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WHEN IMAGES TELL THE STORY: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF U.S. NEWSPAPERS'
VISUAL COVERAGE OF THE 2003 MILITARY CAMPAIGN AGAINST
SADDAM HUSSEIN'S REGIME

Leila Schoepke

When Images Tell the Story: A Content Analysis of U.S. Newspapers' Visual Coverage
of the 2003 Military Campaign against Saddam Hussein's Regime

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Leila Schoepke

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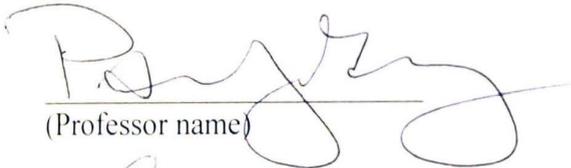
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ABSTRACT

LEILA SCHOEPKE. When Images Tell the Story: A Content Analysis of U.S. Newspapers' Visual Coverage of the 2003 Military Campaign against Saddam Hussein's Regime (under the direction of DR. PATRICIA FERRIER).

This study applied the framing theory to explore the visual coverage of the 2003 Iraq War in the three largest circulation American newspapers. A content analysis of 296 Iraq War-related images published on the front pages of the *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and *New York Times* was conducted from March 6 until May 15 of 2003. Findings revealed that the most recurring visuals in two of the newspapers during the couple of weeks leading to the war until the end of April 2003 highlighted the conflict and consequences frame, and the human-interest frame. The conflict frame included images of advanced warfare technology and military might, conquest, collapse of Saddam's regime, violence and destruction, and casualties. On the other hand, the human-interest frame emphasized scenes of Iraqis in various daily life situations, U.S. soldiers' humanitarian role, and government officials' efforts to rebuild Iraq. Throughout the first two weeks of May 2003, the number of visuals published in both the *New York Times* and *USA Today* was notably scarce compared with the preceding period. In fact, the two newspapers' pictorial coverage represented partly the human-interest frame, and partly the conflict frame. During both phases under examination, from March 6 through April 30, and from May 1 through May 15, the *Wall Street Journal* printed on its front pages only seven images depicting actual scenes related to the war. Small size headshot drawings of government officials, soldiers and other individuals, as well as maps, bullet form data, illustrations and caricatures were the recurring visuals in the newspaper.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Visual coverage of wars not only complements the news narrative of the conflicts with attention-grabbing images, but also, to many viewers, represents a more dependable and truthful account of the events than other forms of news reporting. Images in television, newspapers, magazines, and on the Web often provide audiences powerful “eyewitness” reports of war, or a closer-to-reality depiction of conflict, whether it is an illustration of victory over the enemy or of atrocities.

On March 20, 2003, the United States launched a controversial military offensive in Iraq with the support of other coalition forces, such as Britain and Australia. The attack began after roughly a year of ultimatums and military buildup against the former regime of Saddam Hussein. The imminent U.S. military campaign initiated a political crisis in the international arena and created opposition throughout Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere, but the war-sanctioning resolution brought before the United Nations failed and a campaign of “shock and awe” ensued (Fahmy, 2007).

The U.S. conflict in Iraq brought a notable change in war coverage. Unlike in previous U.S. wars, reporters and photojournalists equipped with modern communication technologies and digital media gadgets were able to embed with U.S. troops deployed in Iraq for the first time (SourceWatch, 2009). Although that unprecedented privilege of media access to the front was restrictive due to military rules and lacked distance and independence between reporters and their protectors, a profusion of war accounts and photographs emerged before a worldwide audience. Furthermore, visual coverage of the Iraq war was also different from depictions of earlier U.S. conflicts and provided better

war reporting opportunities thanks to the Internet, which made it possible for correspondents to deliver visual and narrative news content around the world instantly and around the clock (Schwalbe, Silcock & Keith, 2008).

Images of war tend to instigate different feelings and convey different meanings about the battlefield and those involved in the conflict. Pfau et al. (2008) reasoned that visual images are processed by audiences differently than the same content communicated by words. An image of Iraqi men lifting their arms up before a group of soldiers as a sign of surrender could suggest might and victory over the enemy to some, while to others it could symbolize violence and conquest by the aggressor. Former *American Journalism Review* managing editor Lori Robertson (2004) described the content of a *Time* magazine photograph of a dead man lying on the desert as “tragic” but also “more poetic than graphic”(para. 1).

Despite the fact that government and military officials argue that graphic visual representations of military operations produce a negative impact on public opinion regarding the war, Pfau et al. (2008), along with other scholars (Domke et al., 2002) said there is scant evidence as to whether and how news images of casualties, violence, and destruction affect public support for war. Campbell (2003) contended that, for a photograph, “being a site for contemplation” does not really make it a means for political change.

Critics of the U.S. news media’s coverage of the war on Iraq suggested that, earlier in the conflict, news executives and editors withheld graphic photographs of the war’s human toll and suffering and presented instead images of U.S military power. Filmmaker Michael Moore and columnist Joe Klein said the American news media

presented a rather “sanitized,” “PG-rated” version of events, in which hardly anyone seemed to die (Robertson, 2004, paras. 2-4).

Purpose of the study

The objective of this study was to examine the U.S. news media’s visual coverage of the occupation of Iraq. While the subject has several broad areas of significance, some of which have been tackled by previous research (Fahmy, 2005; Fahmy, 2007; Pfau et al., 2008; Schwalbe, 2006), this research took the discussion beyond war and photography to look specifically at the complex interaction between the print press’s framing of conflicts and the Iraq War. This study is focused on newspapers instead of other media outlets such as television or Web news sites because of their accessibility to the public and their prominence.

Within this context, the study explored how the top three American newspapers covered, through images, “Operation Iraqi Freedom” and whether their visual portrayal of the U.S. military campaign against the former Iraqi regime changed within a specific length of time. The research used a content analysis of 296 images published on the front pages of the *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and *New York Times* from March 6 until May 15 of 2003. This time period is important because it covered the two weeks before the onset of the conflict on March 20, 2003, and the “Shock and Awe” campaign on March 21, 2003. The study also includes newspapers published in the two weeks leading up to President George W. Bush’s announcement of the “end of major combat operations” on May 1, 2003. That two-week period is named the “Mission Accomplished” period in this study.

Other studies (e.g. Carpenter, 2007; Fahmy & Wanta, 2007; Griffin, 2004a;

Griffin, 2004b; Pfau et al., 2008) used surveys, experiments, interviews, and content analysis to examine the visual coverage of the Iraq War across diverse U.S. media venues and in different phases of the conflict. However, research did not specifically focus on the three largest U.S. newspapers' front-page coverage of Iraq War visuals published on the time period between March 6 and May 15, 2003.

The value of this research lies in the findings that resulted from the content analysis of Iraq War visuals. Furthermore, the fact that no studies were found that used the *Wall Street Journal* in their examination of the print media's visual framing of the Iraq conflict distinguishes this study. The new data this work contributes complements existing research on media exposure of Iraq War images. It also provides a reliable starting foundation for future studies on the contemporary visual coverage of U.S. military operations overseas, considering the growing groundbreaking communication technologies that will continue to revolutionize news media's war reports.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The Significance of Visuals in War Reporting

Caroline Brothers (1997) in her book *War and Photography: A Cultural History* described the role of photographs during wartime as “witnesses despite themselves.” The adage “a picture is worth a thousand words” definitely applies to the context of war coverage (Irby, 2004). Images seem to have a great authority in reinforcing the importance and credibility of news stories. They provide “visual proofs” or “factual records” of events. Antiviolence proponents who question the legitimacy of their government’s decision to go to war rely more on the work of reporters and photojournalists than on the government-driven reports to get greater insight into the battlefield (Trivundža, 2004).

Kamiya (2005) explained that, in war, pictures often have more significant value and power than words. Without them, it is impossible to catch the multifaceted reality of war. Kamiya (2005) wrote that the truth about war and its consequences should be revealed, and journalists have an ethical obligation to those who were killed or wounded, regardless of their nationality. Campbell (2003), referring to the U.S. government’s position vis-à-vis news media’s exposure of graphic images of the Iraq war’s human toll, wrote “imagery was central to the conflict and often the subject of conflict itself.”

Journalist Robert Fox (2008) wrote that, in the face of the ubiquitous nature of images of war and the ease with which they can be transmitted, government authorities tend to be narrow-minded about showing that war kills, particularly when the images depict their dead soldiers or citizens. Fox said military forces in Great Britain

increasingly use their own “combat media teams” to present official and unobjectionable footage and interview content for mainstream media organizations such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

As much as news organizations need photographs from the combat zone to complement their war narrative, they also often see the need to minimize or withhold images of casualties and war mayhem from the public. Some critics say the media do that to “sanitize” the war coverage, whether in support of the government, to protect the military operations, or in consideration of public sensibilities (Aday, Livingston, & Hebert, 2005). Others contend it is also because journalists fear losing access to the battleground. Associated Press photojournalist Ken Jarecke said the news organization practiced self-censorship when it refused to publish his photo of a charred Iraqi body because of its grisly nature. He argued that people should see the image because it presents an accurate picture of war. He wrote “if we’re big enough to fight a war, we should be big enough to look at it” (Sharkey, 2003).

