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**Different Stories:**

How the newspapers in the United States, Britain and South  
Asia covered the Iraq War

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Shorenstein Fellow, Spring 2004

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# **Different Stories: How the newspapers in the United States, Britain and South Asia covered the Iraq War<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Media and war:**

In many ways, war presents the biggest challenge to the values and the professional practices of the press. Despite the growing internationalism and readership over the Internet, most newspapers are rooted firmly in a national ethos and the most obvious tension is between patriotism and the professional practices of truth telling, sensitivity, fairness in presenting different sides of the story and critical examination of official accounts. This is also the time when the press is under close scrutiny from critics who are dissatisfied either that the press is not patriotic enough or that there is too much of a home side type of reporting and not enough questioning of official accounts.

The Iraq war was an unequal conflict not just in terms of the overwhelming superiority of the American, British and other coalition forces but also because much of the information was controlled by the coalition. It was predominantly a U. S version of the war that was sought to be put out, with the administration of President George W Bush presenting its account and seeking the support of the American people as well as of international opinion. How closely did the press accounts follow the U. S version, how were they influenced by patriotism, national opinion and concerns or by their own views that was supportive of the American position or was sympathetic to Iraq, how far did the press succeed in providing a true account of the situation on the ground in all its aspects—these are questions that would be vital to gain an understanding of the functioning of the press in wartime.

Robert S. Entman, discussing the validity of the hegemony and the indexing approaches to the shaping of opinion, suggests that a cascading activation model could explain the process better<sup>2</sup>. Those who speak of the hegemony of the government over information suggest that political leaders make sure that there is agreement on first principles and public debate is confined within narrow ideological boundaries so that a broad and vigorous democratic discussion becomes impossible. Indexing theorists focus on policy disagreement among the elite groups and suggest that the more divided the elite groups are and more they speak with different voices on a particular policy, the more of dissent from, and questioning of, the executive's policy line one would find in the press.

Entman suggests that a policy frame cascades down from the administration, and how effective it is in shaping press coverage depends on the policy agreement among the elite, the cultural resonance that the basic ideas, concepts and imagery find among the people and how the events themselves shape out in reality. This paper examines the press coverage of the Iraq war with his model in the background.

### **The American war frame:**

The coverage of the Iraq war, sought to be framed by the U S administration as a preemptive action against dangerous evil, and its interplay with public opinion must be seen against the backdrop of the security situation after the fall of the Soviet Union and the change brought about by the September 11, 2001 attacks. With the end of the Cold War, the security situation eased for the United States and the sense of vulnerability to threats from foreign powers lifted. The American people seemed less interested in foreign policy and less inclined to support military intervention abroad if it involved large scale troop commitments over a prolonged period and substantial costs. The American

administration in the First Gulf War of 1991 sought to tap public support by framing it as an international action against a cruel tyrant who not only invaded a diminutive and hapless neighbor but was also threatening American oil supplies. Subsequent interventions in Somalia and Bosnia, however, did not receive much public support.

The events of September 11 changed all that: the terrorists who hijacked and flew the planes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon seemed to have seared American hearts and minds in a most fundamental way. There arose a heightened sense of vulnerability as terrorist groups abroad had demonstrated their capacity to translate their hostile intent into horrific damage on the United States mainland. In the immediate aftermath of September 11, President Bush realizing that the response would call for a long drawn campaign on many fronts, framed it in terms of a “war on terror” in defense of freedom, terms that addressed the vulnerability and also resonated with a widely held and elevated value. For the action against the Al Qaeda and the Taliban that followed, there was widespread support not only from the public in the United States but from other countries as well, for the Afghan war was seen as partly retributive and partly preventive of further terrorist attacks.

After the popular, even if incomplete, campaign in Afghanistan, the Bush administration sought to weave “a seamless connection” between terrorists and Iraq. Saddam Hussein after the first Gulf War remained bloodied but unbowed, making his hostile intent against the United States obvious, cooperating only sporadically and reluctantly with the inspection program that sought to ensure that his regime did not possess chemical and biological weapons or build nuclear weapons. If the public were convinced that Iraq posed an imminent threat and was linked to the terrorist group that

had attacked the United States, they would be willing to support military action. The clearest articulation of the danger and of the terrorist connection was in President Bush's state of the union address on January 29, 2002 when after referring to North Korea, Iran and Iraq, he went on to say, "States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred."<sup>3</sup>

The case for what was framed as the war against terrorist evil in Iraq was based on three grounds. The first, and the main rationale for the war was the weapons of mass destruction argument in which Iraq's hardly concealed earlier programs on chemical and biological weapons and attempts to build nuclear weapons together with its incriminating attempts at concealment and unwillingness to cooperate with the weapons inspections process were shown as presenting a grave and imminent danger to the United States.

The second argument that focused on Iraq's terrorist connections was built around two specific events: the reported but unconfirmed meeting of Iraq's intelligence chief, Ahmed al-Ani, with Mohammed Atta, the leader of the 9/11 hijackers' group, in Prague in April 2001, and the harboring by Iraq of "a deadly terrorist network headed by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, an associated collaborator of Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda lieutenants", as Secretary of State Colin Powell put it in his presentation to the United Nations Security Council on February 6, 2003<sup>4</sup>. Along with these were the assertions, based on intelligence, of a safe haven and non-aggression agreement between Iraq and Al Qaeda, Iraqi training of terrorists in poisons and bomb making and Iraqi links with Palestinian groups. With such tenuous links, the jump was made to the likelihood of Iraq

passing on its weapons of mass destruction into the hands of terrorists, posing a grave threat to the United States.

The third argument, that Saddam Hussein was a cruel dictator who did not hesitate to use chemical weapons against the Kurdish people and who resorted to killing and torture to suppress opposition and keep himself in power and needed to be removed from power, was intended to appeal to the human rights constituency and also address the qualms of those who would be hesitant to go to war on the basis of the first two arguments.

How effective this war against terrorist evil frame was could be seen in opinion polls: a CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll in March 2003 found that 88 per cent of the people believed that Iraq was supporting terrorist groups and had plans to attack the United States and that 51 per cent thought that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the 9/11 attacks.<sup>5</sup> While the moral case for war convinced many, public opinion still did not favor a unilateral attack as there was some hesitation among large sections based on practical considerations of the costs and the consequences. One view that found wide support was that the United States should go into Iraq with the sanction of the United Nations and with broad international support after the weapons inspection process had run its course because that would make the war legitimate and also because the burden would be shared widely. Another focused on the costs in terms of the loss of American lives in a difficult and prolonged war and occupation. A third was wary of the loss of Iraqi lives and the destruction in Iraq while a fourth view pointed to the inevitable alienation of the Arab and Muslim world for a long time to come. Entman suggests that

the wariness of the public in going to war delayed it from the autumn of 2002 to the spring of 2003.<sup>6</sup>

To gain support for the war from a public that was hesitant, the U S Administration then had to portray it as the inevitable consequence, after all other options, including the diplomatic at the United Nations, were exhausted and had also to play down the costs in terms of the possible loss of lives and erosion of goodwill around the world. In October 2002, the U S administration moved to demonstrate that there was a consensus among the political elite on the use of force against Iraq by getting the “Authorization for use of military force against Iraq resolution of 2002” passed in the Congress by a 296-133 vote and in the Senate by a 77-23 margin. It is an interesting reflection of the change in attitudes brought about by 9/11 that the opposition to this resolution was much more muted than was the case during the voting on the resolution that authorized the use of force against Iraq before the first Gulf War of 1991. A significant number of Congressmen and almost a quarter of the Senate were opposed to war at this point, but with the leading Democrats choosing to support the resolution or unwilling to oppose it vocally, dissenting voices could no longer be heard on the political center stage.

It would be interesting to examine how this framing of the war as an unavoidable, defensive act aimed against terrorism and a grave security threat played out in the media coverage of the developments in the immediate period before the war and in the coverage of the war itself. What significant differences can one find in terms of the acceptance of this frame, its rejection or the adoption of alternative frames in the American, the British

and the South Asian press? How did the differences in political systems and cultural values and national opinion influence the coverage?

### **The Newspapers and the Critical Incidents:**

The choice of newspapers to study proved particularly tricky, and ultimately I chose to examine what in the judgement of professionals would be regarded as the “quality” newspapers in each country. In the United States, that meant the New York Times; in the United Kingdom, the Times of London and the Guardian representing the quality ends of two different viewpoints; the Dawn of Pakistan and the Times of India. While these would not be representative of the press as a whole in the different countries, they provide an idea of the influential views that prevailed.

Before the start of military operations, the U. S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell in his multimedia presentation of evidence against Iraq to the United Nations Security Council on February 5, 2003 and President George W Bush in his address on March 17, 2003 that set a deadline of 48 hours for Saddam Hussein to leave the country, set the stage for the war. The war itself, in the sense of military operations to gain control of Iraq, started on the night of March 19 in the U.S. and lasted until April 14 when Tikrit fell and the U. S. military announced the end of combat operations. An examination of the actual events as they unfolded and their coverage would reveal how successful the American administration was in selling its war frame to the press in the United States and abroad.

I chose seven types of incidents from which could be teased out broader conclusions on the attitudes towards the advances and the setbacks in the military



campaign, loss of American and Iraqi lives, the difficulty in keeping order and the relief and the concerns at the end of the war:

1. The start of the war with the missile attacks on Baghdad on March 19/20, 2003.
2. The downing of an American Apache helicopter and the capture and parading of American soldiers on Iraqi television on March 23.
3. The killing of a van full of civilians including women and children by American soldiers at a checkpoint near Najaf on March 31.
4. The rescue of Jessica Lynch from a hospital on April 1.
5. The takeover of the Baghdad airport by American troops on April 3.
6. The fall of Baghdad on April 9.
7. The fall of Tikrit and the end of major combat operations on April 14.

These seven incidents together with the pre-war speeches of Secretary of State Colin Powell and President Bush provide useful reference points from which can be judged whether a newspaper accepted, rejected or deviated from the American war frame and how exactly political and cultural differences and national viewpoints and concerns shaped the coverage.

War by itself poses difficult moral choices and the U. S administration in its information management faced a major challenge in playing down the costs of war in terms of the difficulties and setbacks in the military campaign, loss of American lives, killing of Iraqi civilians and the perils of occupation. Daily briefings both at the Pentagon and at the U. S. Central Command headquarters in Doha, Qatar focused on the broad military campaign and its advance while the system of “embedding” reporters with military units was designed to provide restricted but actually observed and detailed

reports from the frontlines—all elements of the classical war frame with its emphasis on the military operation without much attention to death and destruction.

Ranged outside the American information orbit were the Iraqi television and the daily briefings by the Iraqi information minister during the early stages of the war, coverage by the Al Jazeera television from an Arab perspective sympathetic to the Iraqi people, reports from newspaper, news agency and television correspondents who still remained in Baghdad and reporting by “unilateral” war correspondents who operated at great risk independently of the American forces, were free of the restrictions imposed on the embedded reporters but had only limited access to the frontlines. The biggest imponderable, however, was the way the war would play itself out on the ground: how quick or easy would be the advance and how fierce the resistance, the mistakes in terms of bombings and killing of civilians and the problems of occupation. Often the newspapers used multiple sources, and the varying perspectives together with the positioning and display on the front page and on the inside pages, editorial opinion and op-ed commentary provide an indication of how closely they followed the American frame or how far removed they were from it.

