuilding phase, needed to be entirely controlled by the military. That's because Phase Three, the actual fighting of the war, was done entirely by the military. The state department traditionally does this role. But Rumsfeld successfully cut the state department out of the planning in the execution of Phase Four. Well the fact is, the military is actually quite good at doing certain types of limited tasks in the aftermath. They can restore peace because they have trained people who know how to use guns. If they have adequate people, they can do a lot for civil engineering. They have the capability to do it and to do it rapidly and sometimes even under fire. But what Rumsfeld did, partly because of the politics surrounding the

beginning of the war...right from the beginning of the war Rumsfeld and the president insisted that no decision had been made to go to war. Well, that was a lie. No final, formal decision had been made to go to war, but the die had been cast for months. And if Rumsfeld went ahead and did many months before, not only plan for the war but also for what came after the war, then it made a lie of their public policy. So he delayed until January... Therefore, the planning for the actual aftermath of the combat was a disaster. History will show that this administration executed a brilliant war plan but was utterly incompetent in executing the peace plans. So the reporting that happened after the fall of Baghdad became more negative as it became clear that the country was evolving into a state of chaos. You can't write positive stories when what is happening on the ground is overwhelmingly negative. Despite the fact that Rumsfeld kept coming out every day saying the press is distorting news—'there's just a little unpleasantness in Baghdad.' Well, it wasn't just a little unpleasantness. It was all-out chaos, with criminal elements and opportunists and remnants of the previous regime just tearing the society apart.

Although news executives rarely have an opportunity to watch the coverage from their own outlets, Kim Hume was able to catch plenty of the reports from the early part of the war as she sat home with a broken leg. She also observed coverage from other outlets.

I did. [watch the coverage] And I must tell you, I was surprised by it. I was very emotionally involved with the situation when it was pretty clear to everybody, from our relations with the public relations department at the Pentagon that we were going to war. In the very early stages of them preparing for war, Secretary Rumsfeld made a decision that the countervailing propaganda, if you will, was dangerous, in that if they did not counter the propaganda that was coming from the rest of the world and from Iraq itself, they would end up losing the ability to get their side of the story out clearly. So they brought us in from the very beginning, and we worked very hard to figure out how to get through all the barriers we had to get through to put reporters with units. And it was intense. It was hours of meetings and talking. On top of that I was responsible for putting people in harm's way, the same way a general would be responsible for putting people in harm's way. And these people weren't trained. People would come to me and say I want to go. But we also asked people who were in a position to go—will you do it? We asked them to go, and they agreed to go. That's

how they volunteered. It wasn't a situation where we only took people who put their hands up and said 'send me.' So I'm in a position where I have to put people, who work for me, who we depend on, in harm's way. It was very emotional for me. It was a big deal for me. Because of my broken leg, I got to see a lot of what we were doing, and a little of what other people were doing, but I would say that almost universally, I have two observations about people who were embedded with units. One, that it was to me surprisingly positive in the sense that there was not the attitude that these are the bad people and I'm the good person reporting on what they're doing. It was a general sense of here we are, and this is what we're doing. Because their scope was so narrow, the reporters didn't have a chance to do anything than be with that unit, which you can imagine is a very small piece of that picture. Because of that, it was very fact based. It was sort of like, here we are here and last night there was a fire fight and they shot these weapons, and this person was wounded. They were not trying to draw a broad conclusion about how things were going. So when you took all of them together, the public was pretty nicely informed. Now it was not an overall broad picture. It was a series of very narrow pictures, which was a different experience for the audience. It had benefits for both the military and the media because people want to know what's going on and they want to be in on it. We were allowed to bring people into this situation. We had the ability to transmit lives as these units were rolling across the desert. In no other situation in warfare had the American public had the chance to actually experience what the troops were experiencing as it was happening live. It was an extraordinary thing...and, my observation about it is, that it was *completely* compelling. Even when nothing was happening, and you were on that humvee traveling across the desert, you could not take your eyes off it. It was just very compelling. And partly that's what we can do, especially in television media, bring people to the scene. The military allowed this. My overall criticism is that there was not really a way to get a broad picture of what was happening. It was because we were segmented in these units, and so was everybody else. Now, the way to get an overall picture would be from a briefer, in Kuwait, who was General Brooks. What is funny about it, as an observer, if you were paying attention to the other news coverage, you knew more than he did, because you had been there with that unit when it was happening and he was still getting reports back from the field. You had better information from that one area than the person who was supposed to know the overall picture. It's a very fascinating phenomenon. I also noticed that the attitude of the reporter in the briefing was very hostile, whereas the reporter in the field was not hostile. People who relied on the military to give them the overall picture were quite negative in the briefings. I have a simple theory about this. It has to do with human nature. The people who were out in the field were doing something. There were in on

it, it was serious. It was real. They were involved and had real things to cover. When you are away from the battlefield and you are in the briefing room, and you are dependent on somebody and you don't really know how well to trust what they are telling you or not, and you're just waiting around, your attitude will be, 'how come I'm not in the field watching what's really going on?' And somehow, you, Mr. Military person here, must be lying to me. I believe it was almost more of a 'how come I can't go out there and play with the tanks' as opposed to sitting back here and trying to make sense of that information. It is a human nature thing. They were cranky because they weren't experiencing it first hand. When you don't have the independent ability to observe and you are dependent on someone else to report the facts to you, then you are going to have more questions and you are going to be more likely to think that they are trying to keep something from you. So you continue to probe, and it has the effect of being a little more negative.

First Lieutenant Darlan Harris, a public affairs officer at the Marine Corps development Command in Quantico, VA, was deployed to Iraq in February of 2004, nearly a year after the start of the war. As a media officer for the First Marine Expeditionary Force (1MEF), she kept a close eye on media coverage and had plenty of interaction with embedded journalists, who arrived shortly after the Marines established their presence in Fallujah. She was both satisfied and frustrated with the media coverage from Iraq.

To set the scene for you, we were in an area just east of Fallujah, which we ended up calling Camp Fallujah, in Western Iraq. That was our sector in Iraq. We were taking over responsibility of that sector from the Army. And the transfer of authority took place between March 23-24<sup>th</sup>. So, the army was redeploying to the U.S. and the Marines were setting up. We did not have all that many embedded media with us, this time around. We had ten media left. Regardless, we took this handful of media through the entire process from the training in the U.S., to Kuwait, to the flight into Iraq. Once the Marines took over for Army it was harder to attract media to embed. Plus it was extremely expensive. What we found, was, the few folks that wanted to embed were

really gung-ho and were planning to stay longer than a month. We had another category of reporters who had been in Iraq since the invasion. And had disengaged from embedding and were just staying in hotels in Baghdad on their own. It was tough because what we saw, largely, was a lot of reporting coming out of Baghdad, when Baghdad is a considerable distance from Fallujah, far from where any of the Marines were operating. This was the scene prior to going into Fallujah the first time, on April 4<sup>th</sup>, Operation Vigilant Resolve. When the Blackwater folks were killed on March 31<sup>st</sup>, there was a big push to get media embedded with us. We knew that we were planning to go in to Fallujah. We had a timeline to go into the city anyway, but with the Blackwater folks getting murdered, that timeline got pushed forward. We had to figure out how to pitch that idea to a reporter, who might say, 'why should I come to Fallujah when I'm safe in Baghdad? I can see ten miles from this mosque.' Our answer would be it's your best interest to get here at this time since a lot of that includes actually arranging transportation, all the logistics that go into travel in a very, very unsafe environment for those media. So, those four days from the first of April till we went into Fallujah, midnight on the fourth of April, the public affairs officers didn't sleep much. So, after that, we had a pool of media that jumped from having less than 10 embedded folks to over 35 media embedded in one night. And that grew of course. Getting them to where they needed to be, placing them in units into the city, and coordinating that coverage. People needed to see what was going on. The whole world's eyes were on the Blackwater folks who got murdered and hung from that North Bridge in Fallujah. Best to be proactive in those instances when you know the whole world is looking at you. You want to make sure they are getting what they need in terms of visuals and the right information. You can't accurately report on something from Baghdad when what's going on is in Fallujah. We found that that happened quite often, actually. Operation Vigilant Resolve, which is OVR, lasted maybe twelve days. And during that time we had media embedded in the units in the city. After that, for the entire time, up until I left in June, media didn't want to stick around longer than four or five days. They felt that getting a short picture of the Operation was enough. But frankly, from our perspective, it wasn't. There were a few people who stuck around long enough to see what was happening and comment intelligently on it. I have to be honest, though, most of what we saw were ambulance chasers. And that was very frustrating.

We saw most of the coverage. The job of one of the members on our team, and others shared this responsibility as well, was to troll all of the websites to clip the coverage. Part of being a public affairs officer is not just to facilitate news coverage, but also, to follow up. Complete the circle of coverage. And that means knowing how well you did in facilitating whatever the news was. Whatever was being said was

correct, whatever was being reported was correct. Well, daily, what we would do was pull all 250 pages of clippings. When the Abu Graib thing happened, oh! That dominated. Fallujah dominated. Blackwater dominated. The June 30<sup>th</sup> Iraqi government dominated. So, part of making the general, 'the three star,' more effective in his decision making, in his morning brief he must understand what is being reported on. We would review everything and then brief him on the top stuff. Also, if there were inaccuracies, certainly we would address that. There was so much coverage. Everybody from the main news organizations to the people who post blogs. Then there was some hostile one-sided reporting that you could tell was by people who weren't even in Iraq. I quite frankly, don't know how they got their information. You could see that that they were only getting their information from an interested party who didn't seem to have a favorable opinion of Americans being in Iraq. For the most part, in doing the media analysis, the majority of the stories and the coverage seemed neutral. I have to say, honestly, and I may be the first person to say this to you, that overall, the coverage was neutral. There were always a handful of stories that would be good, a handful that were glowing, and the rest a two-sided account of what was happening.

For the most part, the reporting was done from afar, from hotels. There were very few people who got all the facts right. I can say that because I was there, and operationally, I knew what was going on. I sat right there next to the planners who were at the combat operation centers. So I was looking at a map of Fallujah every single day. I was watching where all of our units were going. Who was participating. The whole gamut. It's important for a public affairs officer to be involved, so you can do that media analysis, and say, this is right, this is wrong, and you can correct it. Tony Perry was a reporter who was embedded with us for quite a while. He's from the *LA Times*. He did an excellent job because he stuck with us. Not to say every single story was right on the money, or excellent. And when I say that, I don't mean that every story was favorable to the Marines. But for the most part, you can take a look at all the stories he wrote from that time frame, and understand that he was gaining an understanding of the full situation. As a public affairs officer, I appreciate this type of reporter more than the reporter who wants to come out for only four days to take a look-see.

When we were in Fallujah for Operation Vigilant Resolve, a lot of what we were seeing was insurgents firing from inside mosques. They were hiding weapons in food and in humanitarian supplies. They were hiding loaded weapons in ambulances. I saw that continually, and I have a couple of pictures, stuff that we were able to capture and release to the world that says: 'Look, we're not making this stuff up. These guys are really doing this stuff.' Sometimes media who hadn't gotten that fuller picture

would come in afterwards and take a picture of bullet holes in the glass of an ambulance. They would ask, 'why did you fire on an ambulance?' We would say, by the way...you didn't see all the weapons in the back of it two minutes ago, and whoever they were firing at us!

We often got requests from media who wanted to better understand what was happening with the operation. That's something that we facilitate as best we can when we're not moving with the unit. Like if there's some down time, we always like to make sure reporters get a chance to talk to the commanders to understand what is going on, and also with the Marines who are actually out there operating. They were briefed as best we could brief them, but once they were embedded and moving with the unit, there wasn't much time for that to go on. We were always available to them to answer quick questions. I don't think they did very well with understanding the bigger picture. The intent of what we are trying to do. They didn't stay long enough. They'd hear an explosion in the background and they'd run toward it. Or see something or hear something in Baghdad and ask us to talk about it, which we certainly would do if we could do it. But if we aren't there and can't see or hear the explosion, then we can't know what is going on. You see a car burning? Then it must be burning.

In terms of the content of the coverage, the interviewees provide a notable contradiction to Knightley's observation that the lack of Iraqis in coalition coverage can be explained by the need to maintain a patriotic tone. While Knightley implies that this one-dimensional coverage by coalition media was perhaps intentional, the interviewees claim a more practical explanation for the deficiency. In a roundabout way, Knightley asserts that the government precluded coverage of the other side with the threat that any reporter who ventured into enemy territory and got caught in the line of fire could expect to get killed: "The Pentagon made it clear from the beginning of the war against Iraq that there would be no general censorship. What it failed to say was that war correspondents might well find themselves in a situation similar to that in

Korea in 1950. One American correspondent described this style of media management as like the military telling them, “You can write what you like—but if we don’t like it we’ll shoot you” (Knightley 537). In Knightley’s interpretation, the government’s threat was a convenient way to prevent reporters from covering Iraqis, whose plight would no doubt taint the view that the war was going well: “I believe that the U.S. administration, in keeping with its new foreign policy, has an attitude to war correspondents that reflects the now somewhat infamous statement made by President Bush when declaring war on terrorists: ‘You’re either with us or you’re against us.’ Reporting from the enemy side was considered by Washington as being ‘against us’ and anyone who did so risked being shot. If the correspondents did not like this, the Pentagon did not care. Welcome to the new and highly dangerous world of the war correspondent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Knightley 537). The Pentagon is masterful in manipulation, he argues, and is generally successful in winning the support of the public: “The Pentagon is not in the slightest bit worried about public unease over coalition attacks on journalists because it is convinced that the public, especially the American public, would support its view and its actions, and if not, they know how to drum up the type of media strategies that successfully drum up public support” (Knightley 548). The interviewees, on the other hand, maintain that safety was certainly foremost in their minds, but none reference the government as a motivating

factor in their decision to cover, or not to cover, certain stories. They seemed to have exercised caution on their own volition, determining for themselves which situations were too precarious to enter. Furthermore, the interviewees cite fear of coming under attack by Iraqis, not the coalition forces. John McWethy is quite honest about the coalition's lack of coverage on Iraqis:

Now, what did we not do in that conflict? No one was able to report on the fate of Iraqi civilians. Not the Arab speaking journalists, not the English speaking journalists. No one. Villages that were passed through where a battle erupted, it would often take weeks to find out what really had happened in that village. From the window of a humvee as an embedded reporter you see the firefight and then you move on. What no one was able to do was figure out what was really happening within the ranks of the Iraqi military. Or to Iraqi civilians. I don't know a way to fix that issue. In any war, you cover both sides if you can. But quite frankly, it's not possible to cover both sides. It would be a death sentence to wander around the battlefield. It's incredibly deadly. So, as the conflict progressed, the Arabic speaking journalists did have an edge when they were able to go through villages and talk to people. But those villages or towns were being terrorized by residual forces called the Fedayeen that were part of the Baath party and their job was to not allow people to celebrate the fall of Saddam's family. But the Fedayeen did a remarkably effective job of terrorizing those people and bringing the battle into the middle of the civilian population. Classic guerilla tactics. This makes it very difficult for a better armed and larger force to root them out.