Harold Evans, former editor of *The Times of London* and contributing editor to *U.S. News & World Report*, presented a similar view. Images that demonstrate the real characteristic of war should be revealed and the public should have a transparent picture of the sacrifices being made, of what is being done in their name, he explained. Evans raised the question whether a visual image “had a social or historic significance and, if it did, whether the shocking detail was necessary for a proper understanding of the event” (Sharkey, 2003, para. 20).

Irby (2004) noted that, in times of war, certain pictures have a unique way of changing the course of history, and the Iraq War images certainly fit that category.

Campbell (2003) observed that, despite living in a time that is considered saturated with images of violence and cruelty, a few authors hypothesize about the correlation between political conflict and its visual depiction. The relative absence of theories about this relationship means that the various claims about the power of images have come to lead the widespread belief, he wrote. Among those assertions is the “CNN effect” cliché that depicts news imagery as a force that can change the course of state policy merely by being transmitted. Another differing claim is the “compassion fatigue” theory, which reasons that the profusion of photographs has “dulled our senses and created a new syndrome of communal inaction” (Campbell, 2003, para.1).

Other important aspects of war visuals

The significance of war visuals can expand public consciousness and go as far as impacting policy. Fahmy and Wanta (2007) noted that visuals can be very influential in creating persuasion and gaining public support for government, national security, and military actions during times of war. However, from the government’s standpoint, the power of images in influencing perceptions can also go in the opposite direction. Indeed, graphic images of war have demonstrated a much stronger emotional effect on viewers (Pfau et al., 2008).

Irby (2004) called attention to visuals of past conflicts such as the 1993 photo of “a U.S. soldier’s limp body being dragged through the dusty streets of Mogadishu, Somalia, by anti-American protestors” (para.7). He said the image influenced President Clinton’s decision to pull U.S. troops out of the African nation. Other examples are the 1991 photos of the “Highway of Death” in Iraq, which tarnished the image of a quick and

clean war. The Vietnam War images also helped animate the anti-war effort and encouraged other citizens to support the U.S. forces.

Irby (2004) stated that, throughout our contemporary time of warfare and photography, journalism professionals have struggled to achieve equilibrium between the industry's principle of truthful reporting and the need to curtail preventable harm. However, he said, the graphic images from Iraq, among them pictures of the detainees' abuse, the slaughter of U.S. contractors, and the coffins of soldiers' remains have once more kindled the fight. Such iconic photos may have earned national journalistic recognition but the greatest prize, most news professionals would say, is providing the public with honest information on matters of world interest (Irby, 2004). Compelling images of war represent items of visual information that communicate messages of truth and give an account of real facts. Undeniably, news executives and editors wrestle over "doing the right thing" when it comes to showing visual evidence of war's byproduct (Irby, 2004). Decisions whether to run disturbing and intense photos of war will never satisfy everyone, but then again, the images are only acting as messengers. Besides, with the digital media innovations available to everyone, some people with cameras take it upon themselves to visually document various facets of war, thus challenging conventional perceptions of who is a journalist (Irby, 2004). The popularity of digital cameras can mean people can visually document facets of war without the burden of professional codes of ethics. A former Maytag Aircraft cargo employee took photos of caskets containing the remains of U.S. soldiers being loaded into an aircraft for the flight to the United States. The worker said she wanted to bring to light "the care and integrity" being given to the fallen U.S. combatants (Irby, 2004, para. 20). Some news

organizations rely on freelancers and civilians to contribute photos from the war zone (Irby 2004).

Despite the powerful effect of some images, some media practitioners and scholars wondered whether it is possible to get an accurate view of war from the media. In an article exploring how the U.S. press handled the publication of graphic images of the Iraq war, Robertson (2004) wrote that a few photojournalists and reporters said it is. However, most of them said there is no way to understand what war is like, feel the anguish, the nervousness, the terror, the dreadfulness, “the gulping sense of mortality,” smell the blood and the charred remains, hear the sound of shooting and the soldiers’ possible tone of voice unless one has been there (Robertson, 2004, para. 43).

Photographer Peter Turnley said images represent only “a part of a more accurate picture of what really does happen in war” (para.14). *Los Angeles Times*’ Rick Loomis said images do not always communicate the life-and-death intensity of war. They do not tell the whole story (Robertson, 2004).

The Effects of War Visuals on Viewers

Schwalbe, Silcock, and Keith (2008) wrote that photographs, videos, and icons, etc., constitute one of the most significant features of journalism: war reporting and news framing. They said the use of visuals is essential because of the impact images can have on the audiences’ reactions to the news of war as well as on those who never experienced war and their understanding of warfare. Studies show that the role images play in rendering war goes beyond simply telling viewers about combat (Pfau et al., 2008). They actually provide “a sense of presence” (Cho et al., 2003).

Television, with its stream of video imagery, may be the leading news and

information provider from distant places, but its impact on the minds of viewers is no match for the powerful effect of a still image, which has the role of a contemplative moment (Campbell, 2003). Lang, Newhagen, and Reeves (1996) and Lang, Dhillon, and Dong (1995) examined the emotional impact of negative visuals in news on information processing and discovered that negative footage in television grabs audience attention and produces an increase in arousal, which causes a growth in memory and affects message retention (Pfau et al., 2008).

Similarly, an experiment by Pfau et al. (2008) to gauge the impact of the visual representations of the Iraq War on audiences showed that television news stories featuring visual footage of combat not only intensified viewers' involvement levels about the war but also minimized both their support for continued military presence in Iraq and their pride in U.S. forces deployed there. The study also revealed that female viewers seemed to have experienced greater emotional response to the televised news reports about the conflict than men.

Earlier studies (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Perlmutter, 1998) have found evidence of the power of images in getting the public's attention, provoking persuasion and driving public opinion (Fahmy and Wanta, 2007). Compelling visuals of war can capture and command viewers' attention, particularly in print and broadcast media (Pfau et al., 2008). For the print medium, images can serve as "a point of entry" to text. The image can entice readers to read the actual story that the image illustrates (Barnhurst, 1994; Garcia & Stark, 1991; Lang, 2000; Mendelsohn & Thorson, 2004).

Images accompanying textual reports can affect how the reader evaluates the story. Viewers and readers tend to place greater trust in and believe more of what they

see than in what they read or hear. This may be because people understand that words are authored and are subject to scrutiny, whereas images are perceived as more truthful and credible depictions of events (Graber, 1987; McLuhan & Fiore, 1967; Pfau et al., 2008).

Images of war and public opinion

Media scholars have long asserted that news coverage of events has a great influence on public opinion. Many say that news media war visuals are powerful enough to drive public opinion about the U.S. conflicts overseas (Fahmy & Wanta, 2007). Herber and Filak (2007) reported that the later phases of the Iraq War produced a change in people's views on the presence of the American troops in Iraq. In fact, in the 2006 U.S. midterm elections, over 50 percent of the voters criticized the war.

A review of literature showed that images that appear in the media have a variety of emotional and attitudinal effects that may include shaping the public's perceptions and understanding of news events. During wartime, for instance, the media tend to play a bigger role than just reporting about the military conflict. They help shape public opinion, according to Sloan and Startt (1996), as in the case of past wars where the press neutralizes opposition to bombing and magnifies claims of good versus evil.

In a study that examined the effect of visuals on political perception of the first Gulf War, Fuller (1996) found visuals that do not show war violence and casualties enhance support for the war, while images depicting war's human toll and brutality stifle war support and intensify sympathy for the enemy (Fahmy & Wanta, 2007).

What Impacts Media Organizations' Selection of War Images

Carr (2004), the *New York Times* journalist, said newspapers tend to signal the importance of an article or image by the prominence of its placement, but because of the

nudity and humiliation on display in the Iraq War photographs of the Abu Ghraib prison, many newspapers chose to put articles about them on the front page but the images inside. *Washington Post* executive editor Leonard Downie Jr. stated that his news organization had published shocking photographs of the Iraq War on the front page, such as a photograph of a female soldier holding an Iraqi prisoner by a leash. “We decided that the importance of the news was the most important consideration,” he said. However, Downie explained, the *Washington Post* became more aware that many people receive the newspaper at home and visual content on the front page can be more difficult to avoid than what is inside. People who follow the story inside are usually prepared for what they see when they get there, he said (Carr, 2004).

Kim and Fahmy (2006) claimed researchers (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Tuchmann, 1978) have determined that media organizations “frame news events in a specific way that selects and emphasizes certain issues, suggesting that news content is not an independent entity from political, social, or ideological influence” (p. 3). A study exploring the tone of visual coverage of the toppling of the Saddam’s statue in 43 newspapers of 30 countries revealed that the American newspapers generally distanced themselves from photographs that exhibited a more critical viewpoint of the incident. The scholars also noted that findings suggested American newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post* gave a more positive representation of the event – such as depicting coalition military might instead of looting of Iraqi artifacts – than British newspapers such as the *Guardian*, *London Times*, and *Independent*.