### **A just war?**

In the run up to the war, apart from the American troop build up in the Middle East, two events set the stage for the invasion—the multi-media presentation of the case against Iraq at the United Nations Security Council by U. S Secretary of State Colin Powell on February 5 and the ultimatum given by President Bush in his televised address from White House on March 17 calling upon Saddam Hussein and his sons to leave Iraq within 48 hours or face military conflict.

In a presentation backed by satellite photographs, recordings of telephone intercepts and intelligence information, Colin Powell sought to convince the world that Iraq had an active chemical and biological weapons program which it was trying to conceal from the United Nations Weapons inspectors as well as missiles of longer ranges than it was allowed, that it was trying to build nuclear weapons and that it had active links with Al Qaeda. More convincing even than the material that he produced was to be his own transformation, the fact that from an opponent of an immediate, unilateral war against Iraq he had moved to the position that “Leaving Saddam Hussein in possession of weapons of mass destruction for a few more months or years is not an option, not in post-September 11 world.”

The New York Times’ main report on Page 1 (February 6, 2003) under headline: “Powell in UN speech presents case to show Iraq has not disarmed” described it as “a near encyclopedic catalog that reached farther than many expected.” It noted that it was not clear if it had convinced the audience and that the French, Russian and Chinese envoys wanted more time to be given to the inspectors. It went on to say that the presentation recalled the famed moment in which Adlai Stevenson presented the United Nations Security Council with photographs taken by the U2 spy planes to show the presence of missiles in Cuba during the crisis of 1962, a comparison that was questioned by Adlai Stevenson III who argued in an Op-ed piece “Different man, different moment” the next day that “my father went to the UN to stop a war.” On the inside pages, it carried excerpts from Colin Powell’s speech and reports that elaborated on specific aspects of the presentation including the intelligence on the Iraqi-Al Qaeda connection.

The Iraqi side was presented in two stories on the inside pages. One report “Iraq’s response: Incorrect allegations” quoted the Iraqi Ambassador to the United Nations, Aldouri, as saying that “there are incorrect allegations, unnamed sources, unknown sources.” A Baghdad report with the headline “Hussein aide denounces Powell’s case as full of baseless ‘stunts’” quoted Gen. Amir al Saddi, a top science adviser to Saddam Hussein as saying that “this was a typical American show, complete with stunts and special effects”. There was in addition an elaborate coverage of the proceedings in the U N Security Council where France, Russia and China sought more time for inspections and of the reaction in Europe where France and Germany were opposed to the war but the U.K, Italy, Spain and the former Eastern European bloc countries were supporting the American position.

The New York Times put some aspects of Powell’s presentation to critical examination, and one report from the part of northern Iraq controlled by the Kurds went on to say that he might have been mistaken in saying that a radical Islamic group, Ansar al Islam, operated a poisons training camp and factory in one particular location in the Kurdish area. Another report quoted Mullah Krekar, head of Ansar al Islam as claiming that Powell was mistaken in saying that his organization had links with Al Qaeda and that Saddam Hussein was in fact his enemy.

In its editorial, The New York Times was not quite persuaded. While noting that it was “the most powerful case to date”, it concluded that there was no smoking gun, but evidence of Hussein trying to hide one. It argued that the United States should let the United Nations Security Council take the lead: “Because the consequences of war are so

terrible and the cost of rebuilding Iraq so great, the United States cannot afford to confront Iraq without broad international support.”

In the debate over the war, William Safire argued in his Op-ed column, “Irrefutable and undeniable” that “Colin Powell made his case with half a dozen smoking guns of a huge Iraqi cover up”. A news analysis on Page 1 by Michael R Gordon noted that Powell sought to overwhelm his audience with evidence some of which was new and some not so new, and concluded that without a smoking gun, he sought to present as comprehensive and detailed a case as he could of Iraqi deceit.

In Britain where opinion was divided down the middle on the justification for the war, there was a sharp contrast between The Times and The Guardian in terms of the news coverage, the editorial viewpoints and opinion columns. The Times’ front page headline (February 6, 2003) which read “US makes case for war” detailed Powell’s presentation with a point by point indictment of Iraq and reported that France, Germany and Russia stuck to their stand that weapons inspectors should be given more time. It also noted Iraq’s dismissal of the presentation as “cartoon films”. On the inside pages it reported the reaction in the U N Security Council (“Reaction: Security Council. Defiant dissenters insist on more time for inspectors”) and from Iraq (“Reaction: Iraq. A stunt complete with special effects”).

The Times in its editorial, “Cocked Gun: The US has powerfully reinforced the case against Iraq” concluded that containment has failed and that Saddam must be stopped even if it took war. In its other columns, the focus was on the transformation of Colin Powell and one piece, “The dove who sharpened his claws to lead cry for war” by Roland Watson in Washington noted that President Bush sent him to the UN because of

the respect he commanded and because there was no alternative to him “to recreate the famed Adlai Stevenson moment”. Another column under Foreign Editor’s briefing by Bronwen Maddox described Powell’s address as “the strongest piece of political advocacy” that the U S had mustered on the war. A third column Tim Reid noted that instead of a smoking gun the UN Security Council got smoking intercepts, satellite photographs, spoonful of talcum powder, lego-style drawings of sinister trucks, picture of an U2 plane and mugshots of Arabic men, but the presentation was compelling.

The coverage in The Guardian that wore its anti-war position on its news sleeve was much more skeptical, with its Page 1 headline (February 6, 2003) setting the tone: “Powell raises the banner for war but the world remains divided”. It reported Powell’s presentation in detail as also the reactions in the U N Security Council, Iraq and Europe. In addition, a 6-member reporting team presented the views of experts who were mostly named in a full page story, “Threat of war: Powell’s evidence against Saddam: Does it add up?” It said that on the weapons programs Powell could not present a smoking gun but was presenting evidence of deception and was dismissive of the Iraq-Al Qaeda connection, noting that European and British intelligence sources distanced themselves from that assertion. After a point by point analysis, the report concluded, “Some allegations are striking and significant; others are hyperbole aimed at US audience.” There were other reports contradicting different aspects of Powell’s presentation including one with the headline “Britain disputes terror link to police murder”, another that asserted “U S recycles human test claims” and a third under the headline “Reliability of defectors questioned” that quoted intelligence and weapons experts.

In its editorial, “Powell shoots to kill but the battle over Iraq far from finished”, The Guardian argued that some of the shots “undoubtedly hit the target” but Powell did not present any “killer facts” that would make further diplomacy redundant. Much of the evidence was based on intelligence which had to be taken on trust, it noted, and concluded with a caution to the US and Britain not to “jump the gun”. One commentary on Page 1 by Gary Young under the headline, “He implored. He threatened. A final transformation from dove to hawk” noted “The man on whom so many European hopes of reining in the excesses of George Bush’s administration were pinned had apparently changed sides.” In its take on the Adlai Stevenson comparison, The Guardian report from Washington quoted historian Arthur Schlesinger as saying it did not come close as Powell did not have definitive evidence while Adlai Stevenson presented “irrefutable and incontrovertible proof” of the Soviet Union placing missiles 90 miles from American shores. A commentary under the headline “Don’t let facts get in the way” by Ronnan Bennett, the producer of a documentary on Al Qaeda noted that US intelligence had gone badly wrong in the case of an Algerian living in Britain who was tied to one of the 9/11 hijackers, and concluded, “Given its history, US intelligence should come with a health warning.”

In contrast to the American and the British newspapers, the two South Asian newspapers, The Dawn and The Times of India covered the Colin Powell presentation less extensively and in far less detail, reflecting a lower interest in the story as well as fewer journalistic resources brought into the coverage. In the American and the British newspapers, despite the skeptical stories, dissenting views and editorial criticism, the American viewpoint was dominant. In the South Asian newspapers, within much less

extensive coverage, there was more of the non-American viewpoint, with reactions from Europe and the UN Security Council, from Iraq and from the Arab world.

The Dawn reported the Powell presentation on Page 1 (February 6, 2003) with the headline, “Powell issues virtual indictment of Iraq” and went on to add the statement of the Iraqi ambassador to the United Nations that he would be delivering a message of peace and also that Saddam Hussein had denied that his government had a relationship with Al Qaeda or had weapons of mass destruction. The Pakistani Government’s statement calling upon all including the Iraqi leadership to “avert war and bloodshed” was covered in detail. That statement also noted that the Muslim world was deeply worried that war might break out and called upon Saddam Hussein to put the interests of the Iraqi people first and cooperate with the weapons inspections. Other reports included “Saudi Arabia seeks last chance to avert war”, “China, Russia for more inspections”, “Saddam’s interviewer finds Iraqis stoical” and “US accelerates deployment”.

In its editorial, “Not too late to step back” The Dawn regarded as an “ominous development” the fact that the US and Britain were determined to attack Iraq irrespective of what the UN Security Council decided. It spoke of the concerns in the Muslim world including in Saudi Arabia and called upon Washington to heed the calls from divergent sources and step back from the brink. In an opinion piece, Eric S Margolis argued that despite 99.9 per cent of the Arab world being opposed to the war, their authoritarian regimes were “quietly digging Iraq’s grave”. Another commentary by Frank Zeller titled “Oil factor drives heated debate on looming war” discussed the charge that oil is the prime motive for the war.



The Times of India carried the report of Powell's presentation from agencies below the fold on Page 1 (February 6, 2003) with the headline, "With tapes and images, Powell says Iraq is guilty" and with a picture of Powell holding a vial. On the inside pages, there were reports on discussions on Iraq and avoiding war between the Indian Defense Minister and the visiting British Minister of State for Defense, on the US Ambassador in India talking of "Plans afoot for Saddam-less era" and "Aussie PM loses votes over Iraq".

In its editorial, The Times of India was skeptical of Powell's evidence but felt barring a miracle, war was inevitable. It went on to suggest that Saddam should offer the compromise of removing himself temporarily under U N protection to counter the charge that he was obstructing the search for weapons of mass destruction. On the opinion page, it carried excerpts of an interview with Saddam Hussein by the former British Minister and anti-war campaigner, Tony Benn. There, Saddam Hussein denied that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction or had links with Al Qaeda and said the Iraqis wanted peace but if subjected to aggression and humiliation "they will fight bravely".

If the Colin Powell presentation set the stage for the war, President Bush's televised address from the White House on March 17, 2003 was a defining moment for the supporters as well as the critics of the war, for it became clear that war was inevitable. President Bush sought to underline the connection between Iraq and the war on terrorism: "The danger is clear. Using chemical, biological or, one day, nuclear weapons obtained with the help of Iraq, terrorists could fulfill their stated ambitions and kill thousands or hundreds of thousands in our country or any other." He delivered an ultimatum to Saddam Hussein and his sons to leave Iraq within 48 hours or face military conflict. He

called upon the Iraqi armed forces not to fight for a dying regime and not to resort to such acts as burning oil wells or the use of weapons of mass destruction, holding out the threat of prosecution for war crimes. To the world at large, he pointed out that appeasement of murderous dictators had in the past led to genocide and global war, and asserted “We are now acting because the risks of inaction would be greater.” As for the Iraqi people, once the dictator was gone “they can set an example to all the Middle East of a vital and peaceful and self-governing nation.”