As John McWethy noted earlier, media coverage changes in response to the military action taking place. Christian Galdabini concurs, and recognizes that along with the marked difference in military action from 2003 to 2004 came the harsh reality that straying from the military was an unwise decision.

Yeah, it [the coverage] changed a lot. April 2003, there was a war going on and the forces we were with were moving constantly. The coverage changes in scope

because we were with a moving unit that changed day to day, but then, in 2004, you were with more of a police unit, a stagnant force. They went on patrol and came back. They got to know the neighborhoods. There were routines involved. In 2003 there was zero routine. You didn't know what you were going to do that day. What has become clear, in a year, is that it became more unsafe to be on the street. So you used to be able to go out a little on your own, if you wanted to, but now it's an absolute no-no. You can get into a bad situation very easily, very quickly. Now, almost all the reporting, at least by American journalists, is done side by side with U.S. forces because it's just too dangerous to go out there. If you read about the people getting killed now, most of them are not hit by bullets, but roadside bombs, because the enemy has a hard time getting to them with bullets. But if you aren't with the military, it's very easy to become prone to that. When you're with the military, you run into the same trouble as they do, but they have guns and can protect themselves. If you do the right thing, you'll be in good shape.

Darlan Harris also comments that the military offered the best protection for journalists. She explains that reporters could find themselves in the middle of frightening situations quite easily if they decided to be venturesome.

Security was a big part of life for the embeds. Sometimes it's a tough thing to make people understand that you are actually safer when you are embedded with the military. Because you're taken care of, and oh by the way, you're right there if something does happen, you're in the best place for coverage! It makes things difficult safety wise for them, but also for us. I'll tell you one story about this gentleman [reporter] who was British. He had been in Baghdad for a while and he wanted to get out and come and see what was happening in Fallujah. He decided that it was safer for him to dress up as an Iraqi and get a ride to where we were. So he got in some car that dropped him off a couple meters from the gates of where the Marines were. And he walked up to the gates and thankfully the Marines were smart and cautious and didn't shoot him. Anyway, he pulled out a jacket that had the word press written on it. He had nothing on him. A little bag, no food. He had been out in the desert. So we brought him in and said, 'if this is how you want to get a story, good luck to you. Because it's not the right way to go about it.' He stuck with us for a while and then thought it was best to go back to Baghdad. He had had enough. Definitely scary. There were some media who were in Fallujah the entire time I was there who would email us only. They didn't

want to travel anywhere. So certainly, we responded and told them as much as we could tell them. When you see service members getting killed, it's tough to visualize yourself being saved.

### **On the Dissenters...**

Critics maintain that the notion of the subverted media presupposes the fear of composing stories that go against the grain. During the war, some reporters were stricken from Iraq for violating the ground rules set out in their contracts prior to embedding. To some critics, the removal of reporters was thought to be politically motivated and in violation of the promise of the free press. Fear of removal, they claim, keeps unpopular views at bay: "In the highly competitive media environment, you do not need to be a rocket scientist, or even a social scientist, to know that dissent does not boost careers. This is especially true during times of war. The rewards of going along to get along are clear; so are the hazards of failing to toe the line" (Solomon and Erlich 23). In the eyes of some, the threat of banishment from the battlefield was simply another of the government's tactics for media management. Colonel Richard Long, however, understands that of all the embedded journalists, only a minority of reporters were removed.

We've been embedding media since World War I. And it was simple for us because we thought that these young men and women work hard. They know what it is they are supposed to do. They lead. They do it well. Why should we be concerned about sharing that with others? We shouldn't be. We should introduce them to the media and say here they are. Be transparent. Now there are certain rules to being transparent—the ground rules. Let's embed the media with the troops. These people

are good people. Both the military and the media. There are some problems but we got rid of the 'problem childs.' I think the interesting statistic is that out of the 700 media embedded only a handful, 20, were removed. For violating security, the ground rules. That's pretty good. There was a guy named Bill Smucker, *Christian Science Monitor*. He was traveling with the unit, whether he was in the convoy or not, then live, he gets on the phone with CNN, 'I'm on highway x traveling with this type of a unit...we're heading this way...' He just broadcast to the world exactly where the position was, and the direction. Now all we have to do is wait for the bombs to start coming in! And I called CNN immediately and they pulled it and that was responsible of them. But then, Smucker did it again! And finally he thought it was a big deal that we were out to get him. We detained him, took him back to Kuwait. Took his credentials. I had his press badge for a long time. He then gets another press badge in Kuwait somehow, even though he shouldn't have. He gets recredentialed, goes back into the country, and causes another security violation. We detained him. When you get your badge, you sign what the release rules are. It's unfortunate that he did that. But I think overall the media did a very good job.

Darlan Harris relays the circumstances of the situation involving the removal of a reporter from her unit:

There was a reporter from the *Miami Herald*. And she was embedded with us for a while and we were at our base camp and that's where one of the surgical units is based as well. When wounded soldiers arrive, that's a critical time. The first few hours are critical, so the fastest way to transport them there is by air. By helicopter. As soon as helicopters would come, we would see media start running. We actually had to kick this reporter out. She had been warned about it. And why we ultimately ended up refusing to embed her again was because she wrote a story....and we have very strict rules about next of kin notification. We just can't bend those rules. There was unit that was out with us, the navy Seabees it's called, and these guys are a really tight unit, a lot of them from a particular place. A smaller town in Florida I believe. And they were in an area that got hit with mortars. And a lot of them died and were injured. This reporter sent the story out immediately. Now you can imagine being back at home, a daughter, a wife, a son, and seeing a story about your father or your mother's unit getting hit with mortars and six out of twenty people dying.

## **On Sensationalism...**

As was mentioned in Chapter Two, reporters are often criticized for relying on storytelling formulas that emphasize the dramatic and spark the emotions. Interviewees were asked to assess the degree of sensationalism they perceived in coverage from the battlefield. Jonathan Finan considers journalists' propensity for sensationalist stories:

That's the nature of journalism. To try to find stories. Especially in a situation like that where the people have had an insatiable demand for as much as we can produce. And so we looked for stories everywhere. Whether they were profiles of people that we came across or larger descriptions of actions that we saw, or more analytical pieces about strategy, things like that. I did a few stories for the website, an audio phone interview that would describe a more personal account of the lifestyle thing. But aside from that, there were so much else going on that was more important than if I was getting my three meals.

Christian Galdabini admits that from his stance behind the camera, he was likely to look for stories that contained stunning visuals:

There's no doubt about it, the appetite for video is driven by the fact that if you're there to cover war, they want to see war. For me, it was a driving force to get pictures of weapons firing. Whether they be tanks or LAVs. Light armored vehicles shot shells and blew things up. You wanted to get the most action packed. Number one, you want to get the best video, and the most effective stuff. I know that my employer will air something that is bang, bang, bang! I also am motivated by what I would want to see if I was sitting at home. I still am interested in watching the news from Iraq. Whenever there is a fire I'm glued. There is suspense and there's drama. It's a movie come to life. It's an educational experience. Sensational stories happen in journalism. There are people who want to push certain story lines. It happens. There's no doubt that any media outlet is driven by revenue. We need to put on stories that people want to see. Sometimes you overdo it a little bit. But, my whole thing is, you know in the business what is good TV and what is bad TV. And sometimes they might see something and blow it out of proportion. That creeps into journalism, but it is not an overwhelming trend. Often the stories are relatively balanced. The argument you hear from people is that, I saw the story about the Marine

that got killed. What about the story about the water plant that opened? So, each individual story is an unbiased, balanced report, but people want to see more of one or less of another, and that's where their argument comes in. For me, I can understand that. But if that's what you want, then you have to search it out. Selective exposure is at play. But there are not many people over there doing the feature type stories. There are two reasons. First, their editors don't necessarily want that. Also it's got to be linked to a bigger story. They opened 15 water plants and we did a story on one of them that shows how they did all of them. Um, the other thing is, its hard to do more positive stories because it's unsafe. We can't go out on the streets. We just can't get in the car and check out a school.

Again, you have to factor in where people are coming from, where they are coming from ideologically and where they are coming from in the country. If a reporter is from a hometown newspaper and they've lost 15 people in the war, he's going to report a lot differently than Rick Leventhal at Fox News. That's just the way it is.

Daniel Wise, a cadet from George Washington University, is a psychological operations specialist with the 312<sup>th</sup> Psy Ops, but served with the 24<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit. He received his orders shortly before the start of the war, and flew to Iraq on his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, an ironic coming of age. Although he did not forge personal relationships with any particular reporters, from his observations of those embedded in his unit, the media appeared prone to sensationalism.

The biggest thing I learned when I got back from Iraq is that I will never trust the international media again. I don't care where it's coming from, 95% of it is garbage. Never. Till the day I die. It's not so much that I think that Al-Jazeera is politically this way, and BBC is another way, or FOX is too conservative or CNN is too liberal. I think we're past the days of the media being political. I think we've moved on to something much worse. And it's the sensationalist media. Sure Al-Jazeera is different than Fox news. But the sensationalism of the media far exceeds any political leanings and that is the largest problem. They are all businesses and they are just trying to make a profit. So whatever gets the best ratings, sells the most papers, is what gets reported. The reporters I encountered in Iraq were looking for a big story.

They were out there as businessmen representing the networks. My specific example of this, and this is not my only reason, is this. Our mission was Route 7, between Nasiriah and Al-Kut, and our job was to liberate each of the towns along the route. We got this interpreter, Kudhir. Right from the start, and I told everybody, too, that I had a really bad feeling about him. You have an intimate relationship with your interpreter. One of the first things he said...I introduced myself, and it was really like out of a movie, and we were looking out into the desert and we see these lights from a town that were going to liberate. I asked him about his story. He had gotten out after '91, became an enemy of Saddam. He was a very wealthy Iraqi business man. He dropped his family, everything. Left everyone high and dry. And went to America and set up a restaurant in Washington State. He heard about Operation Iraqi Freedom, and he heard that the DOD was looking for, ideally, Iraqi exiles to come in and be interpreters. This guy got on that bandwagon. I asked him where he was from in Iraq and he goes, 'I'm from that town.' Immediately when he said that, alarm bells went off in my head. This has got to be a conflict of interest. I let my commanding officer know. I said, it didn't seem right. When it was time to go liberate, Scott from *Newsweek* is with us. We move into the downtown part of it and we liberate. And at this time the crowd is building up, people are watching. Our job is to control the crowd. Let them know that we are here to help. We get Kudhir on the speaker. Before it was just a pre-recorded track we had on the speaker. He gets on, and even in his mannerisms, this guy gets on the speaker and makes it seem like singlehandedly, he brought in a company of Marines. Immediately, all of a sudden, one of his sons recognizes his voice, and it becomes a scene. Like, this is Kudhir from 12 years ago! This is a large town, not a small city. The whole family comes out of the woodwork breaking down crying, and it becomes a media frenzy. This guy, clearly this [expletive] left his family with nothing, went to America, and then comes back and makes it seem like singlehandedly he's the one who liberated this town. He left his family! He was very rich and left them with nothing, we found out. This is not a nice guy. Real scumbag. Katie Couric interviewed Scott from *Newsweek* about this. Kudhir reuniting with his family. The press played it up. This is the prime example of a story that will sell papers. This had nothing to do with the war. This guy is not a hero. He's a scumbag. Forget that we liberated the town! It's 'interpreter reunites with his family.' He had been on three missions with us at this point. He refused to do things. We knew that there were arms being stored in a school. He refused to go on that mission with us. He didn't want to make himself look bad. So he decided not to come. He could have been the mayor of that town for all I know.

When I came back to America and got to see TV again, I was out of the loop before, I was bombarded with news from Iraq. What made me mad is that they were reporting 10% of the story, at best. 95% is the negative things. When a soldier gets

killed, it needs to get reported and it shouldn't be something to hide. But for every one negative thing happening in Iraq, there are 99 equal magnitude but opposite positive things going on that never get reported. The reconstruction of the school or the restoration of electricity by 200% in a month doesn't sell commercials as well as a bombing, or six soldiers got killed today. A gigantic sewer treatment plant that is being built would be lucky to get any coverage. The American public educates itself from the media. They have no other source. They form what they think are educated opinions on Iraq from a very skewed source. I came back to the U.S. and everyone said to me: 'It's really out of hand over there. It's gotta be hell over there. They must hate you.' And it's not their fault for having those opinions. I have to try to convince people that 95% of the Iraqis over there love us and don't want us to leave.

### **On Living Conditions...**

The interviewees had no paucity of anecdotes regarding the quality of life of the embedded reporters, who endured the same circumstances as the soldiers. In addition to bearing the discomforts of traveling through difficult terrain in often unkempt conditions, reporters also had to contend with the possibility of injury or death. John McWethy explains that training sessions helped reporters prepare for the worst.

There was training provided by the military. Many found it extremely useful. I spoke to many people who went through the training and were horrified. My God! We get dirty and sleep-deprived. We had to learn how to deal with, my favorite term, sucking chest wounds. Do you know what that means? It means, when your chest takes a large caliber slug, there's a big hole that opens up in your chest, and as your heart is pumping, you can hear the sucking noise of your heart basically sucking air when the arteries and veins are severed. So these reporters were forced to do a little fundamental first aid, if your arm gets blown off, or for sucking chest wounds. So the training was useful. It alerted these people that what they were getting into was going to be enormously physically demanding, and once it becomes physically demanding, it becomes intellectually demanding, and emotionally demanding, and spiritually demanding. It's really a nasty business. Being on a battlefield is absolutely horrible.