In a content analysis of Iraq war-related images across media platforms conducted by Keith, Schwalbe, & Silcock (2009), the researchers found that the statistically

significant differences in how the media depicted the earliest hours of the invasion of Iraq indicate there are factors that influence news organizations' image selection and media content. Among these are the news medium's norms and routines, and "extramedia influences." Their study also revealed that, in their choice of main images, the news media exhibited a similarity, which suggests that "extramedia influences" were stronger factors than media routines in determining image selection. By "extramedia influences," Keith, Schwalbe, and Silcock (2009) referred to two factors that are both related to government actions. One is the late-night announcement of the launch of the invasion by the Bush administration, which makes it difficult for newspapers to redesign their already prepared news content. In addition to that is the issue of the unavailability of a wide range of images to choose from to illustrate the breaking news story. The second factor is a journalist's limited access to Iraq and the unsafe conditions.

Keith et al. (2009) suggested that because television was the first medium to show the air strikes on Baghdad, it may have set the visual agenda for print media, which is another example of an extramedia factor influencing image selection. Another factor that may have impacted news media selection of images and coverage of the war in Iraq is what Keith et al. (2009) called "mimetic isomorphism" or "a visual dialogue," in which the different news media professionals start "talking" to each other and perhaps even view the other platforms before making their image selections, thus exerting influences on each other's visual content.

Kim and Fahmy (2006) stated that photojournalists must decide which visuals should be emphasized, selecting to run one picture instead of others. They said the process of selection is unavoidable when producing a visual and displaying it to the

public (Messaris & Abraham, 2001). Kim and Fahmy (2006) reported most photojournalists and photo-editors favor using graphic images and consider them important in news coverage. On the other hand, news professionals admitted the context of news influences their organizations' selection of graphic photographs under certain circumstances. For instance, political sensitivity ranked higher for selecting graphic images of the Afghan War than for selecting graphic images of 9/11 (Kim & Fahmy 2006).

Government and political influences

Kim and Fahmy (2006) said, because foreign affairs is typically “closely related to national interest and/or security, foreign policy concerns plays an important role for the mass media in reporting international news” (p. 5). Therefore, as the literature (Henry, 1981) suggests, journalism, in the end, is patriotism and “journalists become nationalists when reporting international conflicts in which their host country is involved” (as cited in Kim and Fahmy, 2006, p.7).

Besides, they noted the literature indicated that the news media tend to choose, assess, and structure the events in accordance with their country's interest, as seen in the coverage of past conflicts and incidents such as the Afghan War and 9/11 where, for example, the Arabic-language newspaper *Al-Hayat* and the English-language newspaper *International Herald Tribune* presented differing visual frames of the events (Fahmy, 2004a). Kim and Fahmy (2006) indicated that another study (Gans, 1979) discovered, in coverage of foreign policy, the news media rely greatly on official sources and that foreign news reports were likely to be less impartial and more slanted than national news.

Some studies (Rachlin, 1988; Welch, 1972) have revealed that news coverage of

international conflicts and incidents often promotes government voices, but not all of the news media always agree with the government's foreign policy. A number of studies (Entman, 2003; Fahmy, 2004b; Fahmy, 2007) have demonstrated that certain news media construct their reporting on their political ideology. For instance, the *Christian Science Monitor* gave critical coverage of the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad, suggesting the occupation/invasion frame. Other U.S. newspapers, such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Chicago Tribune*, published more favorable photographs of the event, highlighting the victory/liberation frame, such as pictures of jubilant Iraqi civilians cheering and embracing U.S. soldiers.

In a study that analyzed American and Chinese newspaper coverage of the conflict in Iraq, Huang (2006) suggested that the government stance of China and the United States on the issues of the Iraq War and their respective attitudes toward the military operations there probably determined how the war was framed in the different media. Huang's (2006) study also showed that, in international news coverage--especially in times of international conflict--government stance and cultural value often top all other factors in shaping media reporting.

Kim and Fahmy (2006) question whether political inclinations have an impact on the tone of visual coverage, a matter that has stirred debate among scholars. Some studies (Fahmy, 2004b) found no confirmation of the effect of political leanings of newspapers on the tone of visual coverage, but others (Wanta & Chang, 2001) suggested political beliefs have an influence on visual representations of news events and predict photographic tone. Kim and Fahmy (2006) conveyed some newspapers belonging to different political wings, such as the French *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*, did not differ in

their visual coverage of the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Also, both newspapers reported the event negatively. The scholars said this suggested that some newspapers covered the Iraq War according to the public opinion in their country, regardless of political leaning of their news organizations.

Theoretical Framework: News Framing Analysis

Framing is the act of emphasizing some characteristics of reality, news stories, or topics in order to make them more notable or to advance a particular interpretation of an issue. “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). There are specific frames and generic frames. Specific frames provide better grasp of how clearly identified issues, like war, are framed when compared with the use of generic frames. They can shape how audiences think about and react to certain issues. Perse (2001) also pointed out an important idea about news story framing effects. They are conditional on viewers’ ideology (Perse, 2001).

While framing, according to Severin and Tankard (2001, p. 15), refers to “how an event is packaged and presented in the media,” Tankard et al. (1991) described a frame as “a central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” (p. 5).

Tankard et al. (1991) presumed that such framing of the Iraq war could have subtle and strong influences on the audiences and the way they interpret and react to the content of images of war, especially if it is presented by influential news organizations; however, the audience members may be aware that the content they are exposed to could reflect

some bias.

Framing researchers McLeod and Detenber deemed that differently framed news stories of the same issue had different effects on viewers (Perse, 2001). Iyengar (1991) stated that the media present frames that insinuate “who is responsible for a problem and who can help provide a remedy for the problem” (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 279). This was particularly true in the case of Iraq war and the way it was depicted in different news media outlets, nationally and internationally. For instance, in a comparison of American and Arab newspapers’ coverage of the war in Iraq, Lee (2004) remarked that the *New York Times*, *Arab News*, and *Middle East Times*’ reporting of the war did actually reflect their respective national interests.

Carpenter (2007) maintained that journalists have the most influence during the framing stage. They can focus their work more on certain aspects of issues, while downplaying alternative angles. However, their work is not exclusively an individual journalistic product. Content is also influenced by several other forces. In relation to the Iraq war, Carpenter (2007) pointed out previous research suggested that embedded reporters tended to cover the war more favorably. A study by Dimitrova and Stromback (2005) revealed that the *New York Times* was more likely to use the military conflict frame than the responsibility frame during the invasion period from March 20, 2003, until May 1, 2003.

The Iraq War Visual Frames Examined in Other Research

Research literature suggests the media’s portrayal of conflicts and events through images is used to deemphasize some issues while slightly accentuating others (Fahmy & Wanta 2007). For instance, in their comparative study of the *Washington Post* and

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung newspapers' representations of the Iraq conflict, Herber and Filak (2007) reported that by depicting UN weapons inspectors in a positive light and former President George Bush in a negative light, German newspapers bolstered the anti-war reaction in Germany. On the other hand, by emphasizing the U.S. military's accomplishments, U.S. newspapers encouraged Americans to see military victory as the most newsworthy facet of war.

A study by Dimitrova and Stromback (2005) to investigate the framing of the war in Swedish and American elite newspapers concluded that, although both the *Dagens Nyheter* and *New York Times* offered human interest stories and media self-references, there still were notable differences between them, particularly in the tone of war coverage. While the Swedish representation of the conflict was more negative in general, highlighting the responsibility and anti-war protest frames, the military conflict frame was more frequent in the *New York Times*' coverage.

A pro-government/military frame

Visuals that the American media produced in the early stage of the conflict revealed that the most recurrent images depicted troops in high spirits, weaponry and technological sophistication of the coalition forces, and the progress being made by troops in Iraq. Many of the images showed soldiers posing with weaponry, either U.S. or British flags, and declaring victory over Saddam's regime. Images of dramatic explosions were also used and can be construed as a glorification of the military power(s), their accomplishments and perhaps even the war itself (Media manipulation, 2005).

Schwalbe (2006) and Schwalbe et al. (2008) reported that, during the campaign's

first five weeks, there were five distinct frames that reinforced the patriotic and government-friendly “master war narrative.” The frames are: conflict/shock and awe, conquering troops, rescue/hero, victory, and control. In an essay that examined the pictorial coverage of the invasion of Iraq in three major U. S. news magazines, Griffin (2004a) pointed out that the visual account of the war presented an overall picture that is “contained within the narrative/myth of American rescue and supremacy” (p. 1). Griffin (2004a) explained it is a picture that gives consistent support for the U.S. government’s adaptation of circumstances, motives and events. That is, a depiction that is devoid of images that might trigger questions or cause doubts about the official version of the American toppling of a dictator.

From a content analysis of prominent American and Chinese newspapers’ coverage of the 2003 Iraq war, Huang (2006) found different media frames in these newspapers in their coverage of the conflict. While both the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* framed the Iraq war as aiming at toppling Saddam Hussein and freeing Iraqi people from his dictatorship, the Chinese newspapers framed the war as an invasion of Iraq territory and a violation of UN charter. They also strongly delegitimized the war, in contrast to the American papers’ coverage where patriotism played a big role. Similarly, in a cross-national research exploring the visual framing of the toppling of the Saddam Hussein statue, Fahmy (2007) found that U.S. newspapers overall ran more visuals illustrating a victory/liberation frame than newspapers from coalition and noncoalition countries.