The address and the impending war was the lead story on Page 1 in all the five newspapers, only the coverage of the speech itself, the reaction around the world, the military preparations and the situation on the ground in Iraq were much more extensive in the New York Times, The Times, London and the Guardian. The New York Times’ headline across Page 1 (March 18, 2003) was, “Bush Gives Hussein 48 hours, and vows to act” that was somewhat more tempered than The Times’ “War: the beginning of the endgame. Get out now, Bush tells Saddam family” or The Guardian’s “Diplomacy dies, now its war”. The headlines were direct and matter of fact both in The Dawn (“Quit or face war, Saddam told”) and in The Times of India (“Bush to Saddam: Quite or face war”).

The New York Times’ coverage included reports on the end of the diplomatic effort at the United Nations, on the military plans and expectations (for example, “Allies hope to move quickly to seize cities in Iraq’s south”), descriptions of the mood in the military camps in Kuwait as the troops began their preparations (“In Kuwait, the Marines wrap up artillery practice and get ready to move”, “Division commander: A ferocious competitor who pushes his soldiers and himself hard”) and reactions of the people in the

United States (“Wait over, Americans voice a mix of relief and anxiety”). In addition, it carried a detailed report by its correspondent in Baghdad, John Burns, who described how the city is preparing for the war and noted the yearning for relief among ordinary Iraqis even as they formally echoed the official adulation for Saddam Hussein, as well as a description of the mood in the Kurdish controlled area. The resignation of Robin Cook from the Blair Government was reported inside: “In a new setback for Blair, a cabinet Minister resigns” and there was a report on the reaction in the UN Security Council.

The New York Times was highly critical of Bush’s decision in its editorial, “War in the ruins of diplomacy” where it spoke of war being waged “without the compulsion of necessity” which risked squandering “not America’s power, but an essential part of its glory.” It was critical of Baghdad for its “cooperation without content” and of the French stand which “succeeded in sending all the wrong signals to Baghdad”, but went on to say “Washington’s own destructive contributions were enormous.” In a bow to patriotic sentiment, it promised to hold its silence henceforth on the justification for the war, declaring that once the war started, it might not be the right time for complaints about how the US got into it. That did not, however, prevent it from raising hard questions on the war strategy and how it was executed, in contrast to the basic rationale for the war, both in news reports and in editorials during the course of the conflict.

In an Op-ed piece, “Good reasons for going round the UN”, Anne-Marie Slaughter went on to argue that “The war might be illegal, but it could still be legitimate”—a position that was challenged the next day by Stanley Hoffman who asked how war without the sanction of the United Nations or a large grouping like the NATO

could be legitimate. In a news analysis on Page 1, David E Sanger noted that Bush had turned a new doctrine of preemptive military action into a rationale for the war.

In the pages of *The Times*, London and *The Guardian*, the war still dominated with an extensive coverage of Bush's speech, reports of the military plans and of the mood in the military camps from embedded reporters and others based in Kuwait and descriptions of the situation in Iraq. A great deal of attention, however, was paid to the resignation of Robin Cook, with most reports speaking admiringly of his resignation over a matter of principle. The mood and the maneuvers within the Labor Party before the crucial vote on the war in the British House of Commons the next day were covered exhaustively in both the newspapers. The issue of legality of the war which did not seem relevant in the United States assumed some importance in the UK as it is a signatory to the Treaty of Rome establishing the International Criminal Court, and the Attorney General's view that it was perfectly legal to start military action on the basis of the existing UN resolutions was reported in great detail, along with the opinion of legal experts who were divided on the issue. *The Times* added a new touch to its coverage, commissioning a "soldier artist" Matthew Cook and publishing a full page of his illustrations on life in the military camps, recalling in its story the role of war artists since Goya to Paul Nash and Picasso.

While the news coverage in *The Times* and *The Guardian* was broadly similar, the editorial and the opinion columns showed striking differences. *The Times* in its editorial, "Air of resignation. The Prime Minister confronts his labor colleagues" (March 18, 2003) extended support to the war, criticizing the opponents in the ruling Labor Party. It blamed the French threat of veto for the collapse of diplomacy at the UN and endorsed

the Attorney General's position that war would be legal, arguing that a specific second resolution authorizing military action while politically advantageous was not a legal obligation. It found fault with a section of the Labor members of parliament for treating Iraq as a matter of conscience, ignoring their responsibility as a ruling party under the conventional political process. The opinion columns were somewhat more mixed, with commentators praising Robin Cook ("Cook cuts to heart of debate with razor of principle") and bemoaning the failure to get wider support ("Ten crucial mistakes that cost us dear in search for a deal").

The Guardian in its editorial, "Losing Robin Cook. Can Clare Short be far behind" (March 18, 2003) was strident in its opposition to the war, praising Robin Cook's resignation as reviving the practice of resigning over an issue of principle. It attacked the war without international agreement or domestic support and urged the members of parliament to vote against the war. It also criticized Clare Short's decision to stay on in government after having declared she would quit if there was no specific UN authorization. Bill Clinton made an unusual appearance in its opinion columns with a piece, "Trust Tony's judgment", in which he declared he trusted Blair to do what was right and hoped the British people would do too. Other opinion pieces were extremely critical of the decision to go to war, including an article by a British citizen of Iraqi origin who asked "Whose interests at heart?" In an unusual piece of writing for a correspondent with the troops on the frontlines, James Meek philosophized on the unjustness of the war ("making war where there isn't one"), described some interesting characters among the soldiers and concluded that while individually they were interesting and very human, they would soon be merged into one dark mass, "an indistinguishable horde of invaders."

The Dawn (March 18, 2003) used Baghdad's rejection of the ultimatum and Robin Cook's resignation on Page 1 alongside the main story on Bush's ultimatum. On the inside pages, most of reports were of criticism or concerns over the American plan: the dismay of the Pakistani Government over the failure of the UN Security Council to find a way out, opposition demands that the Pakistani Government condemn the war plan, the Vatican's condemnation of the planned invasion as a "crime", the widening U.S-French rift, Syria's concern that it might be the next target and Saddam Hussein telling a Tunisian envoy that Iraq had had weapons of mass destruction at one time but did not have them any longer.

In its editorial, "On to war" The Dawn was extremely critical of the American plan and said "Unless something dramatic happens, the U S might have unleashed its terror on the Iraqi people." It felt the weapons inspectors must have been given time now that Baghdad was giving them unimpeded access. It saw Israel as the real beneficiary, as in the chaos and aftermath of the war it would be able to annex the occupied territories and warned that the leadership of the Middle East would pass into the hands of the very elements America's war on terror was intended to rein in.

The Times of India too reported President Bush's ultimatum on its front page(March 18, 2003). In addition, it noted the Indian Government's reaction of "deep anguish" over the prospect of military action and concern for the Iraqi people. In its editorial, (March 19, 2003) The Times of India was critical of the planned invasion but its arguments and concerns were quite different from those of The Dawn. While noting that there was no justification or sanction for the war, it hoped it would be a short and mercifully swift conflict with minimum loss of lives. It was critical of the Bush doctrine

of pre-emptive military action and saw the war as sounding the death knell of the United Nations. It warned of anti-Americanism and extremism, of terrorist reprisals and of the difficulties of occupation after the war when the American force “will have to wrestle with bitter sectarian and ethnic divisions in post-Saddam Iraq”. “President Bush might thus end up winning the war but losing the peace”, it concluded.

**War as a reality:**

Even the faint hopes for peace gave way to the harsh reality of a war on the night of March 19 in Washington and at daybreak on March 20 in Baghdad as the United States launched missile and bomb attacks. As the build up to the war had been gradual since February, there was no shock or surprise element but the press was faced with an event of profoundly tragic and transformative significance and how exactly it would play out remained as yet uncertain. Even before the massive air strikes began, F-117 stealth fighters in an attempt to decapitate the Iraqi leadership had dropped bombs on a location in Baghdad where, intelligence reports had it, Saddam Hussein and his sons were meeting but they apparently missed Saddam Hussein. Then followed the cruise missile attacks on Baghdad and the bombing of artillery positions in southern Iraq. Soon after, President Bush addressed the nation from the Oval Office and announced that on his orders coalition forces had begun striking selected targets in Iraq. He cautioned that the campaign could be “longer and more difficult than some predict” and that building a united, stable and free Iraq would require sustained commitment. He also held out the assurance that the coalition forces would make every effort to spare innocent civilians from harm and that the United States had no ambition in Iraq except to remove a threat and restore control of the country to its own people.

The New York Times broke the news of the war with the headline across the front page: “Bush orders start of war on Iraq; Missiles apparently miss Hussein” with a picture of an explosion in Baghdad and one of Bush (March 20, 2003). Alongside a detailed report of the start of the war and Bush’s announcement, it also carried a report from its correspondent in Baghdad on Saddam Hussein’s defiant response and his appeal to Iraqis to draw arms against the invaders. Other reports on the page included a military analysis and the reaction within the United States (“Day of waiting and wondering ends with word from President”).

The Times’ front page (March 20, 2003) had a totally different look, with the headline across the page, “War dawns on Baghdad” with a picture of a Royal Air Force jet flying over the oil fields of Iraq. The main story reported the cruise missile and air strikes and President Bush’s announcement of the beginning of the military action. Along with it were two other reports: one on British school children playing truant and joining the anti-war protests and another on the anger of the French Government over Prime Minister Blair’s attack on France in the debate in the House of Commons. It carried a profile of Saddam Hussein under the headline, “Ruthless gambler rolls his final deadly dice” which spoke of his “errors on an epic scale.” The Guardian too went across the front page with the headline, “Land, sea and air assault” and a picture of Baghdad under missile attack (March 20, 2003). Its correspondent from Baghdad reported how after a short, sharp shock, Baghdad bounced back and another report on Page 1 was on Blair’s appeal to a deeply divided Britain to unite behind the country’s armed forces.

In the case of The Dawn and The Times of India, the ground attack had already begun by the time they could report the start of the war in their editions of March 21.



The tone on The Dawn's front page was strikingly different: "US, UK invade Iraq" with a picture of the missile attack on Baghdad. Also on top of Page 1 was a report from Washington, "Saddam promises victory to his nation". The other stories on the page included "World condemns invasion, fears for civilians", the Pakistani Foreign Minister's statement deploring the military action and Kofi Annan's appeal to all parties to shield the civilian population from the grim consequences of the war. Reflecting a very specific concern, The Dawn also reported in detail of a warning by the State Bank of Pakistan that the war could have some financial consequences for Pakistan depending on its "intensity, duration and collateral damages."

In contrast, The Times of India's headlines were similar to the headlines in the New York Times and the two British newspapers: "US ground attack on; first air strikes target Saddam; fire rages on in the heart of Baghdad". The main report from its correspondent in Washington described in detail the air and missile strikes and how Bush made the final decision and along with it was a picture of an American warplane on an aircraft carrier. Another report on Page 1 was about the assurance of the Indian petroleum ministry that the country had enough oil stocks for two months and there was no cause for worry over the consequences of the war on oil supplies. The war did not take up all of the front page, and it had to make some room for a picture of the Indian cricket team in the World Cup final.