Christian Galdabini shares his experiences:

Weather hurt us sometimes. Sometimes we had to shut down because we just couldn't have the camera out in the dust. The sandstorms were the most unbelievable thing I've ever been through in my whole life. It was the worst. You couldn't sleep. Just us talking like this, your mouth would be full of grit. We slept on the ground. We could sleep in the vehicle but it's just too tiny. By that time you're so loony you just lay out on the ground and put a blanket over your head. It's still in your eyes and your face. It was miserable. It was miserable. We were with the troops the whole time. There was no difference between what they did and ate and where they slept.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter sheds light on the embedded journalist program from the perspective of the “insiders.” In many instances, their viewpoints have provided notable counterpoint to what they consider to be myths regarding the deeper intentions of the program. Overall, the interviewees maintain that embeds were not victims of a subversive government plan that would spawn only favorable media coverage of the war. They quell the notion that they could not act independently on the battlefield and dispel the view that coverage from embeds was seriously flawed because it could not provide a sense of the bigger picture. They stress that embedded journalists provided important coverage that countered the falsehoods in international media, and most importantly, were able to provide the public with an unprecedented view of the battlefield.

## **Chapter 4. Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The sheer magnitude of media attention devoted to the 2003 Iraq war has spurred researchers to find trends in its enormity. In deconstructing media content into its bare essentials—actions, tone, or story length, for example, studies have aided researchers in comparing coverage across media or even over time. Generally, studies of the war have largely been concerned with reporters' objectivity and tone, as coverage of this controversial conflict was speculated to reflect the political leanings of the reporters and their respective news outlets. It may appear that coverage has been sliced and diced, as researchers have probed to draw comparisons to coverage of other wars or other news outlets. While some studies seek to gain an overall impression of stories from the battlefield, others are more focused and seek distinctions between the coverage by embedded journalists, anchors, or unilateral reporters, for example. First, this chapter will proceed by highlighting the methods and findings of notable studies of embedded reporters. Then, it will briefly explain how the study at hand differs from the others in its motivation and methodology.

## **Embedded Reporters: What are Americans Getting?**

### *Project for Excellence in Journalism*

The Project for Excellence in Journalism conducted its study, *Embedded Reporters: What are Americans Getting?* in response to the notion that each embedded reporter is limited to providing only a “slice” of the day’s news. The study is concerned with putting those slices together, to reveal patterns in reports from embedded journalists as a whole. The research considers both the mechanics of reports, such as the ratio of live to taped stories, for example, as well as content, such as the topics and actions featured in each story. Although the research is detail-oriented, the study is quite basic in that it is not concerned with subjective measures such as tone or bias. It states no hypotheses or research questions. Despite its simplicity, it is quite useful in gaining a collective impression of the stories from the warfront.

The study analyzes coverage from the first three days of the war, Friday, March 21, Saturday, March 22 and Monday, March 24, 2003. Coverage from embedded reporters on ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, and Fox News, airing from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and during the evening newscasts, yielded a sample of 108 stories.

First, the study considers the components of each story, such as the presence of taped portions, in which the reporter writes a script that is edited along with the footage

to tell a story, and live, unedited pieces. The research concludes that “embedded reports tended toward immediacy over reflection” (PEJ 2). Breaking down the coverage, “live reports constituted the majority of stories at 49%, live audio, 12.1%, combination at 11.1%, and all tape 27.8%. Networks tended to air fully taped packages 35% versus 20% for cable” (PEJ 2). The finding is disheartening for those who believe that in going live, reporters must sacrifice the context that is often present in taped packages. As Christiane Amanpour explained to the *Los Angeles Times*, “Our network has gotten away from taped packages. They think ‘live’ brings more spontaneity, keep it moving is what they tell us” (Lowry and Jensen, as quoted in PEJ 2).

In determining which stories were covered most, this study is helpful in dispelling the beliefs that embedded reporters would be more apt to cover soft feature stories, such as troop morale or preparations for war. The study holds that “anyone who has imagined embedded reporting wouldn’t focus on the actual battlefield was mistaken” (PEJ 4). The researchers categorize stories into military action, pre-combat, personnel/equipment, combat results, aftermath, and other, which comprise “27.8%, 31.5%, 15.7%, 13.0%, 6.5%, 5.5%” (PEJ 4) of the coverage, respectively. The study also dispels the notion that the press relies too heavily on commentary. The analysis indicates that “93% of stories were factual, 3.7% were commentary, 1.9% were analytical, and .9% were opinion” (PEJ 5). The study also offers useful data regarding

the sources that were most often referenced in stories by embedded reporters.

Reporters themselves acted as the only sources in “77% of the stories, followed by commissioned officers in 15% of stories, and enlisted personnel in 8% of stories” (PEJ 6).

Because the PEJ’s study focuses solely on the nuts and bolts, or the composition, of stories by embedded reporters, other research studies must be sought for more sophisticated arguments regarding the impact of embedded journalism on objectivity and tone, for example. As John McWethy described in his interview in the previous chapter, coverage often reflects the action on the ground. Therefore, this study does not take into account how stories from the few first days of war may be markedly different from stories of the first few weeks, as war is quite unpredictable. Yet, the study is useful in that it provides a snapshot of media coverage at a specific point in time, through which the trends be discerned in the coverage by embedded journalists as a whole.

## **Too Close For Comfort?**

### *The University of Cardiff*

The most comprehensive study of coverage by embedded journalists has been conducted by Cardiff University’s School of Journalism, Media, and Cultural Studies.

The study, *Too Close for Comfort? The Role of Embedded Reporting During the 2003*

*Iraq War*, was largely commissioned by the BBC. Portions, however, including the nationwide survey, were funded by Cardiff University. The study, quite extensive, aimed to gain a broad overview of the role of embedded journalists in the war, and therefore employed interviews, content analysis, and survey research.

The study interviewed 23 members of the UK media in order to take into account their wide range of experiences during the war. Interviews were conducted with four reporters embedded with the U.S., three with the UK, four stationed at the Forward Transmission Unit (FTU), two unilateral correspondents, and one stationed in Baghdad. Nine news directors and heads of world news departments were also included. The media provided useful evaluations on the program. Overall, journalists who were embedded with U.S. media were quite satisfied: “they seemed to understand their requirements and provided adequate transport and support for their equipment. They also benefited from being able to pool technology with other U.S. correspondents with whom they were embedded” (Lewis et al. 8). Reporters embedded with UK troops were generally pleased as well, but were frustrated with the logistics of sending reports via couriers to the FTU, the British media hub, where reporters there would combine the reports with information provided by commanders. In addition to the faulty courier system, the FTU also did not function according to expectations: “correspondents at the hub felt that they had very little access to military commanders,

and when they wanted up-to-date information to confirm stories happening elsewhere, FTU briefers were often unable to supply it” (Lewis et al. 8). The inability to retrieve adequate information from the FTU ultimately led to the disillusionment with the system, and to a disconnect between the media and the military.

Researchers at Cardiff were also interested in journalists’ inclination to lose their objectivity when the military provides for their safety. While journalists relayed instances in which the military protected them in potentially deadly situations, “most embedded correspondents told us that they were able to maintain independence, and if necessary, would have been able to file reports that would have shown the armed forces in a bad light” (Lewis et al.10). For some journalists, more problematic than the difficulty involved in maintaining objectivity was the limited mobility on the battlefield. The study cites the experience of Alex Thomson of Channel 4 News: “I am still amazed by people who will tell you that they weren’t censored. Censorship is restricting someone’s freedom of movement as much as it is restricting what someone can and cannot film” (Lewis et al. 10). This finding was important to the researchers, who concluded that coverage from the war was affected indirectly: “public relations strategies in the Pentagon are partly based on the recognition that influencing coverage involves controlling the context in which journalists report, rather than more direct forms of interference” (Lewis et al. 11). The interviewees in Cardiff’s study do not

reveal, however, the reasons movement was restricted. As the interviewees stated in Chapter Three of this study, the movement of journalists around the battlefield was often discouraged in situations when safety could be jeopardized. This notion of constrained mobility plays into the consensus among Cardiff's interviewees that coverage by embedded journalists was one-sided and lacked context, especially given that no soldiers were embedded with Iraqi troops. The UK reporters recognize that the mobility issue often prevented the coverage of certain topics, a crucial point that is evidenced by the lack of coverage of ordinary Iraqis, for example. The researchers note that the interviewees were quite concerned about maintaining balanced reports.

According to those interviewed in the last chapter of this study, American reporters seem more accepting that balanced coverage was not always possible, though they acknowledge that balance is important. Regarding the American coverage, UK reporter Lindsay Hilsum notes that "The Americans only saw one side of the war on television...there were a lot of journalists in Baghdad, probably two hundred, and everybody was there apart from the Americans" (Lewis et al. 10). Perhaps the American interviewees would contend that their relative absence in Baghdad, especially in the midst of the heavy bombing campaign, was due to their observance of the military's warnings not to remain in the Iraqi capital during that dangerous time. In addition to mobility, however, many of Cardiff's interviewees also suggest that the

lack of coverage of Iraqi casualties was a function of reporters' self-censorship. The researchers at Cardiff note that the interviewees found British television to be "too sanitized" in comparison to coverage by French, German, or Arab stations. Those interviewed in Chapter Three of this study, however, seem to be more accepting that coverage was subject to standards of decency as defined by news editors. Interestingly enough, the opinions of the UK journalists involved in Cardiff's study seem to voice similar concerns as the media critics in America regarding the shortcomings of the embedded journalist program.

To gain perspective on the embedded journalist program from the military standpoint, the researchers at Cardiff interviewed six individuals involved with the program at the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and four at the Pentagon. The most notable distinction between the two departments concerns their somewhat conflicting motivations for the program: "The Pentagon saw the embed program as part of a well-planned, coordinated media and "Psych-Ops" strategy, while the MoD were motivated more by the necessity to accommodate the media during the war. In short, the Pentagon saw the embeds as part of the military campaign in a way that the MoD did not" (Lewis et al.16). The interviews in Chapter Three of this study lend support to Cardiff's finding that the Pentagon saw the program as more than just a means to providing the media with coverage they desired. The Pentagon and the public affairs

officers stressed that the program was quite symbiotic in that it allowed both groups to benefit from each other, with the media outlets acquiring unprecedented access to the war and the military obtaining the extra “eyes and ears” that would check the coverage of foreign outlets. Perhaps the differences in the motivations of the Pentagon and the MoD help to account for the variations between the American and UK journalists, with the former appearing more willing to cooperate with the military and more accepting of the program’s nuances, and the latter expressing skepticism of the military and frustration with the logistics of the program.

Researchers at Cardiff then turned to their attention to an analysis of the television coverage itself. Television evening newscasts from the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, and Sky news were analyzed during the first three weeks of the war. The sample of 1,534 reports enabled researchers to break down the coverage to determine which types of news reports appeared most, the frequency of references to Iraqis and their capability to use weapons of mass destruction, and the frequency of references to the state of the Iraqi people.

In terms of types of stories that comprised the news, the researchers found that “reports from embeds constituted 9% of reports, reports from Baghdad correspondents 6%, and reports from briefings only 4%. The bulk of reports—48%--were delivered by anchors in the studio, while nearly one in five, 19%, were edited packages or studio

based analysis” (Lewis et al. 24). The researchers concluded that embedded journalists were important in the overall coverage of the war, since their reports were aired more frequently than those of other on-location reporters, such as unilaterals and correspondents in Baghdad and Qatar. These latter reporters, then, played less of a role in the Iraq war than they did in previous conflicts.

Given that the anchors in the studio provided the majority of the coverage, the researchers were curious as to how well broadcasters were able to maintain their impartiality. The study revealed that the anchors tended to have a pro-war slant, as evidenced by their referencing of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction: “9 out of 10 references to WMD tended to assume Iraqi capability, while only 1 in 10 cast doubt on it” (Lewis et al.25). Similarly, the a pro-war slant was gleaned from the anchors’ treatment of the condition of the Iraqis: “despite the mixed reports coming from reporters on the ground, broadcasters were twice as likely to represent the Iraqi people as welcoming the invasion than as suspicious, reserved, or hostile” (Lewis et al. 25). The most memorable example of Iraqis welcoming the Americans occurred as the statue of Saddam Hussein fell in Paradise Square. The researchers determined that despite the great deal of news coverage devoted to this event, which portrayed the Iraqis welcoming the liberation, “the most celebratory reporting—the toppling of Saddam—did not come from embedded reporters” (Lewis et al. 28). Thus, the

research concludes that reporters who were embedded and those who stationed in Baghdad provided a more balanced picture of events than the anchors in the studios.

To complement the interviews and the content analysis, the researchers employed a survey of 1,002 people across Britain to assess how the public evaluated coverage of the war. Among the main findings, an overwhelming majority of respondents, 92%, agreed that TV should be impartial in wartime, while 5% disagreed. The survey also determined that that “47% of respondents chose the BBC as their most trusted source of information about Iraq, followed by Sky at 12.5%, ITV News at 10%, Broadsheets at 9%, and Tabloids at 7%” (Lewis et al. 35). The study was also concerned with how respondents would rate the relative importance of different types of reporters—those based Baghdad, those who act as independents, and those who are embedded with troops. 88%, 65%, 57% (Lewis et al. 37) of respondents, respectively, regarded these groups as important. Because the embedded journalists were rated as having less importance than the other roles, researchers at Cardiff concluded that the public was perhaps skeptical that a close relationship between the media and the military would influence the coverage.

### **Embedding the Truth. A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Objectivity and Television Coverage of the Iraq War**

*Sean Aday, Steven Livingston, Maeve Hebert*

The question of journalists' ability to maintain objectivity also been pondered by Sean Aday, Steven Livingston, and Maeve Hebert, who are curious as to how this norm, which bears different connotations across cultures, affected bias in the coverage of the 2003 Iraq war. They argue that this war, more than any other, was most susceptible to bias in coverage, given the unique media milieu in which it was fought. First, the emergence of the large-scale embedded journalist program sparked the fear that journalists' bonds with soldiers would preclude their ability to report objectively. Also, Fox News Channel (FNC) and Al Jazeera, which were not present in the first Gulf War, appeared to be twin threats to objectivity, since "the channels share two attributes: (1) they both claim to be objective and (2) they have both been frequently accused of biased reporting....FNC was often accused of being jingoistic in favor of American, while Al Jazeera was accused of being virulently anti-American" (Aday et al. 6). These factors were expected to send media bias soaring to new heights.