A shift in the frames

A study by Schwalbe (2006) showed the visual emphasis shifted during the first

five weeks of the Iraq War, from the official U.S. war machine to the more personal face of both Americans and Iraqis who were affected by the conflict. Similarly, a later research work by Schwalbe et al. (2008), involving a content analysis of images from various American news media platforms, revealed that the visual framing of the 2003 occupation of Iraq changed from conflict to human interest. The scholars noted that nonwar images began to appear more frequently. Images of people including U.S. troops and Iraqi civilians were more often shown, thus supporting a human-interest frame.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The literature suggests that a large number of the Iraq War images published in U.S. news media since the start of the conflict up until week 5 or 6 (Schwalbe et al., 2008) depicted the American military ‘superpower’ with the U.S. assuming the role of the ‘liberator,’ and the heroic work of the soldiers engaged in the conflict. Most of the earlier studies were of images taken from the moment the U.S.-led invasion and airstrikes were launched on March 19, 2003, or when the “Shock and Awe” campaign began on March 21, 2003, until other significant events or incidents occurred. Some of those events include, but are not limited to:

- the toppling of the Saddam Hussein statue
- the conquest of Baghdad by U.S. troops on April 9, 2003
- the American president’s public address announcing the end of major combat operations on May 1, 2003
- George W. Bush’s surprise Thanksgiving visit to Iraq on November 28, 2003
- the capture of Saddam Hussein by U.S. troops on December 13, 2003

Many previous studies pointed out a variation in the news content across media venues and even across news organizations within the same media platform. The literature also drew attention to a shift in the Iraq war visual frames depicted in the news media as the nature of the conflict itself changed. This study is focused on the visual coverage of the Iraq War in three prominent American newspapers published from March 6 until May 15 of 2003, that is, two weeks prior to the onset of the conflict on March 20, 2003 and the two weeks after the “Mission Accomplished” speech on May 1, 2003.

Focusing on a content analysis during this entire time period helps provide steady and reliable data to determine whether the changing nature of the conflict might have had an impact on the type of visual content published in the three newspapers. As a result, two research questions were formulated. The first research question was based on the idea found in previous studies that the early phase of the war in Iraq was characterized by the colossal and sophisticated military power of the coalition forces.

Some people may presume that, after former President George W. Bush announced that major combat operations in Iraq ended on April 30, 2003, the news media would adopt a critical stance toward the U.S. government's handling of the war and show the public images that provide evidence that the conflict is not over yet. Nevertheless, this study agrees with previous research that actually indicated that the American news media generally tended to give a rather government-friendly representation of the military operations in Iraq. Therefore, based on past literature, the study tested the validity of the second research question.

RQ1: During the two weeks leading to the U.S. invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003, up until April 30, did photographs published in American newspapers focus primarily on advanced warfare technology and military might, violence and destruction, casualties, and the collapse of Saddam's regime?

RQ2: After former President George W. Bush's address aboard the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln featuring the banner "Mission Accomplished," on May 1, 2003, did the U.S. print press visual coverage of the conflict in Iraq shift to depicting U.S. soldiers in a more humanitarian role and the U.S. efforts to reconstruct Iraq?

Research Method

A quantitative content analysis was utilized to assess the study's predictions while also applying elements of the framing theory. Both the research method and the theory were productive in previous research works (Carpenter, 2007; Dimitrova & Stromback, 2005; Kim & Fahmy, 2006) that investigated news media coverage of the Iraq War.

The Research Method Commonly Used in Previous Similar Studies

Numerous studies on news media pictorial representation of the Iraq War have been conducted since the onset of the conflict using a range of analytical approaches including experiments, participant observation, surveys, focus group interviews, and content analysis. A large number of scholars adopted the content analysis approach in their research work to examine how the news media frame issues and events. In fact, many of them have acknowledged it is an effective tool for close examination of visual news content that appears in print press (e.g. Kim & Fahmy, 2006; Wanta & Chang, 2001; 2004a; 2004b).

In a study that compared the visual coverage of the 1991 and 2003 U.S. military conflicts in Iraq, King and Lester (2005) utilized content analysis to explore photographs published in the *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *New York Times* during the start of both wars and proceeding for an entire week of issues in the three publications. The results of their research revealed that there was a considerable dissimilarity in the pictorial coverage of the two wars. Among the differences was the sheer increase in images for the Iraq War coverage compared to the 1991 conflict. Furthermore, an analysis of the content of the images revealed that “the military received the type of

coverage it hoped for when it installed the embedding program,” meaning the images published from the front line were very promilitary with a small number of photographs of casualties (King & Lester, 2005, p.12).

Schwalbe et al. (2008) in their “unique” and “challenging” research work used quantitative content analysis of images across multiple U.S. media platforms to assess the visual framing of the early weeks of the Iraq War. The media platforms included U.S. network and cable television news outlets, news websites, newspapers, and news magazines. One of their main findings was that the visual framing of the war shifted from conflict to human interest within relatively short periods. Additionally, Schwalbe et al. (2008) suggested that embedded photojournalists had an effect on the visual coverage, infusing it with human elements that were not present in the coverage of the 1991 Gulf War.

Wojdyski (2009) analyzed 201 multimedia story types such as audio slideshows, photo galleries, interactive graphics, and flash presentations from the 100 most-visited U.S. newspaper sites to investigate how they were used to cover the Iraq War, and what role they played in framing aspects of conflict. Wojdyski’s study discovered that the human interest frame dominated multimedia coverage, although to different degrees among the multimedia story types. Wojdyski’s study also confirmed the value of content analysis – as “the most widely used mass communication research method that has been informed by framing theory” (p. 5). Wojdyski (2009) noted that, given the evidence that media frames are influential, many researchers have selected to focus on exploring the media content as an avenue to understanding how the news organizations represent events and issues.

Wojdynski (2009) also mentioned that the wide-ranging characteristic of framing-based content analysis work has included not only descriptive analyses of how particular issues were covered in the press during a political campaign (D'Angelo, Calderone, & Territola, 2005; Landreville, 2006), but also comparisons of the framing of two different news events (Griffin, 2004b; King & Lester, 2005) and comparisons of how the same event was covered in different countries (Herber & Filak, 2007; Yang, 2008).

The Sample

Concerning the sample selection, the researcher did not find any studies that used the *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* to analyze their visual coverage of the Iraq War. Most research works selected the high-ranking newspapers in circulation or the more influential papers, particularly the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Chicago Tribune*, which were the most frequently analyzed.

This study used a purposive sample with the three largest newspapers in the United States: the *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and *New York Times*. That selection was based on the 2009 data from the websites Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010) and Audit Bureau of Circulations (2009). According to both sites, the Monday through Friday circulation numbers for the six months ending on September 30, 2009, for the *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and *New York Times* issues were as follows: 2,024,269; 1,900,116; and 927,851. The *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* are considered part of the influential prestige press. *USA Today*, although popular and ranked second in circulation, is not perceived as an elite newspaper.

Kim and Fahmy (2006) described the *New York Times* as a “prestigious” newspaper that plays an important role as a “premier member of the elite press” in the

United States and the world. They said it is generally viewed as more liberal in comparison to other American newspapers and is, according to Cohen (1963), “uniformly regarded as the authoritative paper” in international and political news coverage. Other scholars (Gitlin, 1980) also referred to the *New York Times* as a “paper of record” and reported it is considered an “agenda-setter” for the other national media (Strömbäck, 2005). The *Wall Street Journal* is also known for its national and international coverage and geographical diversity. It is viewed as one of the top influential American newspapers. *USA Today* was important for this study because it was among the top three daily newspapers by circulation, and it provided considerable visual coverage of the 2003 Iraq War.

The Sampling Period

The study included visuals that were published in all existing issues of the *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and *New York Times* from March 6, 2003 – two weeks prior to the official date when the U.S. launched the “Operation Iraqi Freedom” introduced by the “Shock and Awe” campaign – to May 15, 2003, two weeks after former President George W. Bush’s “Mission Accomplished” address when he officially announced the end to major combat operations. With the exception the *New York Times*, which published its paper Monday through Sunday, *USA Today* did not print on Saturday and Sunday and published the same Friday version on the weekend. The *Wall Street Journal* also did not publish its paper on Saturday and Sunday. For this study, visuals that appeared in the Saturday and Sunday issues of the *New York Times* were excluded from the analysis to achieve uniformity in the selection of images from the three newspapers. Each daily front page of the three newspaper’s national print edition, within the specified

research time period, was examined on microfilm and printed in black and white, as well as in color when available.

The Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis was the individual war-related news visual. Each image that portrayed a specific event or conveyed a message with regard to the 2003 Iraq War was coded. Iraq War visuals, including satellite live shots, photographs of actual events, headshots and shoulder shots, maps, logos, illustrative graphics, tables and charts with data related to the war were examined and counted. Only photographs from the front pages of the newspapers were included in this study. A major goal of this study was to concentrate on the most pronounced frames, such as military (warfare and might), liberation (transfer of power and democracy), human interest (troops and civilians), economic consequences (destruction, loss), humanitarian responsibility (rebuilding of Iraq, aid) etc., that appeared in the three newspapers' visual coverage of the conflict.