In its overall coverage of the start of the war, the New York Times dealt with a wide range of issues: the military strategy, reports from correspondents with specific military units, the view from within Iraq and the reaction of Iraqi immigrants in the United States, international opinion including views from a unhappy Saudi Arabia and

Turkey that was reluctant to allow American troops to go through and preparations against possible terrorist attacks within the United States. The Times, London focused on the broad military strategy as well and carried reports from correspondents with British military units in Kuwait but its coverage of the international, particularly European, viewpoint was broader as was its coverage of the specific British concerns over the divisions in the Labor Party over the Blair Government's decision to join the war. The Guardian with its main focus on the war also carried stories of students and workers in Britain and in other parts of Europe protesting against the war, the anger in the Middle East and in Saudi Arabia, the Anglo-French rancor over the collapse of diplomacy in the UN Security Council and the stretched supply lines as the troops moved into Iraq.

The Dawn while reporting on the start of the war in a matter of fact tone with news agency reports provided a great deal of coverage to the opposition to the war from France, Germany, Russia and China as well as from the Middle East and Canada. In its pages one saw also the internal debate within Pakistan on how far its government should go in voicing its opposition to the war, with the opposition parties demanding a stronger public condemnation of the American action. The Times of India focused on the broad war theatre but also reported the opposition from France, Germany and Russia, the Indian Government's anguish and the anti-war protests in Europe.

The New York Times in its editorial noted that the lives of young Americans and of Iraqis of all ages had been wagered in the war and declared, "Now that the first strikes have begun, even those who vehemently opposed this war will find themselves in the strange position of hoping for just what the president they have opposed is himself hoping for: a quick, conclusive resolution fought as bloodlessly as possible." All the

other thoughts had come to a rest, and “We simply hope for the welfare of those men and women—sons and daughters—who will be flinging themselves into the Iraqi desert.”

. In line with the division of opinion within Britain, The Times and the Guardian came down on opposite ends of the war spectrum. The Times felt that the rest of the world had not woken up to the threat posed by the combination of “messianic terrorism and weapons of mass destruction” and that Bush and Blair were trying to establish a framework to respond to new menaces. It noted the difficult task ahead in rebuilding Iraq as a free society and concluded “Now that British forces have been committed, the country should, and almost certainly will, rally around them.” It went on to add the Prime Minister deserved the support of all political parties.

The Guardian noted in its editorial that while Blair had taken Britain into the war his belief that the war was the only way and that the consequences could be controlled “lie not in his hands, but in President Bush’s”, which was the world’s real fear. It was critical of the targeting of Saddam Hussein in the first bombing, arguing that it would be far preferable to try him for his crimes. It wondered who might be on the United States’ target next and urged restraint, “for the legal and moral grounds for this war are already very shaky.”

While The Guardian which was vociferous in its opposition to the war before it began toned down its opposition once the war started, The Dawn which was restrained in its comments before the war showed much more indignation once the war began, declaring in its editorial that there was no justification for the war. The United States while claiming that it was going in to free the Iraqi people and establish democracy was going in “to give more money and arms and lebensraum to Israel; and more oil to itself”.

It warned that the anger of the Arab people would be directed towards the moderate regimes in the region that could not save them from the terror of their American friends. The Arab and the other Muslim states, including America's traditional allies, might find the new Eurasian alliance of France, Germany, Russia and China more appealing. The Times of India's editorials revealed opposition but not so much outrage as The Dawn's. It noted the opposition of every major international body including the UN and NATO to the war as well as of the people who had demonstrated against the war in their thousands. "The US will win this war, but winning the hearts and minds of the swelling waves of anti-war protestors is another matter altogether," was its conclusion.

### **The Pause and the Setbacks:**

In his address announcing the start of the war, President Bush took care to caution against expectations of a quick and easy take over of Iraq, declaring, "A campaign on the harsh terrain of a nation as large as California could be longer and more difficult than some predict." Yet, the war in the early days appeared to be going exceedingly well for the American and the British forces and reports from the briefings and from reporters on the ground with the troops led to the belief that it would be over very quickly. In a New York Times/CBS News opinion poll published on March 24 in the New York Times, 63 per cent of Americans felt at the end of the third week of March that the war would end very quickly as against only 43 per cent at the beginning of the month when "the war was looming on the horizon."

Yet, after the first three days of rapid advance through southern Iraq towards Baghdad things did not appear to be smooth. A dust storm slowed the advance; an army maintenance convoy that took a wrong turn was ambushed in Nasiriya with a dozen

American soldiers killed or captured; 10 Marines were killed when a rocket propelled grenade hit their troop carrier in Nasiriya; waves of Fedayeen fighting the vulnerable columns with small arms and grenades took the American army commanders by surprise; the first wave of attacks on the Republican Guard by Apache helicopters was turned back by continuous small arms fire which brought down one and disabled many of the helicopters; and Iraqi surrenders were not as fast or as numerous as the first reports predicted. The reported comment of the commander of the American ground forces, Lt. Gen. William S Wallace, that “The enemy we are fighting is a bit different from the one we had war gamed against” seemed to sum up the position at that time.

In the overall context of the war these setbacks paled into insignificance when compared with the losses suffered by Iraq. Yet given the one sided nature of the conflict in the very early stages, that the American and the British forces should be taking such casualties changed the press perception, giving rise to the feeling that the war was getting to be more difficult from the standpoint of the coalition forces. The American administration and the military in the daily briefings still focused on the overall campaign and the advances made in the march towards Baghdad, but they also announced the daily count of dead and missing coalition soldiers, and the circumstances surrounding them even as they took care not to reveal any figure of the total Iraqi civilian casualties. The Iraqi government and its television on the other hand kept the focus on the civilian casualties and on the setbacks suffered by the American and the British forces. The most dramatic moment in this information war came when Iraqi television broadcast the images of American soldiers who died or who were taken prisoner in the fighting in

Nasiriya—an act that was denounced by the United States as violating the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war.

The front page of The New York Times of March 24, 2003 reflected this downswing in the assessment of how the war was going. The main headline across the page captured the sentiment: Allies and Iraqis battle on 2 fronts; 20 Americans dead or missing, 50 hurt”. The lead story spoke of the US and Britain taking the worst casualties so far in the sharpest engagement of the war, of the ambush of the maintenance convoy near Nasiriya, of how Iraqi and Arab television beamed the images of captured American soldiers around the world and of the American condemnation of the broadcast as violative of the Geneva Conventions. Another report described how the American forces in a crucial step started their push towards Baghdad but suffered a setback when the Fedayeen militia surprised them with their attacks and the Apache helicopters attacking the Republican Guard did not emerge unscathed, but were trying to regain the initiative. A third report from its correspondent in Baghdad described the Iraqi Defense Minister’s warning of a fierce clash ahead near Baghdad. A news analysis on the front page summed up the mood: “Ambushes and firefights take their toll on America’s initial euphoria”. Even as most of the television channels aired some parts of the Iraqi television broadcast of the images of the captured American soldiers, The New York Times did not publish the images but chose instead to publish the picture of a shocked American servicewoman watching the images of captured and killed soldiers on Al Jazeera television, with a story of how the television channels struggled to deal with the images of the captives in the face of the Pentagon’s request not to use them.

The cautious mood was reflected in The New York Times' editorial, "A New War" which felt "The task of beating back Iraq's best troops and capturing Baghdad while keeping the rest of the country under control looks increasingly formidable." It described as "the most disheartening events of the weekend" two self-inflicted wounds: the shooting down of a British plane returning from combat by an American Patriot missile and the fratricidal attack at a US military base by a disaffected American soldier described as a Muslim convert in which one soldier was killed and many injured. It raised questions over the American decision to press ahead with a relatively small invasion force supported by overwhelming air and missile power, arguing that while it had the advantage of speed, it also exposed the rear of the force to attacks by Iraqi units that were bypassed. The strategy of going in with a relatively small, well equipped force backed by air power, associated with the Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, was to be debated in its columns through the next week.

The headline on The Times' front page (March 24, 2003) was much more stark: "Dawning of war's harsh reality" and the main story began: "The optimism of the early hours of the war in Iraq gave way to somber reflection yesterday as British and US forces suffered jolt after jolt in their advance towards Baghdad." In contrast to The New York Times, it published separate pictures of five captured American soldiers broadcast by Al Jazeera television along with a story of how four of them appeared intimidated by their inquisitor on television while the fifth showed "calm courage" and just revealed his name and hometown. The report also pointed out that the Geneva Convention prohibited the parading of prisoners of war for propaganda or for weakening the resolve of the prisoners' side. In its editorial, The Times kept up its support for the war, noting that the

incidents were “a sober reminder of the brutal nature of conflict” but warned that the tactics of the Iraqi leadership “will be greeted with resolution as well as revulsion”. “Americans’ energies will be redoubled, but their ambitions to be liberators, not conquerors, will not be diminished,” it noted.

The main story in The Guardian’s front page (March 24, 2003) under the headline, “American prisoners paraded by Iraqis” spoke of the series of setbacks suffered by the American and the British forces. Along with five large pictures of the captured American soldiers down the middle of the page, it detailed the scenes from Al Jazeera television of Iraqi captors questioning the soldiers and their replies. It noted the criticism of President Bush and Defense Secretary Rumsfeld of the mistreatment of the prisoners but also quoted a Red Cross spokeswoman as saying that it was not a “violation per se” of the Geneva Conventions to put prisoners of war on television. Its correspondent in Baghdad noted the new, upbeat mood in Baghdad as rumors of a downed American pilot plunging into the Tigris set the police and the people on a search along the banks as a band played music and “for an afternoon at least, a battered city was ready to believe that it could win the war.”

The Guardian’s editorial “Tougher than it seemed. Nothing about war is straightforward” noted, “Buoyed by our sense of technological, political and moral superiority towards Iraq, and precipitated by our culture’s preference for short, sharp, scheduled outcomes, we have risked falling prey to a delusion that modern war is easy, cost-free and entertaining, when it is none of these things.” It felt that the US and British performances had been more fallible than assumed, and Iraqi performance more resilient,



and questioned the wisdom of Donald Rumsfeld discarding the old theory of overwhelming force for the new theory of light and fast blitzkrieg warfare.

The Dawn in its front page reports from news agencies (March 24, 2003) focused on the US advance towards Baghdad but reported extensively on the setbacks with a picture of a wounded Marine being brought to a hospital and pictures of four of the captured American soldiers broadcast on Iraqi television. In addition, it reported on its front page the Iraqi claim that it had shot down five coalition planes and two helicopters, and a call by the German foreign minister to Europe to counter-balance American might in case it went into other “disarmament wars”. It reported an anti-war march in Lahore organized by some religious and opposition parties on which it focused its editorial comment. The editorial noted that the protests were part of the global wave of anger against the US and Britain on an issue which was highly emotive with religious overtones, but warned over-zealous protestors against talk of a jihad against American and British interests in Pakistan, arguing that innocent Pakistanis would be the ones most hurt in such attacks.

On The Times of India’s front page (March 24, 2003) the Iraq war was overwhelmed by the news of the Indian cricket team’s defeat by Australia in the World Cup final. Still, the page one report, “US stumbles on way to Baghdad” by its correspondents and news agencies focused on the setback suffered by the American and the British forces. The one report with a picture of an Iraqi with a crying child spoke of the downing of a British plane by an American Patriot missile, the attack by an American soldier of his colleagues that killed one soldier, the killing of the Marines in Nassiriya, the capture of American soldiers and the broadcasting of their images on television and

Donald Rumsfeld's condemnation of the broadcasts. In its editorial on this phase of the war, "Iraqi minefield" (March 26, 2003) it noted that the Iraqis were making up what they lacked in military might through "sheer grit and will power", resisting with insignificant weapons like small arms and rocket propelled grenades. "To be sure, all this might well be much sound and fury before the inevitable surrender", it conceded, but warned the Bush administration that it would soon have to face the uncomfortable truth that the Iraqi dislike of Saddam Hussein was matched only by their distrust of the United States.