The researchers employ a cross-cultural analysis which analyzes coverage from five American networks ABC, CBS, CNN, FNC, and the Arab network Al Jazeera from March 20 to April 20. A sample of 1,820 stories was yielded from "coverage by the American networks taken 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and the hour-long nightly news on Al Jazeera taped via satellite transmission for those same days" (Aday et al. 8). The study hypothesizes that if all the outlets are truly based on norms of

objectivity, then “1. there will be no difference in story tone between networks or across cultures and 2. no difference in the overall portrait of war, as measured by what is and what is not covered, between networks or across cultures” (Aday et al. 10). By “portrait of war,” the researchers imply the types of storylines that are portrayed in coverage. They indicate that it is vital to take into account the storylines in a study about objectivity, since the “portrait the press paints of a given news event takes into account two important considerations: “what is covered and what is not” (Aday et al.11). They understand that framing the news implies conscious choices, in terms of deciding which information is included or excluded from stories.

The researchers use “tone” as their measure for objectivity. Because tone in the traditional sense is often associated with positive and negative connotations, the researchers have found it insufficient, for such a “coding scheme has difficulty telling us whether an individual story was biased, instead making the mistake of assuming a story that is ‘bad’ for the United States is ‘anti-American’ and one that is ‘good’ for it is jingoistic’ (Aday et al. 9) Furthermore, the scheme would be not be applicable to Al Jazeera’s coverage, since positive and negative do not correspond in the same way as they do in American coverage. Therefore, to measure objectivity the researchers have defined tone according to a five point scale, in which “three” corresponds to neutrality, and deviations from the neutral point in the upwards direction, a 4 or a 5, represent

support for the United States/coalition, while deviations in the opposite direction, a 1 or a 2 represents criticism of the United States. The researchers were cued to look for examples of “pro-coalition slant” or “anti-coalition bias,” such as “opinionated assessments (e.g. ‘these troops are courageous’) or value-laden phrases (e.g ‘the war of occupation’)” (Aday et al. 10).

In terms of the “portrait of war,” the research found that all networks featured battles prominently. CNN and Fox News gave more air time to stories about strategy and tactics, much more than the other American outlets and Al-Jazeera. The storylines that were portrayed hardly at all in the American outlets were those dealing with dissent in the United States or abroad and international diplomacy. By contrast, Al Jazeera devoted “6.7% and 13%” (Aday et al. 11) respectively, to these topics. The American networks did not emphasize casualties. Interestingly, the study found that “Al Jazeera did not air many stories on civilian casualties, contrary to popular wisdom” (Aday, et al. 12). Yet, upon closer analysis of Al Jazeera’s stories in which civilian casualties were emphasized, the tone of these stories was in fact found to be quite critical.

The study found that the stories of ABC, NBC, CBS, and CNN (5:00-5:30) and CNN (6:00-6:30) were overwhelmingly neutral, with percentages of “95.6%, 94.4%, 95.5%, 91.6%, and 92.8%,” (Aday et al. 14) respectively. Al Jazeera’s coverage was

slightly less at 89.2% neutral, while Fox News was considerably less than the other networks at 62.1% neutral (Aday et al. 14). It should be noted that Fox news was “37.9% supportive, and 0% critical” (Aday et al. 14). In analyzing the tone by type of reporter, the researchers did not find support that embedded journalists would be more likely to report favorably on the troops: “embedded reporters had among the highest percentage of neutral stories (91 percent) of any type of reporter” (Aday et al.15). In comparison, anchors produced stories that were “88.7% neutral and 11.9% supportive” (Aday et al. 18). These findings have led the researchers to conclude that news from the 2003 Iraq war “was not all that bad” (Aday et al. 18). However, they do express disappointment that “executives at the network [Fox] consciously chose to abandon a major component of objectivity—detachment—by encouraging reporters and anchors to use the first person plural when describing coalition forces and the United States” (Aday et al. 17).

### **Embedded Journalists In Military Combat Units: Impact on Newspaper Story Frames and Tone**

**Michael Pfau, Michael Haigh, Mitchell Gettle, Michael Donnelly, Gregory Scott, Dana Warr, and Elaine Wittenberg**

For two reasons, this review has included a study regarding newspapers in spite of the fact that it is most concerned with studies of television coverage during the Iraq war. First, the study’s premise and hypotheses are similar to those in the next chapter.

Second, the study concludes that the unique circumstances of embedding have produced a trend among newspaper reporters that has been thought to be more characteristic of television coverage, namely, the decontextualization of stories.

Similar to the studies above, this research is curious as to how news coverage from the war reflects the nuances of embedded reporting. The study involves a content analysis of newspaper reports on ground operations during the first five days of the war. The newspapers analyzed are the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Chicago Tribune*. The researchers expect that reporters will readily identify with the troops, since “the process of enculturation affects embedded reporters assigned to military units for a short time, due to the combat conditions” (Pfau et al. 78). Thus, the study hypothesizes that compared to nonembedded coverage, newspaper articles of embedded journalists about the military will produce more stories that are episodic, or “stories that seek to personalize issues,” (Pfau et al. 77) than those that are more thematic, which are “in-depth, interpretive analysis” (Pfau et al. 77). The study further hypothesizes that “compared to nonembedded reporters, embeds will produce more positive newspaper stories about the military, and compared to coverage of Operations Desert Storm and Enduring Freedom, newspaper stories about Iraqi Freedom will manifest more positive bias toward the military” (Pfau et al. 79). To measure the tone of coverage, the study used “a global attitude measure

consisting of six 7-interval scales, including negative/positive, foolish/wise, worthless/valuable, unacceptable/acceptable, bad/good, and unfavorable/favorable. To measure the depiction of trustworthiness in troops, a 4-item version of the Individualized Trust Scale (ITS) included dishonest/honest, untrustworthy/trustworthy, deceptive/candid, and insincere/sincere. A single 5-interval scale was used to measure the extent to which an article embodied episodic framing” (Pfau et al. 80).

The study finds support for all three of its hypotheses. Indeed, the stories of embedded journalists were more episodic and favorable to the military compared to those of nonembedded reporters. As predicted, the presence of embedded reporters during Operation Iraqi Freedom produced coverage that is more favorable to the military as compared to the coverage of Operations Desert Storm and Enduring Freedom.

## **Conclusion**

The study in Chapter Five combines elements of each of the research studies mentioned in this review. Like the study from the Project for Excellence in Journalism, this study, in a sense, is concerned with overall trends in coverage by embedded journalists and correspondents. It does not attempt to analyze coverage by *specific* types of reporters, as does Cardiff’s study, for example, which distinguishes between “Baghdad correspondents,” “Qatar correspondents,” and “unilaterals.” Like Cardiff’s

study, however, this study has found that interviews with members of the media and the military provide meaningful information that cannot be quantified by empirical research alone. It is interesting to note that Cardiff's interviewees from the UK hold different perceptions of the embedded journalist program than do the American interviewees in Chapter Three. Thus, Cardiff's study provides an interesting counterpoint for this study.

As Chapter Five will illustrate in greater detail, this study is concerned with how news frames, which are consciously selected by the media, subsequently influence the public's understandings of events. Thus, the final two studies mentioned in this review are complements to this study in their analyses of news frames. To gain a sense of how objectivity varies across cultures, *Embedding the Truth* examines the types of stories emphasized most in the "portrait of war," coupled with the measure for neutrality for these stories. The study is premised on the notion that what is ignored or left out in a story is often culture-specific. The study in Chapter Five, however, is not quite concerned with measuring the objectivity of reporters, but in a related vein, is interested in getting a sense of how deficiencies in the news, or "information biases," lead to conflicting appraisals of the war. It is specifically concerned with how the lack of content, context, and closure leads to varied opinions. Like *Embedding Journalists in Military Combat Units*, the study in Chapter Five will examine how coverage

changes over time, but instead of determining how these changes occur across wars, this study will examine changes at intervals within the same war.

## **Chapter 5. Methodology and Findings**

### **The Visual Medium**

Of all news media, television is arguably the most provocative in its immediacy, allowing viewers to experience events as they unfurl. For war coverage especially, the medium makes way for a beguiling combination of pictures and words, through which the percussive of explosions, the rat-a-tat of high-tech weaponry, and the jarring chaos of an insurgency on an Iraqi street ostensibly validate their corresponding stories. How well television coverage translates abstractions, however, such as age-old hatreds, suffering, and “success” in warfare is debatable. Television coverage is paradoxical, say some: “with war, television accentuates myths of connectedness even as it further removes us from actual human connection” (Solomon and Erlich 25). Although viewers are transported to remote settings via their television screens, the motivations and actions of the key figures in each story are filtered through reporters, who are very much beholden to the nuances of the medium. In other words, “television is daily but has a severe time constraint” (McCombs and Shaw 184). Despite its status as an “always-on” medium, television requires that individual news segments fit within the confines of a broadcast. Because stories are reported as they develop, resolution need not be achieved when segments end. Given the nature of television news, then, media analyst Mark Crispin Miller ponders how well the

medium allows viewers to comprehend war: “What do we see when we watch a war? ...While a war is among the biggest things that can ever happen to a nation and a people, devastating families, blasting away roofs and walls, we see it compressed and miniaturized on a sturdy little piece of furniture, which stands and shines at the very center of our household” (Solomon and Erlich 26). Historian Daniel Czitrom, similarly, posits a television-oriented society, in which the medium acts as a pervasive cultural tool: “We may accurately speak of television as a powerful economic institution; as an aesthetic form, as the major purveyor of advertising and arbiter of life-styles; as the chief determinant of the parameters of contemporary politics; as a deceptively complex system of signs; or as a highly individuated, democratically distributed ritual object at the center of many people’s everyday life” (Czitrom xiii). Germane to this study is television’s role as a “deceptively complex system of signs,” which suggests that the medium provides viewers with cues on how to interpret the world.

## **Motivation**

This study is concerned with the cues, or more specifically, the news “frames,” employed by reporters in television news broadcasts of the 2003 Iraq War, and how these frames subsequently influenced viewers’ interpretations of the war. The study is grounded in the reality that the constraints of news broadcasts prevent reporters from

creating longer, more detailed stories from the battlefield. Thus, television reporters, more so than those of other media outlets, must determine which aspects of the human drama should be emphasized during their often brief on-air segments. As Matthew Kerbel notes in Chapter Two, reporters tend to rely on frames that tell the story as quickly and as enticingly as possible. Embedded reporters have been criticized for essentially “cherry-picking” aspects of the war that affirmed their personal convictions on the conflict and the subjects they were covering, effectually cordoning objectivity from their reports. As was acknowledged in Chapter One, this study cannot address the nearly impossible task of directly measuring the biases of individual reporters on their decisions to frame stories, which critics speculated were prominently at play during the 2003 Iraq War. Nevertheless, the study is premised on the assumption that news frames imply deficiencies, since certain types of information are highlighted at the expense of others. By analyzing the elements of stories that were emphasized most across different television networks, this study will attempt to provide a context for the arguments outlined in Chapter Two. It proceeds from the framework laid out by W. Lance Bennett, who pronounces that in reality, journalistic bias in news is not as problematic as has been speculated: “some variations in news content or political emphasis do occur but can seldom be explained as the result of journalists routinely injecting their partisan views into the news. So many Americans are caught up in dead-end debates

about a kind of news bias that is at once far less systematic and much less dangerous than commonly assumed” (Bennett 33). The real dilemma with news, claims Bennett, involves “universal information problems,” (Bennett 34) which have arisen from the changing nature of media: “communication technologies, beginning with the wire services, and progressing to satellite feeds, have evolved with corporate profit motives to create a new form of ‘lowest-common-denominator’ information, lacking both critical perspectives and coherent organizing principles” (Bennett 34). Just as this study does not aim to analyze journalistic motives, nor is it concerned with corporate pressures on the delivery of news. It is solely concerned with war coverage as it appeared to viewers, with all its vagaries and information biases.

Bennett purports that four fundamental information biases exist in news coverage. These biases, seemingly magnified in the limited space of television news segments, preclude the audience’s ability to gauge a sense of the larger context for stories. Bennett finds information biases troubling, for they represent the deficiencies in news that threaten the audience’s ability to make accurate evaluations of current events. Such appraisals are difficult to make when reporters increasingly deliver stories that are emotional and trivialized rather than analytical and contextual. The first information bias involves the “who,” or the human subjects, emphasized in each drama. Bennett recognizes that “whether the focus is on sympathetic heroes and

victims or hateful scoundrels and culprits...the media preference for personalized human interest news creates a ‘can’t see the forest for the trees’ information bias that makes it difficult to see the big picture that lies beyond the many actors crowding the center stage who are caught in the eye of the news camera” (Bennett 35). According to Bennett, reporters tend to “emphasize the surface appearances...the well-known or colorful personalities involved” (Bennett 51). The repetition of certain human subjects cues the audience that these players are most significant, or the most affected by the drama. When reporting on complex situations, for example, reporters will often focus on the plight or experience of a single individual, who then becomes the “face” for the situation as a whole. Stories that are personalized tend to reduce multi-faceted stories to simpler, more emotive reports.

The second information bias involves the type of drama, or action, highlighted in a story. Dramatized news goes hand-in-hand with personalized news, since “drama, after all, is the quintessential medium for representing human conflict” (Bennett 52). Just as reporters highlight the most colorful or unique subjects, they also focus on the events that are the most gripping. The combination of compelling actors and equally as riveting scenarios is the result of what Bennett describes as “the temptation for news organizations to look for the most extreme cases rather than the most representative examples of a subject” (Bennett 56). Because dramatized news reports tell of

immediate happenings, they neglect discussion of underlying causes or the deeper meanings of that action. Bennett recognizes that “lost in the news drama, *melodrama* is often the more appropriate term, are sustained analyses of the persistent problems of our time, such as inequality, hunger, resource depletion, population pressures...Serious though such human problems are, they just are not dramatic enough on a day-to-day level to make the news” (Bennett 36). Rather, highly visual camera-worthy events are given preference over storylines that are more abstract and therefore, less visually-dependent. The preoccupation with the here and now, in which the current action is emphasized with little or no mention of the chain of events leading to that action, produces a skewed understanding of cause and effect. The isolation of events from a larger context, then, plays into the third information bias—fragmentation.