Coding

A total of 296 visuals were analyzed and coded for this study. Specifically, a total of 82 images from the *New York Times*, 128 images from *USA Today*, and 86 images from *Wall Street Journal* were coded manually. Wimmer and Dominick (2006) referred to "emergent coding" as one of two ways to establish content categories. According to the authors, "emergent coding establishes categories after a preliminary examination of the data. The resulting system is constructed based on common factors or themes that emerge from the data themselves" (p. 159).

This study included an analysis of each visual collected from the front pages of the three newspapers. This was done based on Entman's (1993, p. 52) definition of

framing as a process “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient” to the audience, and borrowing from past literature (Kim and Fahmy, 2006; Schwalbe et al., 2008). Following an initial general examination of the frames portrayed in the visuals, the researcher adopted an inductive approach in formulating a comprehensive grouping system. The system took into account every unit of analysis and every possible frame that might appear.

The grouping system initially comprised several content categories that were later combined into six specific categories. During a pretest, independent coders used a seventh category, labeled “other,” for visuals that did not clearly fit into one of the six groups. Wimmer and Dominick (2006) wrote that many researchers suggest that too many initial categories are preferable to too few because it is typically easier to merge several categories than to subdivide a large one after the units have been coded. Prior to the pre-test, each visual was assigned to one of six content categories that also included more specific subcategories highlighting distinct recurrent frames.

Table 1 details this preliminary classification of the visual frames found in all three newspapers from March 6 until May 15, 2003. The information on this table includes visuals published on the front page of the Saturday and Sunday issues of the *New York Times*. Later coding excluded those visuals to allow for an equal sample between the three newspapers. In the preliminary analysis of visuals, the visuals were organized not only by content categories, but also by individual newspaper and by the number of visuals per month, that is March, April, and May 2003, taking into consideration the start and end dates within the study period.

Table 1
Preliminary step of coding Iraq War visuals in the top three American newspapers (n= 323)

Main category of recurring visual frames with number of images	Subcategory	Total visuals within each subcategory	
Photo of an actual event (n=111)	U.S./ally government officials or leaders	16	
	Invasion (bombing, firing, shooting, explosion, airstrike, fire, destroyed infrastructure and vehicles)	14	
	U.S. Military power (weapons, vehicles, aircrafts, soldiers, strategy, protection of sites and people)	38	
	U.S. soldiers assisting Iraqis	2	
	U.S.-Iraqi/Kurdish cooperation	2	
	Collapse of Saddam's regime	8	
	Rebuilding Iraq	1	
	Coalition/Ally forces	5	
	Public address/speech	Bush	9
		Saddam	3
	U.S. wounded and casualties	6	
	U.S POW rescued	6	
	U.S. soldiers with families	1	
Demonstrators (n=4)	U.S. protest for and against war	3	
	Protests and other actions about war in other countries	1	
Pre-war military prep. (n=11)	Soldiers training, waiting, relaxing, weapons test	11	
Iraqi civilians/Kurdish civilians/troops (n=56)	Fleeing war, seeking shelter	9	
	Protesting, gathering	10	
	Injured	5	
	Dead	6	
	Detainee	4	
	Cheering, celebrating, interacting with U.S. soldiers	5	
	Iraqi American celebrates in U.S.	1	
	Claiming aid packages	2	
	Other (Iraqis in some other action or setting)	14	
Headshot (n=74)	Bush	4	
	Saddam	5	
	Wanted Iraqis/terrorists	4	
	U.S. government officials	29	
	Iraqi government officials	3	
	Allies (government officials, troops)	2	
	U.N./Kofi Annan	3	
	Other (headshots of other individuals)	24	
Drawing/illustration (n=67)	Weapons	3	
	Vehicle and aircraft	5	
	Flag, Iraq	1	
	Symbol and logo U.S. military	3	
	Iraq map/satellite image	16	
	Other map	2	
	Poll/statistics/data/table/chart	24	
	Other (images of other items, e.g., missing artifact, TV screen, caricature, etc.)	13	

Note: The information on this table included visuals published on the front page of Saturday and Sunday issues of the *New York Times*. Later coding excluded those visuals.

Reliability Assessment

Wimmer and Dominick (2006) maintained that conducting a pilot study would help achieve acceptable levels of reliability. They said researchers should select a subsample of the content universe under consideration and let independent coders categorize it. Wimmer and Dominick (2006) noted that the data collected from the pilot study would be useful for two reasons. First, poorly defined categories could be detected, and second, chronically dissenting coders could be identified.

Therefore, to determine whether the proposed categorization system was effective and consistent, 20 images were shown to 14 undergraduate students who agreed to participate in the pre-test. The participants were asked to look at the unit of analysis, i.e., each single photograph and place it in one of the categories that they thought best described the visual content and message. They also had the option to name a different category if they thought a photo did not belong to one of the named categories.

Standardized instruction sheets were given to the 14 coders to report their classification of the photos. For this study, the coders were not trained, but they were provided guidelines on what to do. After they completed their coding the purpose of the study and their participation was explained.

The 20 images depicted some – but not all – of the frames found in the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Wall Street Journal*. The seven categories prepared for the pre-test were the result of a preliminary examination of the subject matter and the context of each war-related visual collected from the three newspapers. The categories included only images of actual events and excluded small headshots, illustrations, and drawings such as tables, charts, maps, and statistics.

The categories were the following:

- **U.S. advanced warfare technology and military might:** Each photograph was coded for arsenal, tanks and other military vehicles, military hardware, troops preparing for battle or engaged in fighting, searching, securing, protecting sites, weapons test, rescue of U.S. prisoners of war (POW), air and ground combat actions, battlefield scenes, symbols of U.S./coalition superpower (e.g. flag, weaponry, leaders)
- **Violence and destruction:** Each photograph was coded for material damage, demolition, bombing, explosion
- **Casualties:** Each photograph depicted injured or dead individuals, suffering, remains, funeral
- **Collapse of Saddam's regime:** Each photograph was coded for symbols referring to the Iraqi president's breakdown; the fall of his authority, administration, surrendering troops, soldiers capturing wanted Iraqis/Saddam's soldiers
- **Soldier's humanitarian role:** Each images depicted soldiers helping Iraqi civilians, interacting with Iraqis
- **Reconstruction of Iraq and maintenance of public order:** Each photograph was coded for soldiers controlling crowds and protests, arresting agitators, negotiations between political leaders/government officials from the U.S. and Iraq, U.S. soldiers and Iraqis working together
- **Other:** This category included each photo the pre-test participants thought could belong to a different category that was not mentioned above.

Nine of the 14 coders who participated in the pre-test were "chronically dissenting coders," as described by Wimmer and Dominick (2006); they did not classify

each of the 20 photographs they were shown into only one of the seven categories provided. Because their coding was inconsistent, they were dismissed from the pre-test, and two of the five coders who placed each photo in only one category were randomly selected. Random selection was achieved by writing the alphabetical letters labeling the five successful coders on five pieces of paper, putting all of them in a container, shaking the container and then choosing two of the five coders (coder D and coder J). The researcher's individual coding was compared to the categorizations of the two selected coders.

Subsequently, intercoder reliability was checked for the subsample (n=20), which made up 6.75% of all photographs used in the study (n=296). Overall, Scott's *pi* formula of intercoder reliability across all categories was in the level(s) of .75 for coder D and coder J; .87 for coder D and researcher; and .75 for coder J and researcher, which are all considered acceptable results, according to Wimmer and Dominick (2006). Finally, to establish a quantification system for the 296 photographs collected, the study relied on the nominal data measurement technique, in which the researcher counted the frequency of occurrence of the units, that is, how many images conveyed the themes represented by the seven categories, as mentioned in Wimmer and Dominick (2006).

CHAPTER IV

Results

Testing the Research Questions and the Dominant Frames

This study used content analysis to identify and examine the recurring visual frames in the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Wall Street Journal* coverage of the 2003 Iraq war. The objective of the study was also to investigate whether there was a shift in the newspapers' pictorial coverage of the war within the researched time period (Tables 2a; 2b; and 2c).

Research question 1 posited that during the two weeks leading to the U.S. invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003, up until April 30, photographs published in American newspapers focused primarily on advanced warfare technology and military might, violence and destruction, casualties, and the collapse of Saddam's regime. This research question was partly supported. By analyzing visuals depicting the U.S. invasion of Iraq war frames, this study found evidence that although the violence and destruction, casualties, and the collapse of Saddam's regime frames did appear, to some extent, in the newspapers' portrayal of the war in Iraq, the advanced warfare technology and military might theme was by far the most frequent frame in the *New York Times* and *USA Today* visual coverage of the conflict.

The advanced warfare technology and military might frame was manifest in the *New York Times* and *USA Today*'s coverage during the whole time period from March 6 until May 15, 2003. In fact, during the months of March and April, 2003, over 38.4 (28) of the *New York Times* front page Iraq War visuals (n=73) were those of advanced warfare technology and military might, compared with 10.9% (8) of images of violence

and destruction, and 6.8% (5) of images portraying casualties. As for images of the collapse of Saddam's regime, they also constituted 6.8% (5) of the images published during the same time period.