**The face of human tragedy:**

The phrase "collateral damage" has come to be recognized as a particularly insensitive phrase in military speak to refer to the death of non-combatant civilians and the destruction of houses, schools and hospitals that were not targeted but were hit in error, and in the coverage of the war one did not find the phrase used much. The American military insisted it did not keep a count of civilian deaths in Iraq but the Iraqi government kept giving out the civilian death toll—for example, it put the overall civilian toll at 653 midway through the war as of April 1 -- while non-official groups estimated over 1000 civilian deaths during the main combat phase. A particularly tragic incident involved the death of seven civilians including women and children when an American army unit fired on their van that was approaching a checkpoint they were manning near the city of Najaf. This incident came soon after a suicide bombing in which an Iraqi soldier in civilian clothes had driven an explosive laden car into another checkpoint in Najaf, killing four American soldiers. The circumstances surrounding the shooting of the van load of civilians were not quite clear. The American military spokesmen said that the

soldiers had first motioned the van to stop, fired warning shots, then fired into the engine and only as a last resort when the vehicle still continued towards the checkpoint did they fire into the passenger compartment. This account of a graduated response was challenged by the eyewitness account of a Washington Post correspondent, William Branigin, who was with the troops on the location and quoted an American army captain pulling up a platoon leader for killing a whole family because he did not fire a warning shot soon enough. Branigin's report also quoted other soldiers as saying that they had heard the platoon leader explain to the captain that he had indeed fired two warning shots but the van wouldn't still stop, and what exactly had happened remained unclear.

The New York Times (April 1, 2003) did not report the Najaf checkpoint killings as a separate story on its front page; instead it was dealt with in three paragraphs way down in the main report, "2 US columns are advancing on Baghdad defenses" which kept the focus on the overall military strategy. A more detailed account was published on the first page of its 16-page special daily section, 'A Nation at War' and this account as well as the front page reference reported the Pentagon's version of the incident without any mention of William Branigin's eyewitness account that was also put out on news agency wires along with the American military version.

While The New York Times did not give the checkpoint killings a prominent play in its news coverage, it referred to the tragedy in its editorial, "The Death of Innocents" which noted that the war was turning out to be quite unlike the one "that would flood the Arab world with pictures of American soldiers feeding hungry people and giving medical attention to sick children" envisioned by the Bush administration. Instead, "billions around the globe are seeing and hearing reports that women and children were gunned

down yesterday while riding a civilian van at an American checkpoint.” It went on to warn that if such incidents became routine, “the political war in Iraq could be lost even before the military one is won.”

The Times (April 1, 2003) placed the checkpoint killings on top of its front page, “Children die as US troops fire on van at checkpoint”. Its correspondent detailed both the Pentagon account of a graduated response by the army unit and William Branigin’s account which suggested bungling. The main story on The Times front page was, “Voters believe war is being won” which reported the findings of a Populus poll for The Times that two thirds of the British public felt the war was going well. It also quoted the findings of a Gallup poll for USA Today and CNN that 85 per cent of Americans felt the war was going well. In its editorial the next day, The Times felt that it was essential the US troops should exercise restraint. The difficulties the American troops faced were not to be underestimated, it said and noted the temptation to contrast the “trigger happy” Americans with the more restrained British with their experience of terrorism in Northern Ireland. The comparison was not so clear cut, for at no point did the British army have to cope with “the chilling menace that is the determined suicide bomber.”

The Guardian (April 1, 2003) gave the checkpoint killings story more prominence on the top of its front page than The New York Times and The Times with a factual headline, “Seven women and children shot dead at checkpoint.” The report by its correspondent described the killings as “the worst single case of civilian deaths in the war that US forces have so far admitted” and included the Pentagon account as well as the “dramatically different account” of William Branigin. The report spoke of the tensions between the Americans and the British commanders who were worried about the

“trigger-happy tactics” of the US troops in contrast to the stricter rules of engagement enforced by the British. The main story on its front page, “US draws up secret plan to impose regime on Iraq”, spoke of the differences within the Bush administration on how exactly to involve Ahmed Chalabi in a new government in Iraq. Its editorial “Wider still and wider” which argued against extending the war to Syria also noted the civilian deaths: “Iraq’s guerilla tactics, increasingly indistinguishable in the American military mind from terrorism, are leading to ever more frequent, unacceptable civilian deaths at the hands of US soldiers unaccustomed to, and untrained for, unconventional warfare.” This situation was intensifying the “broad sense of outrage across the Arab and Muslim world”, it warned.

Interestingly, both The Dawn and The Times of India focused more on the aggregates and the overall total of civilians killed rather than on the specific incidents involving a few, reflecting perhaps the journalistic practices rooted in the cultural mores of community oriented, rather than individualistic, societies. The Dawn mentioned the Najaf checkpoint killings in passing in a front page main story on civilian deaths: “15 of a family among 56 civilians killed” and noted both the Pentagon’s account and the version of William Branigin. On the course of the war itself, it provided greater front page coverage of the Iraqi account, with a picture of Iraqi fighters in front of a destroyed American truck and a story on the top of the page, “3,000 volunteers ready in Baghdad. Many tanks, copters destroyed. Saddam calls for Jihad”. The Dawn did not comment on the checkpoint killings editorially but it carried commentaries by British and Pakistani writers (“Wake up call in the Arab World” “Saddam’s war predictions come true, at least

for now” and “Illegal war will end in disaster for all”) suggesting that the war was not going well for the American and British side.

The Times of India (April 1, 2003) reported the checkpoint killings as part of its main story on the front page, “Allies kill 40 civilians”. The killing of 33 civilians in coalition bombing in the outskirts of Hilla was the focus of the first part of the story while the second half covered the checkpoint incident. The report from news agencies recounted the American military version that the vehicle failed to stop despite repeated warning shots by US troops who then fired at the passenger compartment. It also quoted Maj. Gen. Buford Blount, commander of the Third Infantry Division as saying that he was “very concerned about it and very sorry it happened.” While the focus on its front page was on civilian deaths, the tone was neutral as the reports were drawn from international news agencies.

### **The American mood lifts:**

In the midst of death and destruction of the war, the media also tend to focus on stories of heroism and one such poignant moment with its happy rather than tragic ending was the rescue of Jessica Lynch from a hospital in Nasiriya where she had been held for a week after she was injured when her maintenance convoy was attacked. She was rescued by US Special Forces and Marines after they had got information from an intelligence source and after a firefight outside the hospital. The American military was not very forthcoming about the details of the rescue or her condition but for two weeks from then on, Jessica Lynch became the focus of intense media attention. It was a human story in the midst of accounts of bombings and of advancing troops fighting their way through

and marked a quick change of mood from concern over the way the war was going to a sense of optimism.

The New York Times, keeping the main focus of the front page (April 2, 2003) on the overall military situation, placed the report of the rescue of Jessica Lynch on the middle of the page: “Commandos rescue soldier; she was held since ambush”. It was the initial account of the rescue with not much detail of the rescue operation itself, along with the background of her family, of the attack after which she was taken prisoner and of the others missing from the ambush. This was a human story that the New York Times was to keep following for several days, with Jayson Blair providing some questionable reports on her background, family and home.

The New York Times in its editorial, “War news gets better” signaled the change of mood. “After bitter bickering over the adequacy of the invasion force and a delay caused by blinding sandstorms and attacks on supply lines, the allied campaign in Iraq has finally begun moving again,” it began. After noting the advance of the troops to 20 miles south of Baghdad, it went on to describe the rescue of Jessica Lynch as “the most heartwarming event in recent days.” “Her rescue provided a new symbol, reminding relatives and friends of U.S. soldiers of the homecomings waiting at the other end of the march to Baghdad,” it concluded.

In contrast, The Times (April 2, 2003) did not see much significance in the Jessica Lynch story. Its main story on the front page with the headline running across the page, “Strains of war test the allies” spoke of the British dismay at the US checkpoint killings. Another major story on the front page reported that “one in three French backs Saddam”.

The Jessica Lynch rescue was reported briefly on the front page, with a more detailed report with her picture on the inside pages.

The Guardian (April 2, 2003) reported the rescue of Jessica Lynch on an inside page with the headline “Troops free soldier taken prisoner in ambush”. Its front page focused on the battle for Baghdad with another report, “Children killed in US assault” which said “Dozens of Iraqi villagers were killed and injured in a ferocious American air and land assault near the Iraqi city of Babylon”. Its editorial criticized the Bush administration for trying to widen the conflict to Syria and warned of the intensifying outrage across the Arab and Muslim world. “The US could not find a clear link between Iraq and al Qaeda. Now by its own woeful blunderings, it is creating one.”

In contrast to The New York Times and the two British newspapers, neither The Dawn nor The Times of India showed any interest in the Jessica Lynch story, reflecting their distance from the war and from any of the people involved in it.

### **The American advance:**

Alongside the reports of the rescue of Jessica Lynch came the news of the American forces advancing and poised to attack Baghdad after taking control of the Baghdad airport on April 3. By this time, doubts that had been voiced over the adequacy of the American troop commitment in the face of the attacks on the stretched supply lines and unconventional warfare by the Fedayeen became muted. A decisive moment had arrived and the question in the air was when the American forces would attack Baghdad and what shape the battle for Baghdad would take. This was also the moment when it became clear that the Iraqi claim on how the war was going was wearing thin, and the American account gained greater credibility.



The New York Times (April 4, 2003) portrayed this stage of the war with the headline across the front page, “U.S. Forces at Edge of a Blacked-out Baghdad” which described how the American forces had moved into the Baghdad airport and were on the outskirts of the city. Its correspondent at the airport described in detail how the tanks of the Third Infantry Division moved into the airport and how a potent symbol of Saddam Hussein’s rule had now turned into a potent symbol of his “looming downfall”. It also reported the Marines closing in on the Iraqi capital from the southeast and how the American forces were poised for the battle for Baghdad. A cautionary note was sounded in the report of a press briefing by Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, in which he cautioned that while the Iraqi army had been weakened, it was “still lethal”.

Interestingly, The New York Times also informed its readers with images of front pages and translations that in the Arab press the war was being viewed in a very different light, with the focus on the killing of civilians and on the fierce resistance of the Iraqi forces.

Its editorial, “On the outskirts of Baghdad” which reflected the new situation noted that “American forces reached the outskirts of Baghdad with astonishing speed yesterday, raising hopes that the endgame in the Iraqi conflict may be close at hand.” It pointed to anecdotal information of Iraqi people welcoming the American forces and calls from the Shiite clergy to the people not to oppose the American and British forces, which should be helpful in maintaining order and providing humanitarian aid. If reports of the Republican Guard melting away were true, it “would make the final engagements in Baghdad somewhat easier”, it concluded.