While the personalization and dramatization biases are direct results of the types of content selected for each story, fragmentation is the outcome of how that information is structured. Not only are elements within the story disjointed from the larger event at hand, but the story itself is fragmented from other related news, so that it “comes to us in sketchy dramatic capsules” (Bennett 38). The fragmentation of information within a story is exacerbated by the space limits of the news format, in which reporters focus solely on what is enticing, due to the “fear of boring viewers with too much information” (Bennett 38). Because stories exist as self-contained

segments, they are therefore “hard to assemble into a big picture” (Bennett 38).

Bennett likens fragmented news segments to a jigsaw puzzle, in which the viewer must piece together individual reports to gain a more complete picture of events.

The fourth information problem, the authority-order bias, concerns resolution, or how dramatic events are settled by the conclusion of the segment. Because the most chaotic events are stressed in the news, reporters attempt to “normalize” the drama with the introduction of an official voice that helps to mitigate the confusion. Bennett notes that journalists are necessarily wrapped up in “whether or not the world is returned to a safe, normal place...along with related questions of whether authorities are capable of establishing or restoring it” (Bennett 40). Bennett points out that the authoritative voice contributes to the very drama of the segment, as it simultaneously affirms the shock or gravity of the event while providing “... a necessary dramatic counterpoint” (Bennett 39) to that action. Thus, Bennett explains, the use of official voices must not be confused for a contextual reference of sorts: “passing for depth and coherence in this system of personalized, dramatized, and fragmented information is the... tendency in which the authoritative voices of officials take center stage to interpret the confusing events that threaten the order of social life” (Bennett 38). While the voices may bring order to the mayhem by the close of the segment, the

underlying causes of the drama are left unmentioned, and a feel for the bigger picture remains unfulfilled.

### **Methodology and Hypotheses: Adapting the Information Biases**

This study examined 272 news segments from correspondents and embedded journalists during two points of 2003 Iraq War, March 20-April 4, 2003, and March 31-April 14, 2004. Footage from the television networks ABC, NBC, FOX and CNN were derived from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive. Financial and time constraints prevented the examination of additional network and cable news outlets. The unit of analysis is the individual news segment by a correspondent or an embedded journalist that appeared in an evening newscast of *ABC World News Tonight*, *NBC Nightly News*, *Fox Report*, or *CNN NewsNight*. The study aims to determine the extent to which information biases in the news differ by type of reporter, news outlet, and point of time in the war during which the segments were aired.

### **Information Biases by Type of Reporter**

**H<sub>1</sub>: The information biases by correspondents and embedded reporters will vary based on their differing vantage points in the war.**

**H<sub>1a</sub>: Correspondents are likely to include a wider range of subjects and actions within their stories than embedded reporters, who are most likely to feature stories about the experiences of journalists and the military.**

First, the study makes the distinction between coverage by correspondents, who were stationed in Iraq or neighboring countries to cover the war, and embedded journalists, who lived and traveled with military units. Correspondents are factored into a study primarily concerned with embedded journalists to serve as a measuring stick of sorts, by which to evaluate how the stories of embeds differ from those of another population of war reporters who did not work within such close proximity to the troops.

Of importance to this study is the notion that correspondents will cover a greater range of human subjects and actions while providing more context for their stories than embeds, since their reports were gathered from a variety of sources. Correspondents received news from embedded journalists, other correspondents, and generals at Central Command posts (CentCom), or the media hubs, where generals held regular press briefings throughout the war. From this lookout, then, correspondents had more options for stories than embedded reporters, who could observe actions only from their positions within military units: “embedded journalists see very localized action and it’s a pinprick...they don’t have the ability to lay a strategic overview” (Tumber and Palmer 26). Therefore, their coverage is expected to reflect the subjects and actions in their immediate surroundings, such as the experiences of the military, as well as their own situation as embeds.

For the purposes of this research, the study modified Bennett's notions of personalization and dramatization. The research does not determine if, indeed, the human subjects of stories were the most "well-known and colorful," as Bennett mentioned as journalists' criteria for determining the most newsworthy subjects of stories. Rather, the study seeks to determine which types of subjects, more generally, received what share of the coverage. Likewise, the research does not attempt to discern an objective measure for the camera-worthiness of the drama portrayed in each segment. Again, the study is interested in a general sense of which types of actions were emphasized most in the coverage.

To measure the personalization bias, the following categories denote the main subjects in the stories:

1. **Journalists:** This category includes the embedded journalists and correspondents who are the subjects of their own stories.
2. **Coalition Forces:** This category includes references to U.S. and coalition troops, generals, and government officials.
3. **Iraqi civilians:** This category includes ordinary Iraqis not involved in the Iraqi government or military.
4. **Iraqi enemies:** This category designates subjects who are part of Iraqi armies or terror squads, such as the Republican Guard or the Fayedeen. It also includes

Iraqi officials, Saddam Hussein and his sons, Uday and Qusay Hussein, and Iraqi prisoners of war.

5. **Other:** This category is reserved for subjects who do not fit neatly into the above mentioned categories, such as the U.S. contractors killed during an attack in Fallujah.

Main subjects are defined as those actors who are directly involved in or affected by the drama. Stories often contain more than one main subject. For example, on April 3, 2003 ABC's Mike Cerre, embedded with the Marines, recounts a 20 mile long firefight between Iraqi soldiers and the Marines, and the unexpected surrender of 2500 Iraqi soldiers, who waved white flags after failing to thwart the U.S. advance into Baghdad. Here, both the Marines and the Iraqi militia are the main subjects of the story.

To measure the dramatization bias, the following categories were created to designate the most frequently reported actions:

1. **Strategies:** In addition to stories detailing engagements in battle, this category also includes tactics employed by coalition forces, the use of particular types of weaponry, and the deployment and movement of troops. It also includes actions relating to the strategies used by Iraqi fighters, such as the use of human shields.

2. **Uprisings:** This category designates uprisings by Iraqis, such as street riots, ambushes, the igniting of cars, or the use of roadside bombs.
3. **Toll of War:** This category designates the unfortunate happenings of war, such as friendly fire, kidnappings, or accidents such as the downing of helicopters.
4. **The Rebuilding of Iraq/Humanitarian Efforts:** This category includes actions such as the delivery of food and medicine to Iraq, the progress of humanitarian aid efforts, and the restoration of water and electricity to Iraqi towns.
5. **Plight of Coalition:** This category includes experiences specific to embedded journalists and troops, such as their ability to cope with the loss of fallen soldiers, their endurance through sandstorms and inclement weather, and their struggle with injuries.
6. **Plight of Iraqis:** This category includes situations specific to ordinary Iraqis and insurgents alike, as they cope with the disruption in their cities, civilian deaths, and overcrowded hospitals.
7. **Other:** This category designates actions that did not fit within the above categories, such as the debate between coalition forces and Iraqis regarding the public opinion and propaganda “wars.”

The study codes only those situations within segments that are considered to be “major.” That is, stories in which subjects and actions are clearly established by and expounded upon by the reporter. Excluded are very incidental happenings that received only a mere mention in the segment. A story can contain more than one related major action, however. For example, on March 31, 2003, Fox’s Greg Kelly reports from the U.S. Army 3<sup>rd</sup> infantry on an incident in which coalition forces engaged in intense fighting with the Iraqi Fayedeen and Republican Guard while trying to secure a bridge over the Euphrates River. When capturing this incident on camera, Kelly and his camera crew were struck by mortar fire that knocked them to their feet, broke the camera, and hit Kelly in the face. Because the reporter expounds upon his “scare” equally as much as the fight for the bridge, the segment is coded as having two types of major action: “Strategies,” which encompasses the U.S. strategy to secure the bridge and the ensuing fight with the Iraqis, and “Plight of the Coalition,” which takes into account the experiences of the embedded journalists during the war.

### **Information Biases by News Outlet**

**H<sub>2</sub>: There will be a difference in the information biases based on television news outlet.**

The study's second aim is to grapple with the perceived differences in the coverage according to news outlet. Chapter Two delves into the arguments that coverage of the war varied by media outlet, with some outlets being more critical of the war and others more favorable. According to political scientist James N. Druckman, individuals turn to trusted "elites" to help them make sense of happenings. In this line of thinking, then, individuals look to their favored news outlets for information they believe is accurate: "...citizens delegate to ostensibly credible elites to help them sort through many possible frames...they are thus selective about which frames they believe—they only believe frames that come from sources they perceive to be credible..." (Druckman 1045). Thus, this study is concerned with determining if the variation in coverage among the news outlets is significant enough to consider the outlets themselves a factor in the formation of these arguments.

This study does not employ direct measures for such qualities as "favorable," "patriotic," or "negative," subjective modifiers which have been used by critics to characterize the coverage. Although it cannot directly gauge the tone of the coverage, the study can, however, be used to make inferences as to the origins of these arguments, by comparing the information biases across news outlets. For example, news outlets that contain more stories about the experiences of journalists and troops, and less about the plight of Iraqis and the humanitarian effort, could be viewed as

“propagandistic” by those who believe that certain outlets “ballyhooed” the war by emphasizing coverage about battle and strategy and downplaying stories about the plight of war experienced by Iraqi civilians. On the other hand, news that highlights violent uprisings by Iraqis and the difficulties encountered by coalition forces, for example, may have contributed to the view that war coverage was negative and unrepresentative of the progress made in Iraq.

In addition to contextualizing these arguments by measuring the personalization and dramatization biases, the study assesses the fragmentation and disorder in news, which can contribute to varying perceptions of the war. The drama at hand is heightened when it is fragmented from a larger context, a notion that is confounded by Bennett’s observation that journalists tend to select the most “extreme cases” to represent particular circumstances. Thus, isolation from a historical or analytical context leads viewers to generalize about what they see. To measure the fragmentation of news stories, the study determines if the major action in each segment stands alone or is situated in an analytical context. Each segment is coded as either of the following:

1. **Episodic:** Segments are as episodic if the reporter “parachutes the audience into the middle of an already developed situation” (Bennett 41). There is little or no mention of context or analysis.

2. **Thematic:** Like episodic segments, thematic segments may begin *in media res*, but with the caveat that the reporter situates that action within a social, historical, political, or analytical context.

In a March 31, 2003 live report, ABC's Richard Engle catapults the viewer to the balcony of his hotel, where he is witnessing the bombing of Baghdad. He describes the sounds and sights of the explosions to Peter Jennings back in the studio. When the reverberations shake his hotel, he pauses to exclaim: "Hold on, I'm putting on a helmet!" The segment is caught up with the here and now, and makes no reference to larger themes such as the origin of the conflict. On the other hand, on March 31, 2004, ABC's correspondent John Berman reports on the assault on four American contractors who were killed in Fallujah. He contextualizes the event by discussing the hatred for Americans that was at the heart of the Iraqis' violence, and turns to the street to talk to other Iraqis about their opinions of the US. Finding mixed reaction, he concludes that "the complicated response [to the killings] reflects a complicated response to the U.S." Although Berman does not determine the precise motivation for the heinous act, viewers are able to gauge a sense of Iraqi sentiments, and more importantly, why the situation in Iraq is so precarious.

The authority-order bias, similarly, provides cues that help viewers make sense of events. Although Bennett proposes that this bias is marked by the presence of an

“official voice” brought in to comment on the disorder, this study does not seek to determine which official voices were most frequently relied upon, as the journalists themselves, especially the embeds, often act as the authoritative voice. Yet, the study is concerned with how segments are concluded, with either a continuation of the disorder or with a return to normal. Quite often before signing off, journalists provide a final comment or two that summarizes the state of affairs: “...But so far, it’s smooth sailing,” (David Bloom, NBC, 3/21/2003) “to sum it up, a dicey day, a very dicey day,” (John Donovan, ABC, 3/22/2003) “...the real battle hasn’t begun yet...there is enormous uncertainty as to how cohesive the Republican Guard is” (Nic Robertson, CNN, 3/21/2003). These lines contribute to viewers’ assessments of the resolution at the end of each segment. Although the study does not employ a direct method to determine if an overwhelming presence of chaotic stories in the news does, in fact, lead to negative views of the war, or conversely, if ordered stories lead to positive assessments, the authority-order bias allows inferences to be made, in which chaos and order correspond to negative or positive views, respectively. To determine if segments are chaotic or ordered, each is coded as one of the following:

1. **Order:** A chaotic situation is presented, but order is restored by the conclusion of the segment. This designation also includes segments in which order was intact from start to finish.

2. **Disorder:** A chaotic situation is presented, with order left in doubt by the conclusion of the segment.

On March 20, 2003, NBC's Dana Lewis presented a story in which the troops suit up on three separate occasions after threats of chemical or biological attacks. Although the attacks never transpired, Lewis reassures viewers that despite the scare, the troops are prepared for future attacks, and until then, "all is in working order." On March 26, 2003, ABC's Richard Engle, on the other hand, does not conclude his story with such certainty. He reports on the civilian deaths that occurred after an errant missile crashed into a marketplace, and describes the pools of blood and severed limbs left in its wake. Iraqis doubt they are as protected as they once believed: "Iraqis thought the air campaign was safe and precise, but now worry that they are targets." Indisputably, the segment lacks closure, as the insecurities remain strong and unmitigated by the time Engle signs off.