At the same time, nearly 23.3% (27) of *USA Today's* total front page Iraq War visuals (n=116) during March and April, 2003 portrayed advanced warfare technology and military might, compared with only 3.4% (4) of images of violence and destruction. Images of casualties also constituted 3.4% (4), and images depicting the collapse of Saddam's regime represented 2.5% (3). Thus, the military power frame was the most dominant frame in *USA Today's* visual coverage during the period between March 6 and April 30, 2003. The *Wall Street Journal* featured only 1.2% (1) image representing advanced warfare technology and military might, and 2.4% (2) images depicting the toppling of Saddam Hussein statue out of its total images (n=82) during the initial phase from March 6 through April 30, 2003.

Research Question 2 was neither strongly supported nor strongly rejected. It hypothesized that print media's visual coverage of the Iraq conflict would shift to show U.S. soldiers in a more humanitarian light and U.S. efforts to reconstruct Iraq after former president George W. Bush's speech May 1, 2003, in front of a banner reading "Mission Accomplished." In fact, from May 1 until May 15, 2003, the three newspapers' visual coverage of the war seemed to have decreased considerably, with their coverage focusing less on the military conflict (the military might and advanced technology frame) and consequences (violence and destruction, casualties) frames. Instead, the newspapers' visual coverage centered somewhat on the human interest (Iraqi civilians in various situations) and rebuilding Iraq frames (meetings and negotiations between U.S. and Iraqi

government officials). The frame for soldiers' humanitarian role did not appear during the first two weeks of May 2003.

Unlike the *New York Times*, where images of Iraqi civilians dominated the newspaper's visual coverage of the Iraq War between May 1 and May 15, 2003, both *USA Today* and the *Wall Street Journal*'s visual coverage during the same period focused primarily on headshots of government officials/leaders such as George W. Bush, Colin Powell, Kofi Annan, L. Paul Bremer III, Tony Blair, high-ranking U.S. military officers and soldiers, as well as other individuals. Precisely, the *New York Times*' coverage from May 1 through 15 featured a little over 33.3% (3) of the total images for that month (n=9) representing Iraqis in various daily life situations during wartime. Photographs of civilians, a newlywed couple, individuals in a mental hospital, and protesters were the most frequent, followed by 22.2% (2) of images representing the reconstruction of Iraq efforts. Additionally, one photo depicted an Iraqi casualty 11.1% (1), another image was an illustration of an artifact, 11.1% (1), and the remaining two images represented advanced warfare technologies and military might 22.2% (2).

As for *USA Today*, 50% (6) of its May visual coverage (n=12) of the conflict in Iraq focused on headshots of government officials/leaders and soldiers, where two of those represented U.S. efforts to rebuild Iraq and lift sanctions against the nation. Another 25% (3) featured images reflecting advanced warfare technology and military might; 16.7% (2) of images portrayed Iraqi civilians, while 8.3% (1) depicted an Iraqi casualty. No images depicting soldiers' humanitarian role were present in the newspaper's May coverage. Finally, the *Wall Street Journal* published only four Iraq war-related images during the first two weeks of May 2003, which were all headshots of various individuals,

such as an Arab deputy of a spiritual leader, a reporter, a Belgian cameraman, and an author.

Table 2a
The *New York Times*' total number of visuals from March 6 through May 15, 2003

Category	March 6-31 (n=26)	April 1-30 (n=47)	May 1-15 (n=9)
Advanced warfare technology and military might	10	18	2
Violence and destruction	3	5	0
Casualties	1	4	1
Collapse of Saddam's regime	1	4	0
Soldier's humanitarian role	0	1	0
Reconstruction of Iraq and maintenance of public order	0	5	2
Other	- U.S./Iraqi/foreign government officials or leaders (meeting, speech, headshot) 7 - Iraqi civilians in various situations (fleeing, cheering) 4	- Family members of U.S. soldiers 3 - Iraqi civilians in various situations (cheering, pilgrimage, giving haircut to soldiers, cooling off, demonstrating, searching for missing relatives) 7	- Illustration, drawing: artifact image 1 - Iraqi civilians in various situations (newlywed couple, demonstrating, in mental hospital) 3

Note: Number of visuals (n=82) excludes Saturday and Sunday issues. The bolded numbers in the category "Other" reflect how many images represented themes different from the six frames mentioned above.

Table 2b
USA Today's total number of visuals from March 6 through May 15, 2003

Category	March 6-31 (n=52)	April 1-30 (n=64)	May 1-15 (n=12)
Advanced warfare technology and military might	15	12	3
Violence and destruction	2	2	0
Casualties	1	3	1
Collapse of Saddam's regime	1	2	0
Soldier's humanitarian role	1	3	0
Reconstruction and maintenance of public order	0	1	2
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Headshots of U.S./Iraqi/foreign military or government officials or leaders 14 (2 images of soldiers with weapons, 2 headshots of soldiers with face gear) - Iraqi civilians (fleeing, claiming aid packages, comforting each other) 5 - U.S. protests 3 - Drawing, illustration, graphic, data, TV screen (warship cruise missile, military insignia, M1 tank, military strategy, vehicle, TV screen, foreign media) 8 - Flag 1 - Map 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Headshot/shoulder shot 19 - Symbols 4 (insignia, dead soldier symbol) - Family members of U.S. soldiers 3 - Data 7 - Iraqis (gathered for pilgrimage, praying, Kurdish troops) 3 - Iraqi American celebrating 1 - Images, illustrations (most wanted Iraqis card, rifle) 2 - Demonstration 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Headshot/ shoulder shot 4 - Iraqis 2 (two girls, crowd/protesters)

Note: Number of visuals (n=128) excludes Saturday and Sunday issues. The bolded numbers in the category "Other" reflect how many images represented themes different from the six frames mentioned above.

Table 2c

The *Wall Street Journal's* total number of visuals from March 6 through May 15, 2003

Category that describe content of image	March 6-31 (n=46)	April 1-30 (n=36)	May 1-15 (n=4)
Advanced warfare technology and military might	1	0	0
Violence and destruction	0	0	0
Casualties	0	0	0
Collapse of Saddam's regime	0	2	0
Soldier's humanitarian role	0	0	0
Reconstruction of Iraq and maintenance of public order	0	0	0
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Headshot /shoulder shot drawing 18 - Maps 8 - Bullet form data 9 - Drawing (vehicle, media, soldier, helicopter) 5 - Caricature 3 - TV screen image 1 - Iraqis (claiming aid) 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Headshot /shoulder shot drawing 8 - Maps 7 - Bullet form data 8 - Drawing/image (symbol of U.S. rebuilding Iraq, stryker, action figure, man wearing mask) 4 - Caricature 2 - TV screen image 2 - Iraqis (imams) 2 - Actual headshot/shoulder shot (human shield woman) 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Headshot /shoulder shot drawing 4

Note: Number of visuals (n=86) excludes Saturday and Sunday issues. The bolded numbers in the category "Other" reflect how many images represented themes different from the six frames mentioned above.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The research shows that visuals of the 2003 Iraq War in the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Wall Street Journal* portrayed dissimilar aspects and scenes of the conflict. For instance, on March 6, 2003, the *New York Times* published photos of foreign and U.S. government leaders involved in the decision-making process regarding the imminent war while *USA Today* published images of Americans rallying in the streets either protesting against the war or supporting U.S. troops.

Also, on April 30, 2003 the *New York Times* published photos of U.S. military and government officials aboard an aircraft as well as a photo of soldiers taking cover in a building. On that same day, *USA Today* published only one small picture of a doctor treating an injured Iraqi man. On May 5, 2003, the *New York Times* showed an image of American and Iraqi government officials meeting while *USA Today* showed one image of Iraqi civilians excavating a mass grave with the remains of people and another image of two young girls.

The variation in the two newspapers' pictorial coverage of the Iraq War demonstrates that the *New York Times* focused its visual representation of the conflict mostly on the U.S. military might, war strategy and diplomatic negotiations, while *USA Today* wanted to portray the human aspect of the conflict by showing more images of civilians, soldiers, and their families. This difference could suggest that the two newspapers had disparate reasons for choosing to frame the war in a particular light.

The reasons could be political, organizational or related to how the audience views the U.S. military intervention in Iraq, how it reacts to it, and what it expects to see

about the war. For instance, it could be that the *New York Times*, just like many patriotic Americans, viewed the war as a justifiable act to free a nation from its tyrannical leader and to help its people achieve democracy. Therefore, the *New York Times*' visual coverage of the war may have reflected the newspaper's and its audience's "nationalistic" stance on the U.S. war in Iraq. The *New York Times* editors could have also felt the need to frame the war in a way that highlighted the U.S. military might rather than the human side of the conflict to back the government's efforts in gaining the public's support for the war.

Kim and Fahmy (2006) wrote that past studies also found that different national news media present different image of international conflicts, such as war and terrorism. The difference of the Iraq War depictions between the *New York Times* and the British paper *The Guardian*, for instance, indicates that journalists and news editors "operated from the outset within parameters and expectations that conformed to long standing conventions of war illustration, national interest and public opinion" (Kim & Fahmy, 2006, p. 22).