The Times (April 4, 2003) reported the takeover of the Baghdad airport with a somewhat more robust headline across its front page, “Troops storm Baghdad airport”

and went on to report the seizure of parts of the airport by American armored divisions and the confusion in Baghdad following the blackouts. The Iraqi government even at this stage was conducting foreign journalists to the airport to show them that the American forces were nowhere near. The last Western journalist on such a tour, John Irvine of ITV News reported on the front page how he and his cameraman along with their Iraqi minder and driver were just reaching the airport when the American shelling began, how they had taken shelter in a dugout with Iraqi soldiers and then driven back to Baghdad. It seemed to be an instance of Iraqi news management gone terribly wrong in this specific case, though a group of foreign correspondents who had been taken to the airport a few hours earlier had gone back to report it was still under Iraqi control.

In its editorial, The Times noted that the outcome of the conflict had become certain though the timing and the narrative of the regime change remained unpredictable. Discussing what exactly would symbolize the capture of Baghdad, it argued that the most potent symbol of dictatorship was the person of the dictator himself and concluded, “In this war, for many people, there will be no symbolic substitute for the demise of Saddam Hussein.”

The Guardian (April 4, 2003) on its front page focused on Baghdad with the headline, “Lights out in Baghdad as US sends in special forces. Troops in battle for airport. 80 dead in strike on village”. Its correspondent in Baghdad reported that the reality of the American advance had hit home and how “a city which spent yesterday warding off the notions of an American onslaught went to bed with the realization that the attack had arrived.” Its editorials on the day did not deal with Iraq but it continued to run opinion pieces extremely critical of the war (“Unhappy endings” “Privatise this war”

and “False witness”) along with another which said “The rottenness of the Iraqi regime will hasten its end.”

The Dawn’s front page headline (April 5, 2003) read “Baghdad airport captured” and the story itself mixed reports of the American takeover of the airport with accounts of Saddam’s defiant call to the Iraqi people to resist, a suicide attack that killed five, the destruction of six US tanks and three armored personnel carriers, the surrender of 2500 Iraqi soldiers to the Marines and the claim by the Iraqi Information Minister that the American forces in the airport were surrounded and would face unconventional attacks. Another story on top of the front page, “Saddam’s dramatic appearance” along with a picture of Saddam Hussein out on the street with some people reported Iraqi television showing Saddam Hussein out on the streets of Baghdad vowing to defeat the American forces who were on the doorsteps of the capital. It did not take editorial notice of the developments at this stage but continued with its opinion columns critical of the American policy.

The Times of India on April 4, 2003 had reported on its front page, “Allies knock Baghdad door” but when it reported the American takeover of the airport the next day, its focus was on Saddam Hussein’s appearance on the Baghdad streets. “Saddam comes ‘live’, stuns all” was the main headline on the front page. The report of the airport capture was added to the account of the television footage of Saddam Hussein appearing on the streets of a residential area of Baghdad and talking to the people. It raised the question whether it was really Saddam Hussein or a double but noted that the presence of a long time bodyguard alongside made Western analysts conclude that it could be the real Saddam Hussein. The Times of India’s editorial stance at this stage continued to reflect

the earlier mood of pessimism and bemoaned the loss of credibility of governments and the organized media. It noted that the report of the capture of the Baghdad airport on Thursday turned out to be false, as Western journalists taken there could see the Iraqi forces in control.

### **The fall of Baghdad:**

Six days after they had stormed the airport, the American forces marched into Baghdad in the face of very little resistance, much of the Republican Guard having melted away. What symbolized the fall of Baghdad most in the public memory was the image of the Marines with their armored vehicle and rope helping a group of Iraqis pull down a statue of Saddam Hussein in a square in central Baghdad. The Iraqis on the scene appeared jubilant, and some dragged the head of the Saddam statue through the streets. Later, questions were to be raised on whether the event was staged or was spontaneous but at the moment it seemed to mark the moment when the regime in Baghdad had ended.

The New York Times (April 10, 2003) in its headline reporting the fall of Baghdad was cautious, “U. S. Forces take control in Baghdad; Bush elated; resistance remains”. It went on to report that the Defence Secretary Rumsfeld urged caution and said the war “most assuredly is not over”. It carried four pictures of the pulling down of Saddam Hussein’s statue and the crowd around, explaining in the caption that “American marines lashed a towering statue of Saddam Hussein to their armored vehicle and pulled it down.” A report from its correspondent in Baghdad noted that Saddam Hussein’s rule collapsed in a matter of hours, prompting ordinary Iraqis to take to the streets, loot government ministries and interrogation centers and “give a cheering, often tearful

welcome to advancing American troops”. A military analysis on the front page argued that speed, flexibility and American airpower combined to make possible the toppling of the Saddam Hussein regime.

In its editorial, “The Fall of Baghdad”, The New York Times felt that the scene in Baghdad where Saddam Hussein’s statue was toppled showed that “a complete American victory in Iraq may be achieved in a matter of days, not months”. In its assessment, “The swiftness of the American advance and the relatively low number of American and British casualties reflect a well designed battle plan and the effective use of air power to weaken and demoralize Iraq’s ground forces.” It warned that there might be some combat ahead in the areas north of Baghdad and wanted the American armed forces to rise to the challenges of keeping order and maintaining supplies of food, water and medicine to the population in the occupied areas. It concluded that a positive and historic transformation would come about only if “military operations are followed quickly by efforts to stabilize the country, feed and heal the people, and set Iraq towards a course of self-governance.”

The Times (April 10, 2003) in reporting the fall of Baghdad was quite ecstatic, going across the front page with the headline, “Victory in the 21-day war” along with a picture of a falling statue of Saddam Hussein. Its correspondent in Baghdad described the mood of relief and joy over the toppling of the Saddam Hussein regime and how the poor Shiite suburb of Saddam City “exploded into a festival of looting” of government buildings and shops and businesses. As for the toppling of the Saddam Hussein statue, the report noted that it was done by “a US tank egged on by a cheering, excited mob which then stamped with undisguised glee on the fallen idol.”

In its editorial, “Liberated Baghdad”, The Times noted that “A trickle of relief became a wave of frenzied, anguished rejoicing.” It wanted the military commanders to restore order and “rein in the exuberance before it turns to anarchy”. Noting the challenge of rebuilding Iraq which would cost \$20 billion a year, it wanted Iraqi self-government to be restored as soon as was practical and suggested that the United Nations resume its humanitarian aid.

The Guardian (April 10, 2003) on its front page focused on the mood in Baghdad after the toppling of the regime with the headline, “The toppling of Saddam—an end to 30 years of brutal rule”. Its correspondent who had been reporting from Baghdad “as Saddam’s regime passed from defiance to denial then to yesterday’s final defeat in the city” noted the relief among the people as “Thirty years of brutality and lies were coming to a close—not decisively, not in full measure, not without deep fears for the future or resentment at this deliverance by a foreign power—but on a day of stunning changes.”

In its editorial, “After the fall: One tyranny must not replace another”, The Guardian’s tone was a mix of relief and alarm—relief over the end of “the towering tyranny of one man” and alarm at the prospect of the Bush administration extending its “pre-emptive, unilateral, illegal war-making” to other countries like Iran, Syria, Libya and North Korea. It noted the challenges of restoring order and political authority and said “If reconstruction works, and that is an enormous ‘if’, a resource rich, democratic Iraq could become the throbbing engine of the Middle East.”

The Dawn (April 10, 2003) reported the fall of Baghdad in a matter of fact tone as the main story on the front page with the headlines, “Saddam control over Baghdad collapses. Looting breaks out. Little resistance met. Iraqi leader’s fate unknown”. It was

a mix of news agency reports on the American troops entering and taking control of Baghdad, on the pulling down of Saddam Hussein's statue, scenes of jubilation, the looting, President Bush being pleased and Vice President Cheney warning that "hard fighting" might lie ahead. In its editorial on the fall of Baghdad, "After Saddam, what?" The Dawn for the first time came out with its condemnation of Saddam Hussein, noting that "the Saddam regime has passed into history" and after an unequal fight, "a sorry chapter" in the life of Iraq had come to a close. The scenes of jubilation symbolized "the fate of all dictators who tyrannize over their own people". That said, it went on to urge the victors to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people by using Iraq's oil wealth and over the long term ensure the continuation of Iraq as a sovereign political entity with its territorial integrity. It warned against attempts to balkanize the country, creating a Kurdish state in the north and a Shiite state in the south and urged Washington not to go it alone in the task of reconstruction but involve the United Nations.

The Times of India's reporting of the fall of Baghdad on its front page (April 10, 2003) was more distant but louder than The Dawn's with the headline, "Joy and looting in Baghdad. Saddam's regime collapses. War is not yet over, says Bush". The main story from news agencies reported how elated Iraqis welcomed the American forces along with a picture of Saddam Hussein's statue being pulled down by US Marines. In its editorial, "Chief of Baghdad" it noted "Having waged the war against Saddam Hussein almost entirely on its own, it is the US that will determine the destiny of Baghdad for the foreseeable future." It was worried that the Bush administration would not allow United Nations any independent role but would want the world body as well as NGOs to function under its overall control, and over the choice of Ahmed Chalabi to

head the interim administration. “Democracy may eventually come to the Arab world but for a long while it will be one directed from Washington,” it concluded.

**End of major combat:**

In the eyes of most of the world, the Iraq war was over when the American forces took over Baghdad, but some towns north of Baghdad remained outside the control of the American and coalition forces. It was in Tikrit, the hometown of Saddam Hussein, that the remnants of his army took their last stand but after a day of fighting, the Marines took control of the town on April 14. With the fall of Tikrit, the whole of Iraq had come under the control of the American and coalition forces and the Pentagon announced the end of major combat operations. The focus suddenly veered to Syria, with the Secretary of State Colin Powell charging Syria with harboring fleeing officials of the Saddam Hussein regime and warning of economic and diplomatic sanctions. The White House was even stronger in its condemnation of Syria, labeling it a “rogue nation” and its president “an untested leader” who had lost his chance of proving he can take the right decisions.

The New York Times (April 15, 2003) combined the Pentagon’s announcement of the end of major combat with the warning to Syria on its front page with the headlines, “Pentagon asserts the main fighting is finished in Iraq. U. S. says Syria risks penalties for harboring Hussein officials.” It also reported the scene in Tikrit after the Marines had taken over, and Lt. Gen. Jay Garner who was to run post-war Iraq flying into the country. Another report described how order was returning to Baghdad after a week as American soldiers and a few Iraqi police officers patrolled the streets together.

The shift of focus to Syria, rather than the end of the Iraq war, drew editorial comment from The New York Times on April 15. It argued that Syria’s encouragement



of potential suicide bombers to go into Iraq, its harboring of officials of the Saddam Hussein regime and its encouragement of Palestinian Islamic Jihad were no doubt cause for alarm and anger but war against Syria made no sense. For, “Washington will only live up to the worst expectations of the Arab world if it now adopts a belligerent military approach to every nation in the region that it dislikes.” In another editorial, it noted the looting of the treasures from the Baghdad Museum. It urged the new Iraqi government to track them down, noting that it would need the cooperation of the West “which is the ultimate market for looted antiquities.”