### **Information Biases by Time Sample**

**H<sub>3</sub>: There will be a difference in the information biases of correspondents based on time sample.**

The final aim of the study is to examine how information biases change over time. War is by no means static, given that special operations are tailored to each phase

of the conflict. In terms of media coverage, then, each stage in the “theater” of war would seemingly initiate a change in the subjects and actions that ought to be emphasized in reports. This study seeks to determine not only if information biases changed over time in response to the variations in warfare, but if these biases are reflective of the change in *how* the war was covered a year after it began. In other words, events during the first two weeks of the war garnered an overabundance of stories from the warfront, reported by equally as many correspondents as embedded journalists. The two-week sample of television news reports taken a year after the start of the war, however, features considerably less stories, 65, compared to the 207 from the first two weeks, and are told exclusively by correspondents. Although some media outlets undoubtedly had remaining reporters embedded with troops at this time, no reports from embeds were available for coding from the television outlets during their evening programs in the second time sample. Because less air-time for war reports was available during the second time sample than the first, for example, correspondents may have been spurred to report the most dramatic, and therefore the most episodic and disordered, happenings as possible. While any number of factors are at play in explaining why correspondents reported as they did, this study is primarily concerned with determining if there is a change in information biases over time; a finding that

may support the notion that the media's "mood swings," as laid out in Chapter Two, contribute to the conflicting sentiments about the war coverage.

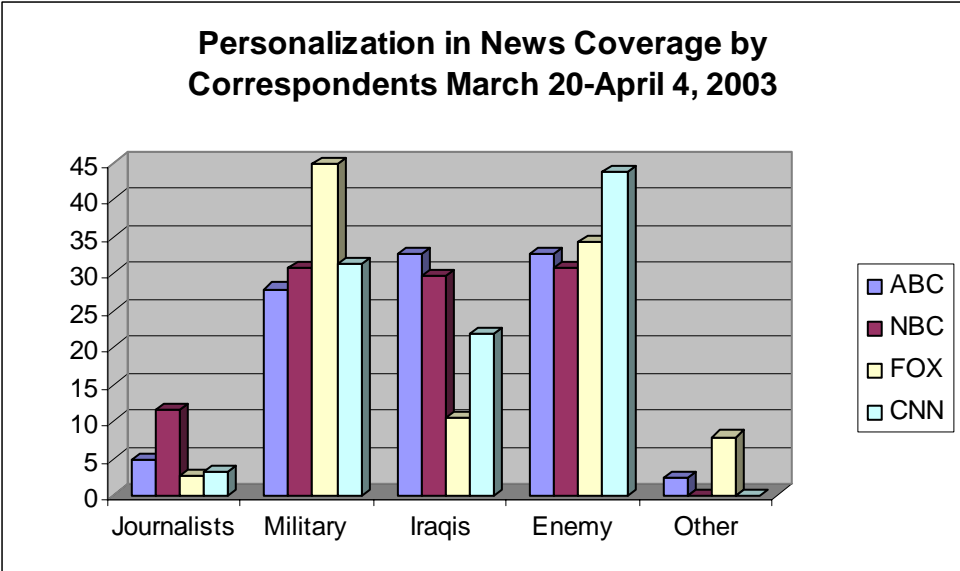
## **Findings**

### **Personalization**

The results support the hypothesis that there is a difference between correspondents and embedded journalists in the human subjects appearing most in their reports. According to Figures 5.1 and 5.2, across all media outlets, correspondents reference the Iraqis significantly more than the embedded journalists reference this group. This finding may be explained by the fact that correspondents received their information from a wider range of sources than embedded journalists, who had a much narrower view of the war. Correspondents from ABC, NBC, FOX, and CNN feature Iraqis as 32.6%, 29.6%, 10.5%, and 21.8% of all subjects, respectively, while embedded journalists featured the Iraqis a mere 8.8%, 12.3%, 2.5%, and 3.6%, respectively. Despite the considerable difference between the correspondents and the embedded journalists on the representation of Iraqis, this subject group is one of the least represented in the coverage by both sets of reporters, following very low representation of the Journalists and Other subject groups. Embedded journalists, across all news outlets, on the other hand, feature the military as the main subjects of

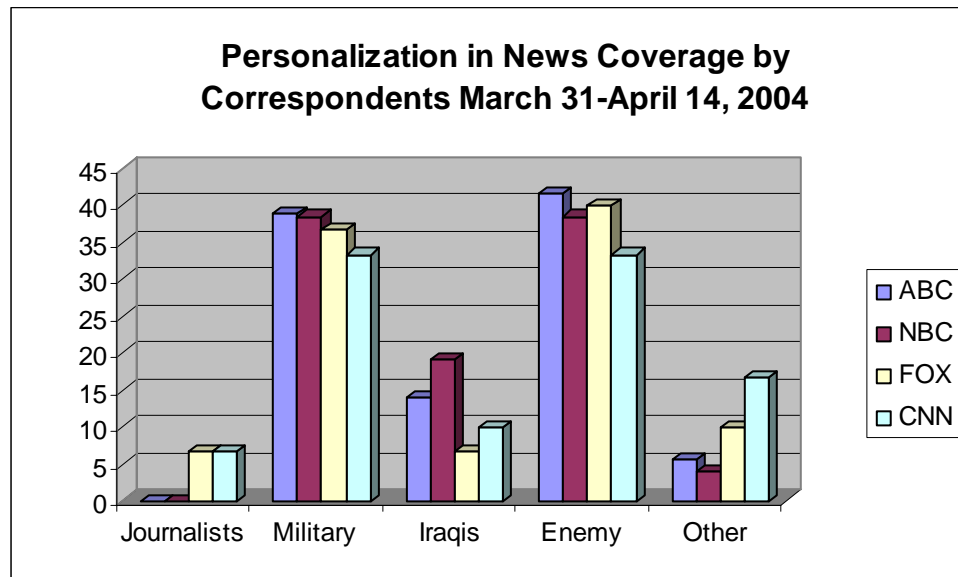
reports more often than any other group of subjects. Embeds from ABC, NBC, FOX, and CNN feature the military 48.2%, 52.6%, 57.5%, and 60.7%, respectively, while correspondents feature the military 27.9%, 30.7%, 44.7%, and 31.2% of all subjects. While the findings support the hypothesis that the embedded journalists, who travel and work with the troops, would reference the military more often than the other subject groups, the hypothesis that embedded reporters would feature Journalists as a main subject group more often than other groups was not supported. Neither set of reporters, across all news outlets, featured Journalists prominently. Correspondents across ABC, NBC, FOX, and CNN represent Journalists 4.6%, 11.5%, 2.6%, and 3.1%, respectively, while embedded reporters feature the group 5.3%, 5.6%, 10%, and 3.5% of all subjects, respectively. Given that the first two weeks of the war primarily dealt with the march to Baghdad and the “Shock and Awe” campaign, it is understandable that correspondents and embedded reporters, as a whole, would present stories that most often feature the Military and the Enemy subject groups.

**Figure 5.1**



Correspondents and embedded journalists across all news outlets are fairly similar in their representations of the Enemy. Across ABC, NBC, FOX, and CNN, correspondents feature the Enemy 32.6%, 30.1%, 34.2%, and 44.7%, respectively, while embedded reporters feature this group 37.5%, 28.1%, 30%, and 28%, respectively.

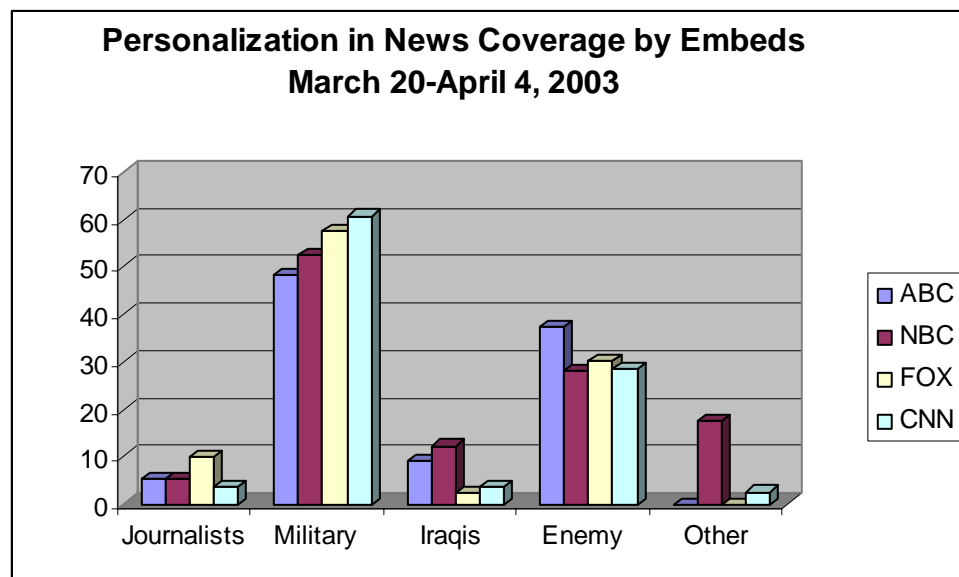
**Figure 5.2**



In comparing the subject groups covered by correspondents across the time samples, the hypothesis that the groups emphasized in the coverage would change over time is only somewhat supported. As with the first time sample, the Military and the Enemy subject groups are represented most frequently across all networks, while the Journalists are represented the least frequently. Although coverage of Iraqis still remains in the middle in the second time sample, there is a marked decrease in the coverage of this group across all networks compared to the first time sample. ABC, NBC, FOX, and CNN reduced coverage of Iraqis to 13.8%, 19.2%, 6.6%, and 10%, respectively (Figure 5.3). This change may be due to the fact that during the second

time sample, the situation in Iraq had grown more precarious, with violence and uprisings escalating. The plight of the Blackwater contractors murdered in Fallujah is indicative of this violence. To reiterate a point stated by the interviewees in Chapter Three, due to safety concerns, it was unwise for reporters to wander into enemy territory without military protection. Because correspondents did not travel with the military, access to Iraqis was not easy, a fact that may be supported by the waning representation of this subject group in coverage from the second time sample.

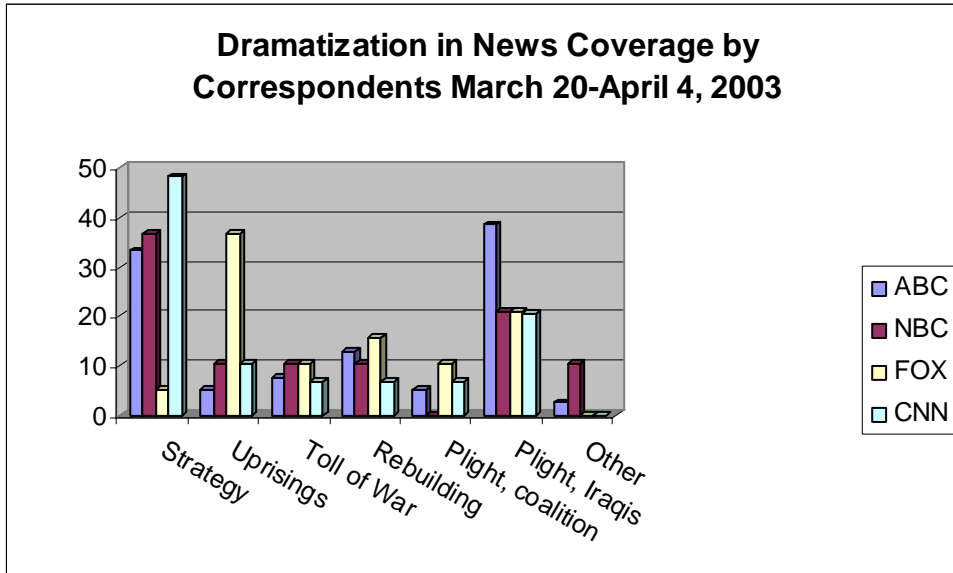
**Figure 5.3**



## **Dramatization**

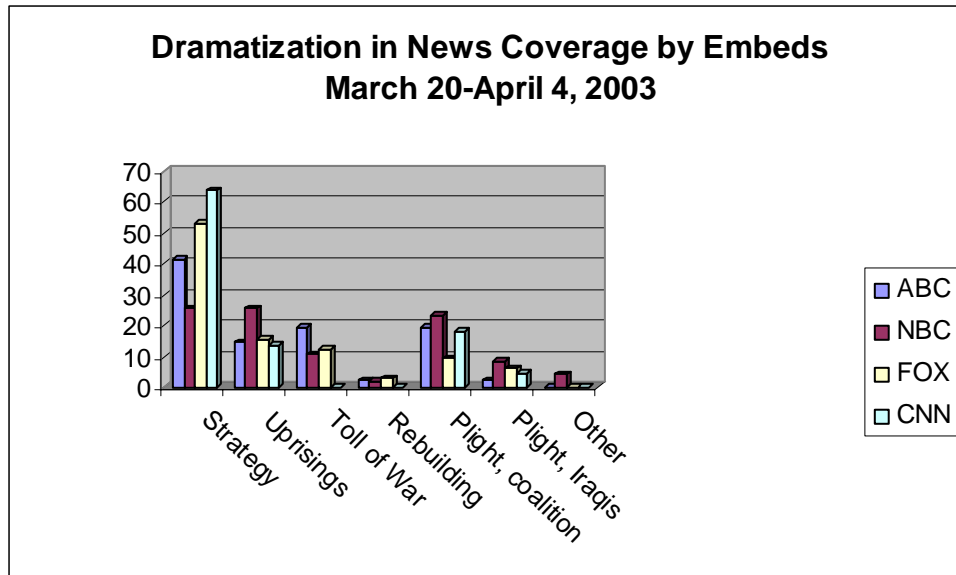
Before addressing the hypotheses associated with the types of drama emphasized most by correspondents and embedded reporters, it is necessary to acknowledge the extreme cases apparent in Figures 5.4 and 5.5. First, correspondents from FOX downplay Strategy, which comprises the smallest percentage of the events covered at 5.3%, while emphasizing Uprisings, which comprises the largest percentage of events, at 36.8%. In comparison to the other networks, then, correspondents at FOX represent Uprisings in their coverage over three times as much as NBC and CNN, at 10.5% and 10.3%, respectively, and approximately six times as much as ABC, at 5.1%. Meanwhile, correspondents from ABC, NBC, and CNN, as a whole, tend to feature Strategy, at 33.3%, 36.8%, and 48.3%, as among their most emphasized events. This finding is not quite consistent with the argument laid out in Chapter Two that Fox, as a patriotically-oriented outlet, is most likely to highlight military might, which could be rightfully categorized as Strategy. While emphasis on the violent uprisings by Iraqis would suggest that FOX's coverage is negative and frightening, and not at all patriotic, the assertion may be made that the focus on Iraqi violence seemingly validates coalition efforts in Iraq. Despite this, however, FOX's embedded journalists seem to correct the imbalance in coverage by correspondents. For embedded journalists across all networks, ABC, NBC, FOX, and CNN, Strategy appears most frequently, at 41.4%, 25.5%, 53.1%, and 63.6%, respectively.