Findings from the present study suggest that the visual portrayal of the war in the *New York Times* and *USA Today* may not have always followed the long-standing conventions of war coverage. For instance, the *New York Times* and *USA Today* were not shy about publishing images showing Iraqi civilians protesting against the war and the U.S. military presence in their country or to show images of Iraqis fleeing their destroyed homes and as casualties.

Additionally, the research discovered that some frames were more dominant than others throughout the time period of the research. For instance, visuals collected from the

front pages of the three newspapers revealed that the advanced warfare technology and military might frame was more common in the *New York Times* and *USA Today* from March 6 until May 15, 2003, than the casualties or violence and destruction frames. The study also shows hardly any photos of actual combat activity in the three newspapers' visual coverage of the war, despite the fact that the Iraq War featured the presence of embedded reporters and photojournalists who had more access to the front lines than they experienced in previous wars (Kim & Fahmy, 2006). The reason could be that, although photojournalists had unprecedented access, they still had to follow military ground rules that could have prohibited them from taking photos of fighting that show war violence.

Evidence was found regarding a change in the dominant visual frames presented in the three newspapers for the two phases examined. For instance, in the initial phase beginning March 6 through April 30, 2003, the most dominant frame highlighted the advanced warfare technology and military might aspect of the war. During the second phase from May 1 until May 15, 2003, the number of Iraq War-related visuals published in all three newspapers' front pages decreased. Those photos showed the advanced warfare technology and military might, casualties, reconstruction of Iraq and maintenance of public order frames as well as other illustrations, headshots, and images of Iraqi civilians.

The dissimilarity in the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Wall Street Journal's* visual framing of the Iraq War could be explained by the fact that each of the newspapers has different agendas and perspectives toward the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Each of the publications may have chosen to focus its pictorial coverage of the war-related events on specific issues that it thought were important for the public to see. The advanced warfare

technology and military might frame was more dominant than other frames perhaps because initially the newspapers relied on U.S. government officials to provide them with information about the war plans. As embedded reporters started going to Iraq, the visual coverage continued to depict the “U.S. war machine,” but also tried to give a representation of “the human face of the war,” that is individuals involved in the conflict such as U.S. and coalition forces, Iraqi civilians, government officials, and news media practitioners.

It is beyond this study’s capacity to explore specific reasons behind the shift in the newspapers’ visual coverage of the conflict as it did not include a survey of news editors and executives’ decision-making processes regarding framing of the conflict and the publication of war images. A possible explanation, however, is that the change in news frames could be related to the changes in the conflict itself and the newspapers’ executives and editors perceptions of the war and other newsworthy events, as well as, perhaps, their understanding of the audience news needs. Findings from this study show some support for results from other research. For instance, Schwalbe et al. (2008) found “conflict” was the most frequent frame in U.S. media immediately after the U.S. invasion began. One difference between Schwalbe et al.’s (2008) study and the present study could be the categorization of the images.

While this study separated the frame of advanced warfare technology and military might and the violence and destruction frame, Schwalbe et al. (2008) combined both frames into one theme that they labeled the conflict frame, which included images of the official “war machine,” U.S. government and military leaders, arsenal, troops, explosions, air strikes on Baghdad, wrecked buildings and other scenes of destruction

characterized the conflict frame. The human-interest frame, composed of nonwar images of troops, the enemy, Iraqi civilians, journalists, became more dominant in the following weeks. Both Schwalbe et al.'s (2008) study and one by Aday, Cluverius, & Livingston (2005) found a sharp drop in visual coverage of the war in the aftermath of major combat operations as the war began to fade from the news media in favor of SARS and other matters.

For both the *New York Times* and *USA Today*, advanced warfare technology and military might was the most frequent frame two weeks before the start of the war until the end of major combat operations on April 30, 2003. Thus, photographs published in the three largest American newspapers did not focus primarily on violence and destruction, casualties, and the collapse of Saddam's regime. Images depicting those frames were limited. Also, interestingly, after excluding the Saturday and Sunday front-page visuals from the *New York Times*, results of the content analysis revealed that the newspaper featured the lowest number of visuals compared with the *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today's* visual coverage.

The *Wall Street Journal* published only one photograph depicting soldiers' pre-war preparations, two photographs representing the collapse of Saddam's regime through the toppling of his statue, and three images showing Iraqi civilians claiming aid packages, praying, and in a mosque. Another photo was of a woman being used as a human shield. Those images were the only photographs of actual events that appeared in the newspaper's front pages from March 6 until April 30, 2003. The largest categories of visuals that dominated the *Wall Street Journal's* front page were small images: headshots, as well as drawings and illustrations that included maps, caricatures, polls,

tables and charts with Iraq War-related data (Table 2c). Large images and photos that depicted actual events from Iraq or related to the war appeared in the sections inside the newspaper.

Overall, *USA Today* printed the most Iraq War-related visuals from March 6 through May 15, 2003, compared with the other two publications. In fact, visuals from the *New York Times* between March 6 and May 15, 2003 accounted for only 27.7% of the three newspapers' total of images (n=296) – compared with 29% of visuals from the *Wall Street Journal*, and 43.2% of visuals that were collected from *USA Today* (Table 3a).

Table 3a

Iraq war-related visuals in U.S. newspapers' front pages from March 6, 2003 - May 15, 2003 (n=296)

Months Newspapers	Percentage of visuals for March 2003	Percentage of visuals for April 2003	Percentage of visuals for May 2003	Total percentage of images in each newspaper
<i>The New York Times</i>	31.7%	57.3%	10.9%	27.7%
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	53.4%	41.8%	4.6%	29%
<i>USA Today</i>	40.6%	50%	9.3%	43.2%

Note 1: Visuals include photographs of actual events, headshots, maps, illustrative graphics, tables and charts with data.

Note 2: Because of rounding, some of the percentages do not add up to 100.

As the war progressed and major combat operations came to an end on April 30, the three newspapers showed fewer Iraq War-related images in the following two weeks, from May 1 to May 15, 2003. April 2003 featured the highest numbers of Iraq War-related visuals for both the *New York Times*, which published 47 images Monday through Friday, and *USA Today*, which printed 64 images – compared to their visual coverage during the last three weeks of March 2003 and the first two weeks of May 2003.

As for the *Wall Street Journal*, its topmost visual coverage of the Iraq War was during March 2003, with 46 images. Then, as the conflict evolved, its visual coverage dropped off substantially, particularly during the month of May 2003 (Table 3b).

This decrease in photo coverage could be attributed to a combination of several factors: the announcement by former President George W. Bush that major combat operations in Iraq were over, the outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS disease), and the Riyadh bombings in Saudi Arabia.

Table 3b

Iraq war-related visuals in U.S. newspapers' front pages from March 6, 2003 - May, 15, 2003 (n=296)

Months Newspapers	Number of visuals for March 2003	Number of visuals for April 2003	Number of visuals for May 2003	Total number of images in each newspaper
<i>The New York Times</i>	26	47	9	82
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	46	36	4	86
<i>USA Today</i>	52	64	12	128

Note1: Visuals include photographs of actual events, headshots, maps, illustrative graphics, tables and charts with data.

Note 2: The equivalent data is given in percentages in Table 3a.

This study confirmed that, in general, the three newspapers presented distinct pictorial coverage of the Iraq War. Although the U.S. advanced warfare technology and military might was the most recurrent frame in both the *New York Times* and *USA Today* front-page coverage of the conflict between March 6 and April 30, 2003, the two newspapers had dissimilar secondary visual frames within the same time period.

For instance, while the *New York Times* published images showing Iraqis fleeing war, cheering, gathering, and in various daily life situations, *USA Today* presented headshots of individuals involved in the conflict.

Images of violence and destruction, casualties, and the collapse of Saddam's regime were scarce. Throughout its coverage of the conflict, the *Wall Street Journal* used only 2.3% (2) images depicting the collapse of Saddam's regime out of the 86 visuals published on its front page from March 6 through May 15, 2003. The *New York Times* printed only 7.3% (6) photographs portraying U.S. and Iraqi casualties out of its total images (n=82) it published on its front page from March 6 until May 15, 2003. Only 3.1% (4) images reflecting violence and destruction were present on *USA Today's* front page Iraq War coverage out of the total images (n=128) it published during the period starting March 6 and ending on May 15, 2003 (tables 3a and 3b).

Overall, the most recurring visuals in two of the newspapers during the weeks leading to the war until the end of April 2003 highlighted the conflict and consequences frame and the human-interest frame. The conflict frame included images of advanced warfare technology and military might, conquest, collapse of Saddam's regime, violence and destruction, and casualties. On the other hand, the human-interest frame emphasized scenes of Iraqis in various daily life situations, U.S. soldiers' humanitarian role, and government officials' efforts to rebuild Iraq.

Throughout the first two weeks of May 2003, the number of visuals published in both the *New York Times* and *USA Today* was notably scarce compared with the preceding period. In fact, the two newspapers' pictorial coverage represented partly the human-interest frame and partly the conflict frame. During both phases under

examination, from March 6 through April 30 and from May 1 through May 15, the *Wall Street Journal* printed on its front pages only seven images depicting actual scenes related to the war. Small headshot drawings of government officials, soldiers, and other individuals, as well as maps, bullet form data, illustrations, and caricatures were the recurring visuals in the newspaper.