The Times (April 15, 2003) at this stage proclaimed victory for the second time during the war with the headline across the front page, “Victory—now to win the peace” with the picture of an Iraqi jumping over a fallen statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad. It noted that Saddam Hussein’s hometown fell without a fight and that his “grandiloquent threats proved hollow”. It also reported Prime Minister Blair’s speech in the House of Commons where he claimed victory “albeit in solemn and modest tones” and went on to say, “There is upon us a heavy responsibility to make the peace worth the war.” In its editorial, The Times noted that Syria was now in the American sights and argued the country which had in the past cooperated with Saddam Hussein and was adopting confrontationist policies towards the coalition would do well to heed the American warnings. The “new reality” after Iraq was evident in Ariel Sharon’s new commitment to a future Palestinian state, the move to include more moderates in the Palestinian cabinet and in North Korea’s show of flexibility in negotiations over its nuclear program.

The front page of The Guardian (April 15, 2003) shifted the focus from the Iraq war to Syria, and along with a picture of American soldiers arresting a group of men

suspected of carrying arms, the main report carried the headline, “Bush vetoes Syrian war plans”. The front page also reported the results of a Guardian/ICM war tracker poll which found that the support for the war among the British public had risen from 28 per cent in mid-February to 63 per cent on April 13. It reported the end of the major combat operations on the inside pages with the headline, “With battles over, a perilous phase begins.” In its editorial, “Bush’s next move. It should be Palestine, not Damascus”, The Guardian argued that with Washington’s “anti-Syrian drumbeat” the opponents of the war would feel vindicated as the US started picking next targets while the supporters of the war for removing weapons of mass destruction and regime change would feel they had been taken for a ride. It noted that if Syria stopped its political support to militant Palestinian groups, it could help calm the Israel-Palestine front but only if President Bush exploited “new opportunities in Jerusalem as well as Damascus.”

The Dawn (April 15, 2003) divided its front page between Syria (“Syria a terrorist state, says US”) and the end of the combat in Iraq (“Saddam’s hometown falls to US troops”). It reported the White House warnings to Syria not to harbor supporters of Saddam Hussein and also give up its chemical weapons while a second report, also from news agencies, described how the US forces took control of Saddam Hussein’s last stronghold. “One never thought America would turn its attention to its next Arab target so soon,” it commented in its editorial. It felt that the hawks in Washington were trying to sideline the moderates led by Colin Powell and the “Zionist lobby” was prodding the US administration to attack Syria and warned that the outcome would be disastrous for America’s relations with the Arab-Islamic world.

The Times of India's main focus on its front page (April 15, 2003) was the end of the war: "War ends, time to rebuild: US" which described the fall of Tikrit and the attempts by American and British forces to restore order in the country with the help of the Iraqi police. Another report on the front page spoke of the American warnings to Syria on weapons of mass destruction. In its editorial, "Weapons of disruption", it noted that weapons of mass destruction had not been found in Iraq and raised the question if the war had been waged on false premises. It expressed concern that the play was about to go into the second act, with Syria now being portrayed as the villain.

**The overall coverage of the five newspapers:**

In the overall coverage, The New York Times clearly scored over the rest. There were many facets to its coverage, though its front page kept the focus on the military strategy and the progress of the war. With a separate 16 page section on the war every day during the combat phase, it provided a thorough coverage of the progress of the war and military strategy, accounts from individual military units by correspondents moving with them, reports on the situation and life within Iraq from its correspondent in Baghdad and in the Kurdish controlled areas, views of foreign governments and the Arab press, descriptions of the reaction of people within the United States and wide-ranging commentary on different aspects of the war.

Editorially, it did not accept the case for the war but after the conflict had started, it deferred to patriotic sentiment by not continuing to question the justification for the war when American soldiers were fighting on the ground—a position it declared specifically in an editorial. However, it did contest the administration's war strategy, its version of the course of the war and civilian deaths, even while warning of the difficulties ahead. In

both its news and opinion columns, there was a debate on Rumsfeld's strategy of fighting the war with fewer troops than were initially thought to be needed, for instance.

Compared with the other four newspapers, its news coverage did not focus as much on Iraqi civilian deaths, though it took editorial notice of them. It chose not to publish pictures of dead or captured American soldiers, in line with the Pentagon's request to be considerate to the families of the soldiers and their sensibilities.

In The Times, London, the headlines as well as the editorial comments made obvious its support for the war without lapsing into jingoism. It proclaimed victory twice during the course of the conflict, the first time when Baghdad fell and again when the major combat operations ended with the fall of Tikrit. Even on February 6, 2003 it commented editorially that Saddam must be stopped even if it took war, would not fault the United States for any incident and continued to support every move of Washington including the warning to Syria. It provided a detailed coverage of the differences within the Labor Party on joining the war, including the resignation of Robin Cook and the revolt by a section of the Labor members of parliament. Its support for the Blair Government's decision to take Britain into the war was unreserved and it was strongly critical in its editorials of the opponents of the war in Britain.

Its coverage of the war was detailed though not as extensive as the New York Times'. In what appeared to be a difficult phase of the war for the American and British troops, it reported the setbacks and the problems but editorially it remained optimistic, warning against despondency. It reported civilian deaths more prominently than the New York Times, but editorially it questioned the view that the American troops were more trigger happy than the British forces.

In contrast to The Times, The Guardian was vehement in its opposition to the war. Yet, while it attacked the American case for the war in the strongest terms before it began and continued with its opposition during the course of the war, it became somewhat muted after the combat operations began. Unlike in the US where support for the war was overwhelming, British opinion was divided, with an underlying debate on whether one could be “anti-war” but “pro-troops”. Having to walk the tightrope at a time when British troops were in the middle of a war made opposition to the war somewhat less strident. The tone changed but it remained consistent in its opposition to American unilateralism and the British decision to join the war. It balanced its distrust of the American motives with a condemnation of Saddam Hussein’s brutal regime in its editorials.

The Guardian’s correspondents were more prone to raise questions and challenge the American statements and actions in their reports and it also provided rich and textured accounts of the life and happenings in Baghdad. It focused on civilian deaths to a greater degree than The Times and The New York Times and both in its news reports and in its editorials it raised the issue of American troops being untrained and trigger happy. In its columns, there was also a wider coverage of opposition viewpoints and anti-war protests.

The Dawn’s position played out to be the opposite of The Guardian’s—restrained and circumspect in its opposition in the beginning, more strident after the war began, speaking in terms of America unleashing its terror on the Iraqi people in its editorial. It gave greater prominence and credibility to Iraqi accounts of the war than the American and British newspapers did, featuring them equally with the American and British accounts. Representing a moderate Islamic point of view, it voiced its support for the

Iraqi people rather than for the regime of Saddam Hussein, and after the fall of Baghdad came out with a condemnation of Saddam Hussein's regime. The Israel-Palestine conflict and the motives and plans of Israel were high on its list of concerns and were brought into the analyses of the war at every stage. The war in Iraq was seen as helping Israel to push through a settlement on its terms and annex the occupied territories. While critical of the United States, it stopped short of outright condemnation and framed its criticism in terms of the damage to Washington's relations with the Arab and Islamic world. It was worried that Islamic extremism would be fueled by the American actions and would topple the moderate regimes in the Middle East.

The Times of India's approach was in the manner of a distant, neutral observer without an emotional involvement with either side. It opposed the war but in much milder terms than The Dawn, and it was critical of Saddam Hussein. It framed its opposition in terms of concern for the Iraqi people and even suggested that Saddam Hussein should hand the country over to the United Nations temporarily. Its reports, mainly from international news agencies, were factual and neutral in tone. It did not show any special concern for any religion or group of countries and continued to analyze the situation from the standpoint of an anti-war liberal. It gave a greater prominence in its coverage to civilian deaths and to Iraqi accounts than The New York Times and the two British newspapers, but not so much as The Dawn.

**Conclusion:**

While the US administration was only partially successful in selling the case for the war before it began, how successful was it in getting the press both within the country and abroad to accept its ideal frame during the course of the war as a military mission

with rapidly advancing troops suffering few deaths, avoiding tragic costs in terms of civilian deaths and being greeted as liberators by the Iraqis? Six broad conclusions emerge from this study.

First, the American war frame seemed dominant in so far as the military strategy and operations were concerned. The rapid advance of the American and British troops and the Iraqi army melting away without much of a fight ensured that it was accepted as a highly successful mission. Yet, the acceptance while substantial was not quite in a full measure, for the actual events were not always smooth: the US and the British military had to reckon with a pause and setbacks including deaths and prisoners of war after the first three days of fighting, friendly fire incidents and avoidable killing of civilians in much publicized incidents. Even the scenes of jubilant welcome by Iraqis turned out to be less widespread than expected. There were no traces of the weapons of mass destruction that provided the basic rationale for the war, but in those early days that issue was as yet in a nascent stage. In the end, however, the doubts and the negative images were swept away by the relatively easy takeover of the country.

Second, the dictum that the victors get to write the history seemed relevant in this war. Competing against the American frame was the Iraqi war frame which focused on tough Iraqi resistance and the images of civilian deaths caused by the coalition attacks. With the Iraqi army being overwhelmed, Baghdad's accounts of the war which spoke of fierce resistance and of the coalition forces being halted in their tracks seemed to be losing credibility, and among the five newspapers in this study, *The Dawn* alone gave them some credence. Much more effective than Iraq's military accounts were its accounts of civilian deaths along with images that were widely publicized and stoked

anti-American sentiment, particularly in the Arab media. In a sense, only the American and the Iraqi frames were competing for influence. The British account differed little in its orientation from the American one and the governments of Pakistan and India were too far removed from the events to set up their frames and try to influence coverage.

Third, newspaper coverage seems to reflect notions, values and ideas that resonate within particular societies. Among the five newspapers, *The Dawn* and *The Times of India* gave more prominence to accounts of civilian deaths which fitted in with the image of a harsh and cruel war. To the American and the British public, inflicting civilian deaths would represent a callous disregard for innocents and seem out of character with their own notion of their countries and their values, and they were not quite prepared to see images of, or read about, such killings. This dissonance with popular sentiment—along with a general reluctance, on grounds of taste and sensitivity to reader reaction, to show too many images of death and injury-- perhaps made the American and the British newspapers hesitant in their coverage of civilian deaths.

Fourth, as might only be expected, national sentiment and patriotism do come into play during a war and influence coverage. Even those who oppose the war mute their voices once it starts lest they should be accused of giving comfort to the enemy. When a nation's troops are on the ground in a war, support for the troops becomes a value that is accepted without question. In the case of the United States, this also translates into some measure of deference to the President as the commander in chief who makes the decisions on the war. Regard for such national sentiment is apparent in one way or the other and in different degrees in the case of *The New York Times*, *The Times* and *The Guardian*. That much is clear from the emphasis in the display and the news



stories, the coverage of the casualties, the nuances and the editorial opinion, though the basic professional commitment to truth telling, fairness and presenting all sides is never lowered. A different kind of sentiment, identification with the Islamic world which is the outer circle beyond national boundaries, comes into play in the case of *The Dawn*. *The Times of India* appears like an uninvolved observer whose approach to the war is not touched by national or religious sentiment, but its interest in the war is much lower too.

Fifth, it is interesting to see how divided or how unified elite opinion was and how it shaped the coverage. In the United States, elite opinion was divided a year before the war started and well into the fall of 2002 and there was a vigorous public debate on the case for the war. *The New York Times* too opposed going to war at this stage. However, after the Congress passed a resolution authorizing the use of force and when it became clear that war was inevitable, the dissenting voices among the elite—the Congressional leaders, in particular—fell silent and opposition to the war was virtually pushed to the margins. Yet *The New York Times* did not join the silenced elite but kept up its opposition to the war till it actually began. Only after the war began did it stop raising questions on the justification for the war.