**Figure 5.4**



The other extreme case can also be observed in Figure 5.4. ABC's correspondents emphasize the Plight of the Iraqis, which comprises a majority of that network's coverage at 38.5%. Conversely, the Plight of the Coalition is represented least, excluding the Other category, and comprises only 5.1% of ABC's coverage. This unevenness may cause some to speculate that ABC's correspondents were more sympathetic to the condition of the Iraqis than that of the coalition. As with the previous extreme case, however, coverage by embedded reporters seems to make up for the imbalance. ABC's embedded journalists emphasize the Plight of the Coalition in 19.5% of the coverage. Likewise, the network's embedded reporters deemphasize the Plight of the Iraqis, which comprises only 2.4% of the coverage.

**Figure 5.5**



The fact that the correspondents, in comparison to the embedded journalists, make more references to the Rebuilding of Iraq and the Plight of the Iraqis indicates moderate support for the hypothesis that correspondents would provide more coverage on a wider range of actions than the embedded journalists. In the first time sample, correspondents across ABC, NBC, FOX, and CNN emphasize the Rebuilding of Iraq, 12.8%, 10.5%, 15.7%, and 6.8%, respectively, which is considerably more than the embedded journalists across networks, who emphasize this action in 2.4%, 2.1%, 3.1%, and 0% of their coverage, respectively. Additionally, correspondents' coverage of the Plight of the Iraqis, across all networks, far exceeds that of the embedded

journalists. Across ABC, NBC, FOX, and CNN, correspondents reference the Plight of the Iraqis in 38.5%, 21.1%, 21.1%, and 20.7% of the coverage, respectively. The embedded journalists, across all outlets, on the other hand, only reference this action in 2.4%, 8.5%, 6.2% and 4.5% of their coverage.

The hypothesis that embedded reporters would reference the experiences of military most of all actions is also supported. Across ABC, NBC, FOX, and CNN, Strategy is referenced in 41.5%, 25.5%, 53.1%, and 63.6% of the coverage, respectively. It should be noted that the embedded journalists, in three of the outlets, reference the Plight of the Coalition more so than the correspondents of those same outlets. Embedded journalists from ABC, NBC, and CNN emphasize the Plight of the Coalition in 19.5%, 23.4%, and 18.2% of the coverage, respectively, while correspondents do so in only 5.1%, 0%, and 6.9% of their coverage. The exception here is FOX, in which coverage of the Plight of the Coalition by its correspondents, at 10.5%, is just slightly higher than coverage by its embedded journalists, at 9.3%. Overall, when viewed in tandem, coverage by correspondents and journalists appears to be quite complete, in that each makes up for the other's deficiency.

In the second time sample, there is support for the hypothesis that correspondents' coverage of certain actions would change over time. The most notable change is the increase in references to the Toll of War across all outlets. In the first

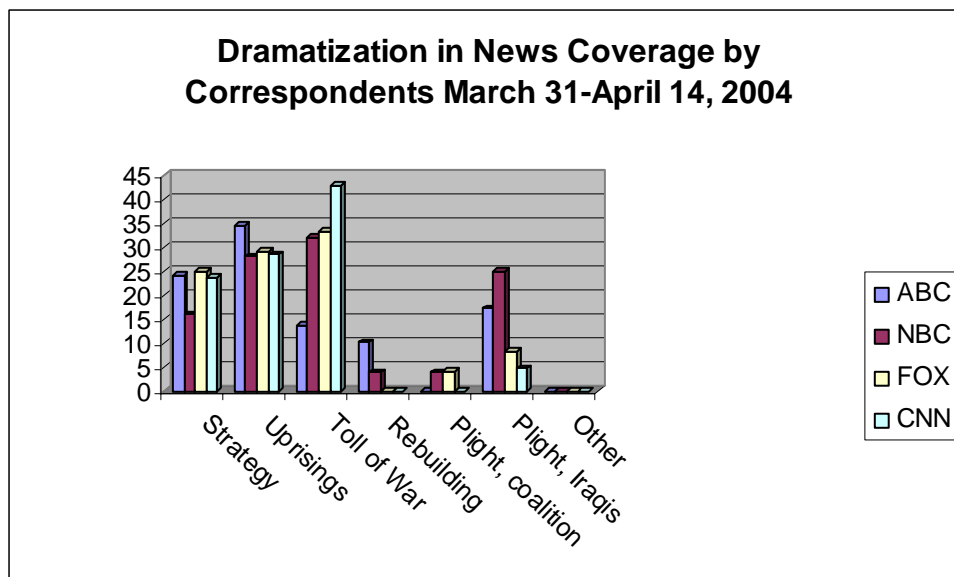
time sample, correspondents across ABC, NBC, and FOX, and CNN represented the Toll of War in 7.7%, 10.5%, 10.5%, and 6.9% of their coverage, respectively. In the second time sample, representation for the Toll of War increased to 13.8%, 32%, 33.3%, 42.8%, respectively, as illustrated in Figure 5.6. The second most notable increase occurred with the representation of Uprisings in the coverage. In the first time sample, coverage from ABC, NBC, and CNN emphasized Uprisings 5.1%, 10.5%, and 10.5%, respectively. In the second time sample, however, coverage of Uprisings increased to 34.5%, 28%, and 28.5%, respectively. FOX is the notable exception, for its coverage of Uprisings decreased from 36.8% in the first time sample to 29.1% in the second time sample. Yet, its coverage in the second sample is more on par with the other networks in coverage of Uprisings in that same sample. Meanwhile, references to Strategy for these same three outlets in the first time sample decreased from 33.3%, 36.8%, and 48.3%, respectively, to 24.1%, 16%, and 23.8%, respectively, in the second time sample. Again FOX is the exception, as its coverage increased from 5.26% in the first time sample to 25% in the second. Yet, its increase in the second sample places the amount of its Strategy coverage on par with the coverage of the other outlets in that same sample.

The most dramatic decreases from the first time sample to the next occurred across all outlets in their coverage of the Rebuilding of Iraq. In the first sample, ABC,

NBC, FOX, and CNN featured the Rebuilding of Iraq in 12.8%, 10.5%, 15.8%, and 6.9%, of their coverage, respectively. By the second time sample, however, coverage of this action decreased to 10.2%, 4%, 0%, and 0%. The second-most dramatic decrease in coverage occurred across three outlets in their treatment of the Plight of the Iraqis. In the first time sample, correspondents across ABC, FOX, and CNN featured this action in 38.5%, 21.1%, and 20.7% of the coverage, respectively. In the second sample, the outlets decreased coverage of the action to 17.2%, 8.3%, and 4.7%. Similarly, the same three outlets decreased coverage of the Plight of the Coalition from 5.1%, 10.5%, and 6.9%, respectively, in the first time sample, to 0%, 4.2%, and 0% in the second time sample.

The change in coverage from the first time sample to the second quite possibly reflects a new phase in the war in which violent uprisings were more prevalent, as was mentioned earlier. With more coverage of uprisings and violence, and less coverage of the Rebuilding of Iraq, for example, the findings may contextualize John McWethy's argument in Chapter Three that coverage grew more negative over time, as it reflected the violent the happenings on the ground.

**Figure 5.6**

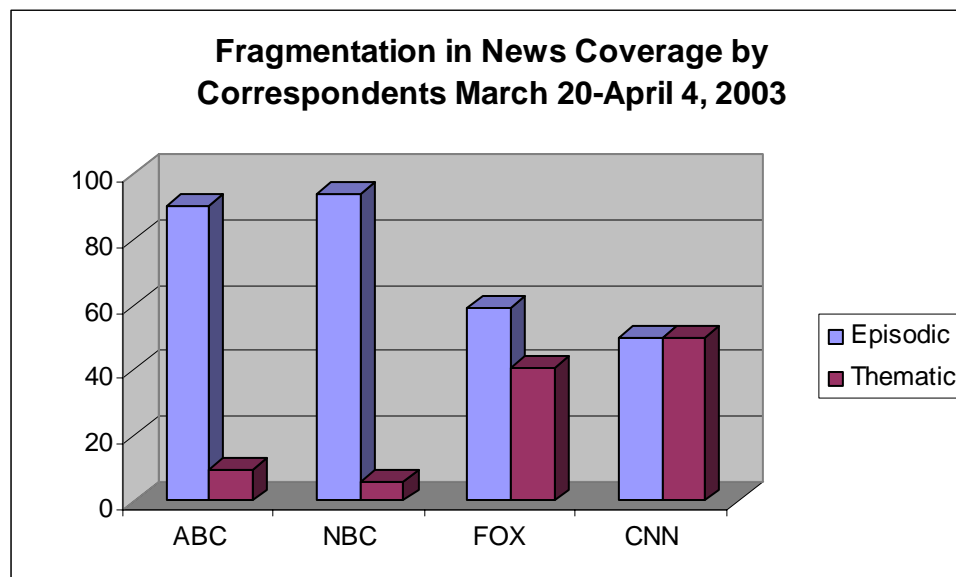


### **Fragmentation**

The hypothesis that correspondents are more likely than embedded journalists to provide stories that are less fragmented and therefore, more contextual, is somewhat supported by the findings. In the first time sample, correspondents and embedded journalists on the whole present stories that are more episodic than thematic. As illustrated in Figure 5.7, however, coverage by correspondents from FOX and CNN are exceptions, since the outlets tend to balance episodic and thematic stories. For CNN,

the balance is exactly even, 50% episodic and 50% thematic, while FOX presents stories that are 59% episodic and 40% thematic.

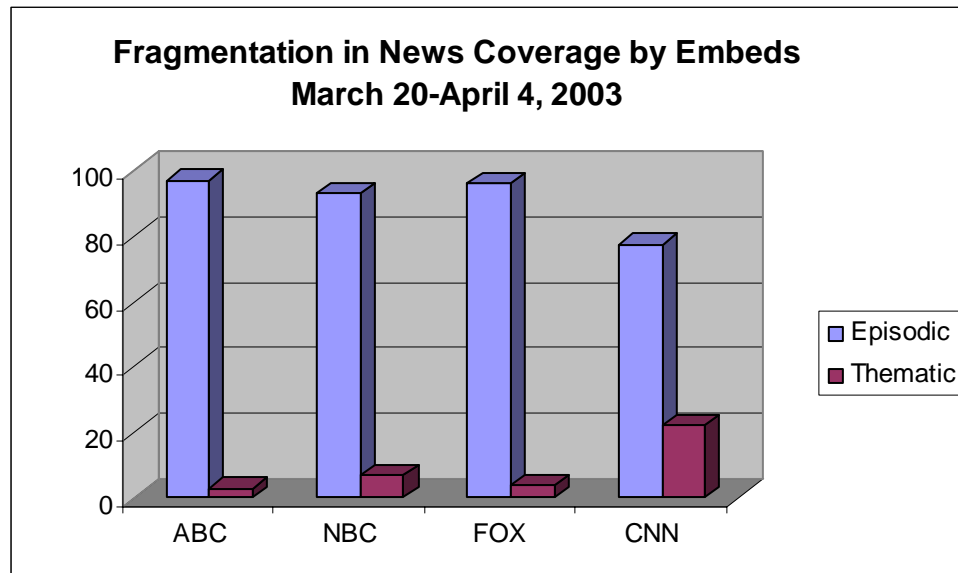
**Figure 5.7**



Aside from the more balanced coverage by the cable news correspondents described above, Figures 5.7 and 5.8 demonstrate an overwhelming trend toward episodic news. The reports by ABC and NBC correspondents in the first time sample have episodic/thematic ratios of 90.5% to 9.6% and 94% and 5.8%, respectively. Of all the outlets, the embedded journalists of CNN report the highest amount of thematic news at 22% and the least amount of episodic news at 77%, as in Figure 5.8. Yet, the discrepancy is still quite wide. For the embedded journalists of ABC, NBC, and FOX, the episodic/thematic ratios are 97.2% to 2.7%, 93.3% to 6.6%, and 96.2% to 3.7%,

respectively. The trend toward episodic news can perhaps be explained by Bennett’s observation that viewers receive news in “capsules.” In other words, news is delivered in installments as stories develop. Furthermore, in the limited space of the television news segment, there is little time for contextual details.

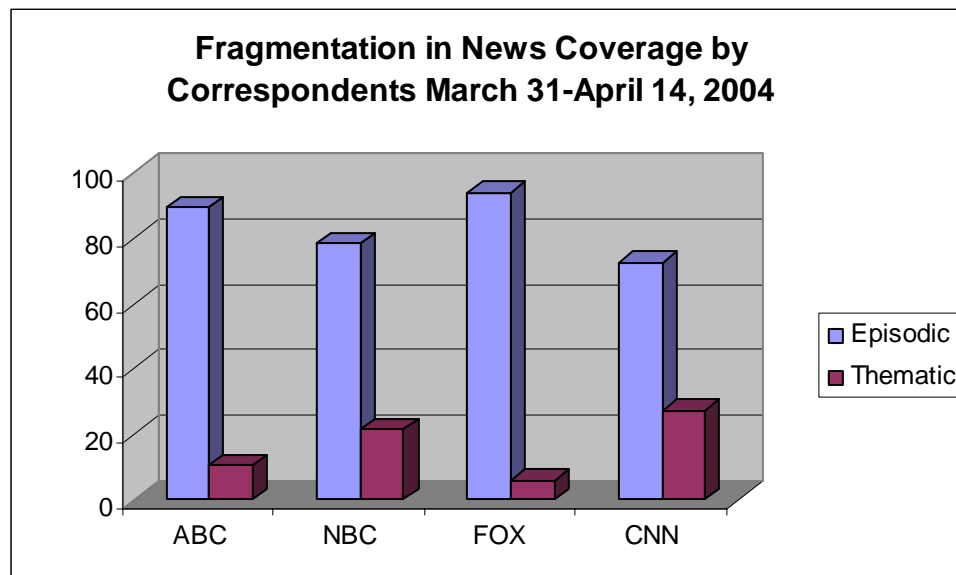
**Figure 5.8**



The hypothesis that coverage by correspondents would change over time is moderately supported by the fragmentation findings. Figure 5.9 indicates that the most significant difference in the reporting between the time samples is the increase in episodic news and a decrease in thematic news by the cable outlets. In the second time sample, FOX and CNN report episodic/thematic ratios that are 94% to 5.9% and 72%

and 27%, respectively. Coverage by ABC and NBC in the second sample is slightly more thematic than coverage during the first sample, yet, the ratios remain consistently biased toward episodic news—89.5% to 10.5% and 78.5% to 21.4%, respectively.