A content analysis of 296 Iraq War-related photographs from the front pages of the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *Wall Street Journal*, shows that the visual coverage of the conflict consisted of more images of Iraqi casualties than American victims. Kim and Fahmy (2006) wrote that, conventionally, the focus of the photographic coverage disregards some key aspects of the war, especially those involving the human side of the conflict.

Although in general, the pictorial representation of the war did not emphasize the human cost of the war, most of the images that showed casualties were those depicting Saddam Hussein's soldiers, mass graves committed under his rule, and Iraqi civilians. There were no pictures of dead U.S. soldiers and very few images of wounded U.S. troops. Those images often carried positive messages of prisoners of war rescue, as was the case with the coverage of Jessica Lynch, and highlighted the care and respect given to the American soldiers.

Framing the human side of the war that way suggests that the newspapers may have tried to keep images of suffering, destruction, and tragedy to a minimum — perhaps so they do not offend and lose their audiences and also so that they do not undermine the U.S. military efforts in Iraq, national security, and the public's support for the war.

Alternatively, by publishing more images of the enemy's war casualties and

collapse instead of ‘our own victims,’ the newspapers may have thought that their readers would not be as repulsed and angered by seeing the other side fall as they could be if they saw images of U.S. soldiers killed in combat. Showing photos of the downfall of the “unworthy” enemy could have also been a way for the newspapers to counter critics’ accusations that the U.S. news media presented a sanitized version of the war. “By showing only a glimpse of the human toll” (Kim & Fahmy, 2006, p. 20), the newspapers prove to the public that they are reporting truthful events and that there are two aspects to war: pleasant and unpleasant.

While the *New York Times* and *USA Today* published more images that demonstrate the U.S. military efforts in Iraq in a positive light, the two newspapers also published a few images of the public’s reactions to the conflict, destruction, and suffering. A content analysis of images from the front pages of the newspapers does not give enough information about news editors and executives’ decision-making process when it comes to the visual framing of U.S. military actions overseas. A survey of news media editors and executive would have been useful to determine how certain images make it to the front pages. The study suggests that the newspapers’ pictorial representation of the Iraq War reflects their individual choices about what images they decide to publish.

The newspapers’ political leanings, ideologies, diplomatic sensitivity, history, judgment of the events and issues, as well as their relationship with their audiences more likely swayed the choice of visual frames and the tone of coverage (Kim & Fahmy, 2006). Another plausible explanation could be that the embedded photojournalists also influenced the tone of reporting about the

conflict because of their proximity to the U.S. soldiers they deployed in Iraq. Being very close to the troops in the battlefield could have impacted the embedded reporters' work and caused them to focus their visual rendering of the war on the military superpower rather than on the consequences.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

The objective of this research was to explore the visual framing of the Iraq War in the top three American newspapers. Additionally, the study sought to investigate whether the newspapers' coverage of the conflict focused on dissimilar frames throughout two different time periods of the war. The researcher hypothesized that during the two weeks leading to the U.S. invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003, until April 30, photographs published in the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Wall Street Journal* focused principally on advanced warfare technology and military might, violence and destruction, casualties, and the collapse of Saddam's regime. The researcher also speculated that, after former President George W. Bush's speech on May 1, 2003, the three newspapers' representation of the conflict shifted to depicting U.S. soldiers in a more humanitarian role and the U.S. efforts to reconstruct Iraq.

A content analysis of the three newspapers' pictorial representation of the invasion of Iraq revealed that the conflict and consequences frame was the most dominant in the *New York Times* and *USA Today* between March 6 and April 30, 2003. The *Wall Street Journal* is not included because only one image illustrating the conflict and consequences frame appeared on the newspaper's front page. This frame included advanced warfare technology and military might, violence and destruction, casualties, and collapse of Saddam's regime. A secondary – and unexpected frame – was the human-interest frame. The study did not predict finding this frame in the two newspapers' visual coverage of the conflict during that same time period. The human interest frame depicted pre-war U.S. protests, family members of U.S. soldiers, government officials' meetings

or speeches, and Iraqi civilians in various daily life situations during wartime, such as fleeing, cheering, gathering, and praying, etc.

In the first two weeks of May 2003, the *New York Times* and *USA Today*'s visual account of the conflict decreased substantially compared to their March and April coverage. In fact, the two newspapers presented dissimilar frames. The *New York Times*' largest number of photographs during the first two weeks of May depicted Iraqi civilians and the U.S. efforts to rebuild Iraq and maintain public order. Conversely, *USA Today* published an equal, but limited number of images, on one hand portraying the reconstruction of Iraq and maintenance of public order, as well as Iraqi civilians, and on the other hand reflecting the conflict and consequences frame. The advanced warfare technology and military might and casualties frames were also found in the *New York Times*' May coverage.

The *Wall Street Journal*'s coverage of the Iraq War revealed that most of the publication's visual portrayal of the conflict was reserved for the inside pages. Iraq-War related drawings, illustrations, polls, charts, tables, statistics, maps, caricatures, as well as headshots of various individuals dominated the newspaper's front page. Only seven photographs of actual events related to the war were featured on the *Wall Street Journal*'s front page during the March and April period. Those images were a mixture of the conflict and consequences frame and the human-interest frame. The newspapers' May coverage was very limited and featured only four headshots.

Overall, the study's predictions about the three largest newspapers' visual coverage of the Iraq War were partially supported. The study's supposition about the March and April time period of the conflict was corroborated, although for only two of

the newspapers. However, the results do not support the speculation that, during the first two weeks of May 2003, the three newspapers' coverage shifted to depicting U.S. soldiers in a more humanitarian role and the U.S. efforts to reconstruct Iraq. In fact, images of U.S. soldiers in a humanitarian role and the U.S. efforts to rebuild Iraq were also present during the March and April phase of the war. Similarly, photographs of advanced warfare technology and military might, and of casualties were found in two of the newspapers' May pictorial coverage of the conflict. These findings revealed that there was not really a shift in the newspapers' visual framing of the war, as was suggested in RQ2. The change was instead in the number of visuals published on the newspapers' front pages. As the war evolved, the three newspapers' coverage of the conflict decreased.

Limitations of the study

One limitation of this study is that it does not include a comprehensive examination of the three newspapers' entire coverage of the Iraq War. This study was limited to only the front pages of the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Wall Street Journal*; therefore the findings cannot be generalized over the entire publications' coverage of the war. Including the inside pages of each of these newspapers may have provided more insight on their framing patterns of the conflict. It may have also revealed which themes were the most recurrent throughout their entire reporting of "Operation Iraqi Freedom."

Another possible limitation could be the fact that the research utilized a purposive sample focusing on specific publications. Another limitation could be related to the lack of clear visual clues identifying the context of the photos. One clue could have been the photo captions, which were not included in this study for two reasons: They were hard to

read due to the small and unclear font size, and the researcher chose to let the images alone tell the story. These narratives that accompany visuals could have been helpful, particularly when a photograph showed people, doing some war-related action.

Sometimes it was hard to distinguish who they were exactly or what they were actually doing when the photo was taken. For instance, an image of U.S. troops trying to help an injured Iraqi woman on her knees on a bridge could be perceived as soldiers about to capture an Iraqi civilian. In this case, the captions could assist in understanding the scene the photo tried to capture and could exclude chances of misinterpreting the situation.

Suggestions for future research

Content analysis was able to provide only partial information about the newspapers' visual framing of the Iraq War. A survey of news editors and executives on their organizations' war reporting practices would give more knowledge about the process and guiding principle of image selection and placement. Furthermore, future studies could explore the extent to which a content analysis of visuals would most likely yield significantly differing results if captions were included for some photos and not for others.

This study contributes new information about print press framing of the 2003 Iraq War through its examination of the visual coverage of the conflict in the top three U.S. newspapers. This research used two newspapers that are generally absent from the pool of newspapers researchers tend to choose, that is, either elite newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* or non-elite newspapers such as the *Columbus Dispatch* and the *Roanoke Times* (Carpenter, 2007). This study included the *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* because they were among the largest circulation U.S. newspapers.

Findings from this study have revealed that, unlike other prominent newspapers, the *Wall Street Journal* did not provide extensive visual coverage of the military operations in Iraq in the front pages of its issues. This may explain why it is rarely included in research analyzing the visual framing of the Iraq War in U.S. newspapers.

More research needs to be conducted on news media framing of the Iraq War in recent years. Communication technologies continue to revolutionize news media's work and the public's exposure to current events. It would be interesting for future researchers to investigate how various prominent foreign newspapers have visually framed the evolution of both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. News organizations depict events and conflicts differently because of influences that affect their coverage. It would also be enlightening to explore the issue of media bias – cultural, political, religious, or otherwise – and the extent to which it shapes the news organizations representation of significant international events such as wars, attacks on countries' national security, as well as other disasters. Finally, future research could analyze the effects of foreign media visual frames of international events that are also portrayed in U.S. news media on American audiences. For instance, it would be interesting to find out how Americans perceive and react to images of the Iraq War on the Arabic television news channel *Al-Jazeera*, the French *TV5*, or the British broadcasting network *BBC*.

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