In contrast to the United States, opinion in Britain was much more divided down the middle on ideological lines. The system of parliamentary democracy made for a more vigorous and more sharply ideological debate, with the prime minister having to convince the parliament on the case for war for his very survival in office. Opposition to the war from a substantial section of the ruling Labor Party members of parliament as well as from the Liberal Democrats continued to the very end. The Blair government ultimately won parliamentary support for the war but not before Robin Cook resigned

from the government, precipitating a political crisis which demanded equal media attention alongside the impending war. The Times and The Guardian represent the two ideological ends of the opinion on the war, The Times offering fulsome support and The Guardian opposing it vehemently. Only, The Guardian became somewhat more restrained in its opposition after the war started. In India, and even more so in Pakistan, elite opinion remained almost uniformly anti-war, and the coverage of The Dawn and The Times of India reflected this situation.

Fifth, newspaper practices rooted in specific cultural and societal mores come into play during war coverage. For instance, The New York Times, The Times and The Guardian reported detailed accounts of individual events of death or capture or rescue, reflecting the values of societies that lay store by individuals. In contrast, The Dawn and The Times of India reported the aggregates, not paying much attention to individual deaths, in line perhaps with societal values that emphasize the community and the aggregate rather than the individual. Again, the two South Asian newspapers and The Times and The Guardian were more open to publishing images of death and injury and of captured soldiers than The New York Times.

Sixth, in information management, openness and truth telling seem to pay off, particularly when things are going well overall. In contrast to the uncontrolled, random access to the frontlines during the Vietnam war, the first Gulf War of 1991 shut the media out of the war theater completely, forcing them to depend on the briefings and the images handed out by the American military. The system of embedding reporters with military units used extensively in this war would seem to have enhanced the credibility of the military's accounts and provided rich and detailed reports from the frontlines. The media

had to accept restrictions on not disclosing locations and plans or publishing the names and pictures of American soldiers killed before the families were informed but were more or less free to write what they saw. The Pentagon felt that the experience would show the media how the troops lived, how well they were led, trained and motivated and for the media itself, going in with the military units was the only way of getting close to the action. Most of the reports from embedded reporters showed the units they were traveling with in a favorable light. At times, however, they reported things that were not going well and contradicted the official accounts, as for instance in the case of the first wave of Apache helicopter attacks being turned back by small arms fire and the checkpoint incident in which seven women and children were killed. Such reports only served to strengthen the credibility of the press after initial concerns that the embedded reporters would identify too closely with the units and lose their objectivity and balance. None of the newspapers used the accounts of embedded reporters (views through soda straws, as they were described) as the main reports on the progress of the war but used them as supplements to the main report, providing specific and detailed accounts. In contrast to high profile briefings by the US administration and the military and the reports of embedded reporters, the Iraqi government adopted a strategy of issuing statements, providing images of civilian deaths and conducting foreign media to places where civilians were killed in the American and British military action. In the face of the war not going well and the Iraqi forces yielding ground to the American and British troops, the official statements that insisted that the invading troops were being resisted and pushed back soon lost credibility and were seen as bluster. On the other hand, the

strategy of focusing on civilian deaths would seem to have been very effective in evoking sympathy in the Arab and Islamic world.

**Postscript:**

Well after a year into the occupation of Iraq, there are no traces of the weapons of mass destruction whose existence was held out to be the main rationale for the war.

While the focus of this paper has been on the coverage of the major combat phase in Iraq and the two speeches that paved the way for the war, a closely related issue outside its scope-- the coverage of the weapons of mass destruction issue in The New York Times and the American media in general--has been revisited and has become the subject of much criticism. This relates to the coverage of both the pre-war phase when US administration, intelligence and military officials--most famously Colin Powell--along with dissidents from the Iraqi National Congress asserted that Iraq did have weapons of mass destruction and that Saddam Hussein was trying to hide them, and the post-war search for the weapons by the American forces after the occupation.

In the pre-war phase, the media in its coverage of the existence of the weapons in Iraq relayed information from three types of sources. The first category comprised administration officials who made statements and speeches (starting from President Bush through Vice President Cheney, Condoleeza Rice and Donald Rumsfeld to Colin Powell) asserting that Iraq possessed chemical and biological weapons and was attempting to build nuclear weapons. To these public statements were added briefings that tended to be somewhat more alarmist from unnamed intelligence and defence sources, some of whom were identified later as neocons.

The second source of information comprised Iraqi dissidents, notably Ahmed Chalabi and members of the Iraqi National Congress, who were close to the defense establishment. If the administration officials were bent upon removing Saddam Hussein and were too quick to jump to conclusions based on hazy information, the Iraqi dissidents had a blatantly transparent motive in getting the US to invade Iraq and topple Saddam Hussein's regime. The third, and perhaps the most credible, category of information was made up of satellite photographs, intercepts and intelligence material all of which were displayed by Colin Powell in his presentation to the U. N. Security Council.

Even as the US administration was trying to convince the American public and the rest of the world on the weapons of mass destruction, Saddam Hussein was defiant in his public statements, denying the existence of the weapons and of programs to build them, initially refusing to cooperate with the U. N. inspection process and finally allowing the inspectors in but not providing them full access but seeking to mislead them. This obstructionist attitude, described as an attempt to conceal the smoking gun, was held out as further evidence of the existence of the weapons.

When it was found that there were no weapons of mass destruction after all, there was general amazement on how the U. S. administration and all the information could have been so wrong. One explanation was that Iraq had destroyed them after the first Gulf War of 1991 and was too enfeebled (reduced to a "toothless tiger") by the post-war sanctions to be able to rebuild them. Still, to instill fear and awe within his country and outside, particularly in the Middle East, Saddam Hussein kept up the pretence of pursuing the WMD programs even when formally denying their existence. In this situation, sections within the Bush administration, particularly the Neocons who were pushing for

an attack on Iraq, converted uncertain intelligence into “proof” while Iraqi dissidents kept offering defecting Iraqi scientists and military officials who provided information that later turned out to be false.

What was indeed surprising was that the press that would normally pursue these issues aggressively and with some measure of skepticism went along with purveying such grossly wrong information. It is interesting that, during the period from the fall of 2002 to the spring of 2003 when the Bush administration was seeking to shore up its case for the war, political opposition to the war waned with leading Democrats either supporting the war plan or choosing to remain silent but there was some debate and dissenting voices within the intelligence community on interpreting the information on Iraq. Writing in the *New York Review of Books* (February 26, 2004) Michael Massing notes in his analysis with the headline “Now They Tell Us”, “With many analysts prepared to discuss the competing claims over intelligence on Iraq, the press was in a good position to educate the public on the administration’s justifications for war. Yet for the most part, it never did so.”

Much of the criticism was directed at *The New York Times* which remained skeptical of the case for the war editorially but led the news coverage on the search for the weapons of mass destruction, carrying alarming accounts of Saddam Hussein’s nuclear and chemical weapons programs. One such front page report of September 8, 2002 by Judith Miller and Michael R Gordon (“US Says Hussein Intensifies Quest for A-Bomb Parts”) spoke of the claims of U. S. officials on Iraq’s attempts to get aluminum tubes intended for use in centrifuges to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons. It also quoted hard liners in the administration as worrying that the first sign of a smoking gun

“may be a mushroom cloud”. This claim was repeated by President Bush in his speech to the U. N. General Assembly on September 12, 2002: “Iraq has made several attempts to buy high-strength aluminum tubes used to enrich uranium for a nuclear weapon.”

Even at the time The New York Times first published the story, some experts at the Energy Department, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the State Department disagreed with the CIA’s assessment and were of the view that the aluminum tubes were more suitable for rockets than for centrifuges. This was also the conclusion that was to be drawn four months later by the preliminary report on the weapons inspectors’ work submitted to the UN Security Council by the Chairman of the IAEA, Mohammed El Baradei. In a follow up report published on September 13, 2003, The New York Times noted that some experts in the Energy and the State Departments felt that Iraq could have been seeking the aluminum tubes for other purposes. However, the report was somewhat dismissive of the doubts and quoted “other, more senior, officials” as saying that this was a minority view and that the CIA view that the tubes were meant for use in centrifuges had “wide support, particularly among the government’s top technical experts and nuclear scientists.”

The New York Times also carried several other stories on the nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programs based on interviews with Iraqi defectors who claimed first hand knowledge of the programs, equipment and places of storage, all of which were later found to be misleading. Many in the intelligence community had doubts about the credibility of the defectors who often tended to exaggerate their roles in Iraq. More importantly, the defectors had an obvious motive of getting the United States into Iraq and toppling Saddam Hussein. Yet the reports seemed oblivious to both their motive and

their lack of credibility as sources and relayed their accounts buttressing the weapons of mass destruction claims of the Bush administration.

After a great deal of criticism started appearing of The New York Times's coverage of the weapons of mass destruction claims, it turned the "bright light of hindsight" on its own coverage in a statement from the editorial board published on May 26, 2004 and admitted "we have found a number of instances of coverage that was not as rigorous as it should have been". It summed up the problems its investigations had revealed: "Editors at several levels who should have been challenging reporters and pressing for more skepticism were perhaps too intent on rushing scoops into the paper. Accounts of Iraqi defectors were not always weighed against their strong desire to have Saddam Hussein ousted. Articles based on dire claims about Iraq tended to get prominent display, while follow-up articles that called the original ones into question were sometimes buried. In some cases, there was no follow-up at all."

The newspaper's public editor, Daniel Okrent in his column published on May 30, 2004 was somewhat more harsh: "Some of The Times's coverage in the months leading up to the invasion of Iraq was credulous; much of it was inappropriately italicized by lavish front page display and heavy-breathing headlines; and several fine articles by David Johnston, James Risen and others that provided perspective or challenged information in the faulty stories were played as quietly as a lullaby." In his view, there were several journalistic imperatives and practices that "led The Times down the unfortunate path", among them the hunger for scoops, the front-page syndrome, hit and run journalism, coddling sources and end-run editing that bypasses standard newsroom procedures.



While such analyses explain the failings in terms of flawed journalistic practices, indexing theory suggests that the problem could lie deeper. With the Democratic leaders in the Congress and outside muting their opposition or coming out in support of the war, elite opinion after the fall of 2002 seemed to be rallying behind the administration's move to attack Iraq. Few political leaders voiced doubts over the existence of weapons of mass destruction and the emphasis was on finding them rather than on examining if they existed in the first place. The only doubters were among the intelligence community and technical experts who by their very nature were on the margins of public debate. The lack of a vigorous debate and the large scale acceptance among the elite of the administration's claims on the weapons of mass destruction made the press adopt the Bush administration's framing of pre-war Iraq as posing an extreme danger that had to be addressed without delay.

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**Endnotes:**

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<sup>2</sup> Entman, Robert M, *Projections of Power*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Sifry, Micah L. and Cerf, Christopher, *The Iraq War Reader*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003

<sup>4</sup> *The New York Times*, February 7, 2003

<sup>5</sup> Norris, Pippa, Kern, Montague and Just, Marion (Editors), *Framing Terrorism*, New York: Routledge, 2003, Chapter 14, Endnote 39.

<sup>6</sup> Entman, *ibid*, P 2-3.