**Figure 5.9**

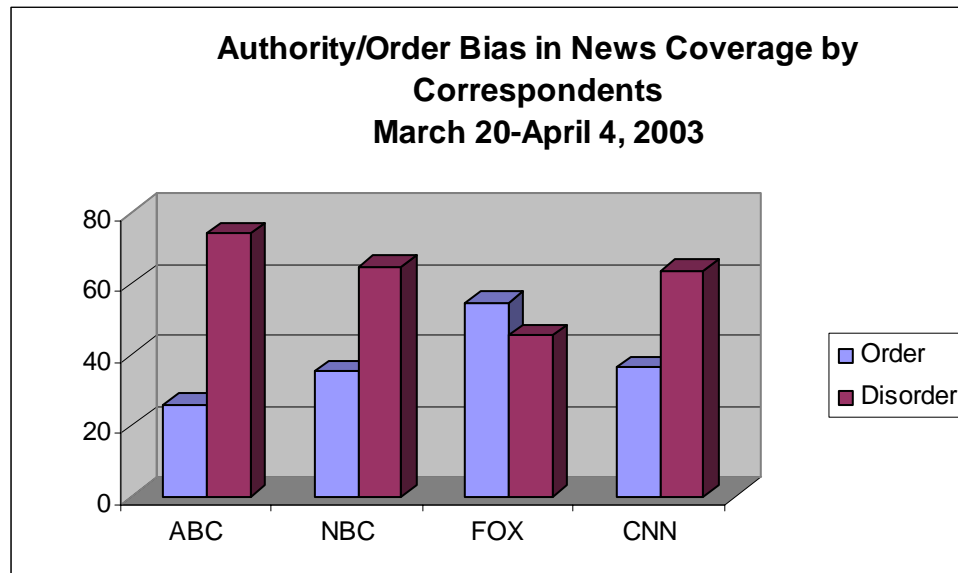


### **Authority-Order**

The findings support the hypothesis that there would be a difference in the coverage by correspondents and embedded reporters based on the authority-order bias. Figure 5.10 indicates that the coverage by the correspondents of ABC, NBC, and CNN

is primarily disordered, given their order/disorder ratios of 25.8% to 74.2%, 35.2% to 64.7%, and 36.4% to 63.6%, respectively. The correspondents from FOX, however, are slightly more balanced in the portrayals of order and disorder, with a ratio of 55.5% to 45.5%

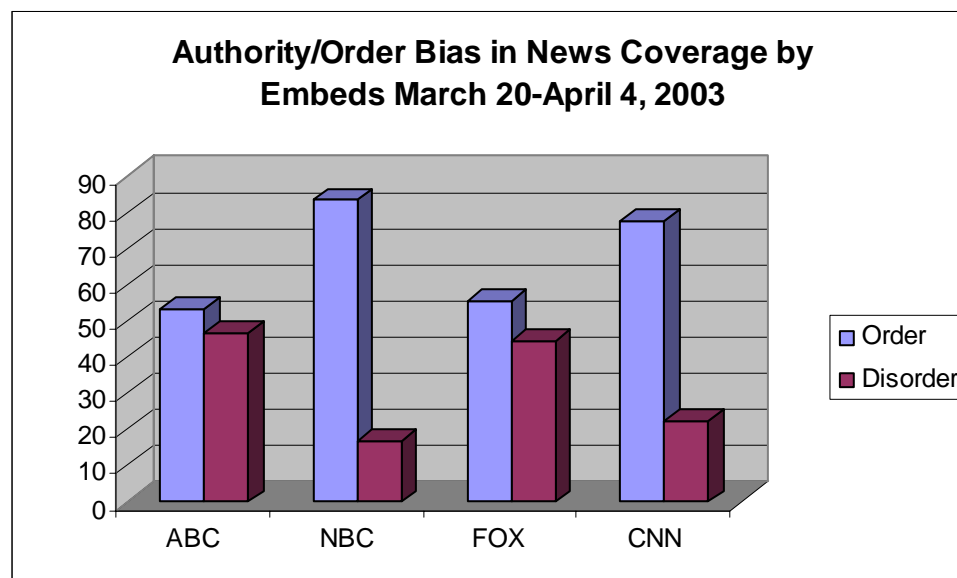
**Figure 5.10**



Contrarily, the coverage by embedded journalists across all four outlets is biased toward order, as is shown in Figure 5.11. For ABC, NBC, FOX, and CNN, the order/ disorder ratios are 55.3% to 46.6%, 83.3 to 16.7%, 55.5% to 44.4%, and 77.8% to 22.2%, respectively. Perhaps this finding contextualizes the argument that embedded journalists painted a picture in which the conflict in Iraq is under control, a

notion that may have led to the view that the war is going well. On the other hand, the primarily disordered news from correspondents may have had the opposite effect. Quite possibly, the conflicting accounts offered by correspondents and embedded journalists may have contributed to the differing perceptions of the war, as laid out in Chapter Two, in which coverage appeared positive to some and negative to others.

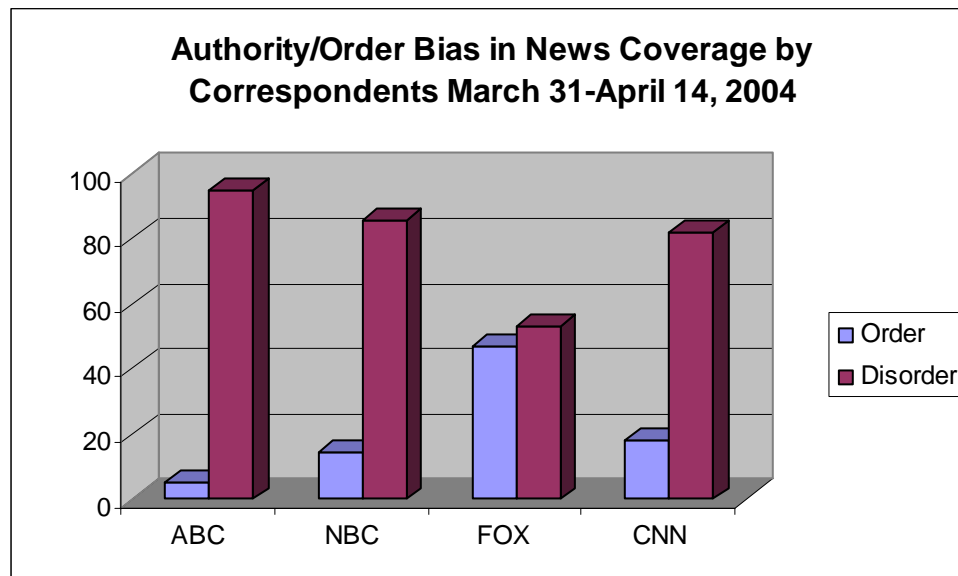
**Figure 5.11**



The hypothesis that the coverage by correspondents would change over time based on the authority-order bias is supported. According to Figure 5.12, in the second time sample, coverage from all of the outlets became more disordered. Even the coverage by correspondents from FOX, which was slightly more ordered than

disordered in the first time sample, became more disordered with an order/disorder ratio of 47.1% to 52.9%. Likewise, the order/disorder ratios for ABC, NBC, and CNN changed to 5.3% to 94.7%, 14.3% to 85.7%, and 18.1% to 81.8%, respectively. The continuation of disordered news from correspondents in the second time sample may have furthered the view that the war was not progressing well. Without the presence of embedded reporters to counter the disordered stories of correspondents, the overall assessment of disorderly affairs may have cued viewers to interpret the war negatively.

**Figure 5.12**



## **Summary and Conclusion**

This study provides a number of important findings that help to contextualize arguments regarding the media's framing of the war.

- The vantage point of the reporter plays a moderate role in determining which subjects and actions are emphasized most in reports. As was expected, embedded journalists, more so than correspondents, represent the Military and Strategy most in their coverage. Correspondents, too, emphasize these categories, but provide more coverage than embedded journalists on Iraqis and the Rebuilding of Iraq.
- Overall, there is not a significant difference in the coverage by correspondents and embedded journalists based on news outlet. With the exception of a few extreme cases explained above, reporters across news outlets are fairly even-handed in their coverage of the war.
- Over time, Iraqis, the Toll of War, and Uprisings became more represented in coverage by correspondents. Meanwhile, Strategy and the Rebuilding of Iraq decreased. The emphasis on topics that are more chaotic is consistent with a marked trend toward news that is more episodic and disordered. Although coverage by embedded journalists was more ordered than disordered, coverage by correspondents, already biased toward disorder, became even more disordered by the second time

sample, when coverage by embedded journalists was not present. These trends may have led to the view that coverage of the war became more negative over time.

These findings are best understood and appreciated once the shortcomings of the research are acknowledged. First, it is necessary to understand how reports by correspondents and journalists fit within an overall broadcast. During the war, none of the evening news programs reviewed in this study relied solely on reports from correspondents or embedded reporters stationed in Iraq. Often the day's war news was told from many perspectives, through reporters at White House or the Pentagon, or through anchors and invited guests, often generals, in the news studio. The viewer, perhaps, garners an overall sense of how the war is going through these multi-dimensional newscasts. This study, however, lifts the reports of the correspondents and embedded journalists from the context of interpretive voices, which may have shaped how viewers perceived the war. The study cannot determine the influence of these other voices, yet, in isolating coverage from the warfront, it is possible to determine how the embedded journalists and correspondents may have contributed to that overall assessment. The study also does not take into account the preexisting opinions of viewers, nor does it attempt to determine how the selective exposure, perception, and retention were at play in viewers' understanding of war.

Finally, the arguments laid out in Chapter Two are not specific to television reporters, but to all embedded journalists equally. This study focuses only on television reporters, who made up just one portion of the reporters who covered the war from Iraq. Perhaps further studies could compare the coverage of journalists across different types of media. As Marshal McLuhan stated, “the medium is the message.” Thus, it may be interesting to see how journalists’ information biases differ by medium. It is likely that television reporters, who rely on visuals and are constrained by short segments, would harbor different information biases than newspaper or magazine reporters, who are granted more space to contextualize their stories.

## **Chapter 6. Final Thoughts**

The U.S. Department of Defense initiated the embedded journalist program under the assumption that more eyes and ears on the action would provide a more complete picture of events from the war. While embedded journalists certainly provided an immense quantity of coverage from the battlefield, the quality of their reports has been questioned on a number of accounts. Coverage has been analyzed much like an interpretive dance, with the relationships of individuals, the significance of events, and the absence or presence of certain attributes provoking different assessments from viewers. Thus, individuals who watched the same news often drew markedly different conclusions about the drama in Iraq. While it is impossible to discern the traits that predispose individuals to certain understandings of news coverage, this study concludes that conflicting viewpoints necessarily exist alongside each other, especially those regarding coverage of a controversial war. This study has contextualized the arguments using a two-pronged approach—interviews with those who were closest to the topic at hand and a content analysis of news. The content analysis suggests that negative views may have solidified over time, but these views are not necessarily the result of journalists' conscious selection of critical and pessimistic news frames. As the interviewees recognize and the data indicate, coverage may have reflected the rise in violent happenings on the ground.

The interviewees reveal that the embedded journalist program was not nearly as sinister as the critics have suggested, for it indeed had its merits. In addition to allowing viewers to observe coverage as it transpired, it was an effective means to counteracting the fallacies that arose in the international media during the war. Furthermore, they assert, the program granted journalists an unparalleled access to the battlefield, effectually outdating the pooling system of previous conflicts, which allowed only a few perspectives to exist in the coverage. Yet those involved with the program address its shortcomings as readily as they embrace its virtues. They understand that in two important ways, journalists are limited in what they can report. Despite their noble attempts to report as objectively and as accurately as possible, constraints such as the scant space available in broadcast segments and newspaper columns, coupled with journalists' lack of extensive background knowledge on certain topics hinders their ability to situate stories within perfect contexts. Karl Zinsmeister pronounces that during the war, embedded reporters' narrow understanding of military culture often led to misperceptions and "unrealistic expectations" about the effectiveness of operations. He recalls the opinion of his "friend Michael Barone of *U.S. News*, who has castigated reporters for applying what he calls the "zero defect standard" to the prosecution of battles. Why weren't we ready for the looting? Why didn't we just stop it? Why the shortages of electric power and gasoline? Why couldn't

we predict the unfolding of the insurgency?” (Zinsmeister 233). Zinsmeister ultimately concludes that journalists comprise “an intellectual class that lacks experience of military life, and therefore, will make errors of both omission and commission when analyzing great events like the Iraq war. Professor Rodney Stark notes that for generations, academic historians missed many critical lessons in military history simply because they didn’t understand the importance of the invention of the stirrup to cavalry warfare...” (Zinsmeister 233). Although embedded journalists certainly gained a feel for the lifestyle of the troops, their indoctrination as journalists, however, seemingly precluded a thorough understanding of the military—one that is realized only by true members of that institution. Similarly, in her interview for this study, Fox’s Kim Hume remarks that journalists, usually cast as “observers,” cannot know all the nuances of situations experienced by actual participants.

In terms of omission and commission, journalists can almost always be accused of the sin of omission, because they don’t know the context, all the facts. Their pictures are almost always incomplete. So anybody who has ever been the subject of a media story knows that we aren’t very good at what we do, and we can’t be. We do the best that we can. But we’re always going to be missing context.

This study has indicated that during the Iraq war, embedded journalists and correspondents were equally as prone to information biases. It should be acknowledged, however, that each reporter may have been only a pixel in the overall

picture of war, yet together, they formed the most remarkable landscape of the battlefield yet.

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