**Shocked and Awed: The Convergence of Military and Media Discourse**

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More than one year after the United States military occupation of Iraq there still is no credible evidence linking Saddam Hussein to the Al Qaeda terrorist network, nor is there any trace of the Middle Eastern dictator's ballyhooed Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) program. These stubborn facts notwithstanding, and in the face of opinion polls that indicate public support for the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq had slipped, U.S. President George W. Bush and other members of his administration continued to reassert the same dubious claims that helped them win over American public opinion in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion. "The reason I keep insisting that there was a relationship between Iraq and Saddam and Al Qaeda: because there was a relationship between Iraq and Al Qaeda," Bush said after a cabinet meeting June 17 (Milbank 2004).

In a *New York Times/*CBS News poll, conducted over the weeks leading up to the invasion, 45 percent of respondents said Saddam Hussein was directly involved in the attacks. A second poll, conducted before the second anniversary of the September 11 attacks, found the number had increased. The *Washington Post* poll reported that nearly 7 in 10 respondents thought Hussein was involved in the attacks—a troublesome figure considering there is no evidence to support the opinion. A Knight Ridder poll reported that 44 percent of respondents believed that some of the September 11 highjackers were Iraqi citizens (Feldmann 2003; Milbank and Deane 2003; Nagourney and Elder 2003). No Iraqis were involved. Moreover, staff reports of the bi-partisan commission investigating the September 11 attacks flatly contradicted one of President Bush's central justifications for the invasion, saying that there did not appear to be any "collaborative relationship" between Hussein and Al Qaeda ( Shenon and Marquis

2004). And in January 2004 David Kay, the man who led the CIA's efforts to locate WMD in the months following the occupation, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that "we were almost all wrong" about Iraq's WMD program. Information used to build support for war would be exposed as misleading, but only after the window of opportunity to intervene in policy implementation had passed. "While few shed tears for the exit of the murderous Saddam Hussein," wrote *Editor and Publisher* reporter Joe Strupp in June 2003, "the press needs to remind the public that the war was sold to them not on the basis of 'regime change' but on the personal threat to Americans posed by Saddam's so-far-missing weapons" (Strupp 2003).

What was behind the success of the U.S. government's media and public relations campaign? Scholarship investigating the relationship between the media and the U.S. military has chronicled how U.S. news media have largely downplayed critical perspectives on military actions (Herman and Chomsky 1988; Kellner 1992; Mowlana et al. 1992; Mermin 1999). Jonathan Mermin, in his work investigating media coverage of post-Vietnam U.S. military interventions, has found evidence to support W. Lance Bennett's (1990) indexing thesis that predicts news coverage will reflect the degree of policy debate and disagreement that exists among elite government officials. Richard Ericson (Ericson et al. 1989) and Mark Fishman (Fishman 1980) have also argued that journalism's heavy reliance on official government sources is a crucial influence on journalistic content. Susan Moeller's extensive study of U.S. media's coverage of WMD came to a similar conclusion. "Most journalists," she writes, "accepted the Bush administration's formulation of the 'War on Terror' as a campaign against WMD." And in doing, "Many stories stenographically reported the incumbent administration's perspective on WMD" (Moeller 2004: 3). That is not to say that all news media dutifully filed the same reports. A detailed survey conducted by researchers at the University of Maryland found that audience misperceptions about Iraq-al Qaeda links varied significantly depending on their source of news. Americans "who receive most of their news from Fox News are more likely than average to have misperceptions. Those who receive most of their news from NPR or PBS are less likely to have misperceptions" (Kull 2003: 12). Virtually all major

U.S. newspapers backed Bush's decision to attack Iraq in their editorial pages.

These opinion polls are consistent with research conducted by Daya Kishan Thussu (2002) who argues that "media-savvy governments" have become particularly adept at selling military actions by using the resources made available to them in a globally networked 24-hour news environment. It is this point that I wish to develop further. This paper builds on the above research in order to delve into the symbiotic relationship that exists between the media and the military. It argues that the U.S. government exploited a convergence of media and military discourse that is constitutive of the political field. As Paul Rutherford argues, "what contributed to the success of this propaganda was that it used the news media, a more trusted source, and not the normal ad media, often discounted by consumers, to promote the Bush agenda" (Rutherford 2004: 33). I argue that spectacular narrative forms deployed by the U.S. military, such as "Shock and Awe," and the "Saving of Pvt. Jessica Lynch," are constitutive of the mediated political field. That is to say, that these narratives are fully integrated into military and corporate public-relations campaigns along with the daily production regimes of 24-hour cable news channels. I view spectacular media events – such as the invasion of Iraq – as "*hog fuel*" for 24 hour news channels and Web sites.  In particular, I believe they are well suited to a global trend toward "*high-volume flexible production systems*" characterized by *flexible forms of management, labour performance* and *increased intensity* in the speed of production and turnover time (Castells 2000; Harvey 1989).

I am not suggesting a strictly top-down form of domination in which the military imposes its will on a reluctant U.S. media. Instead, I tease out examples of the willing, and I might add eager, integration of military propaganda, organizational work routines, and the commercial interests of converged-media conglomerates, and other social actors. There is no conspiracy. Social actors continue to pursue their own interests independently. My point is that these interests have converged. Following Guy Debord (1995), we can say that these spectacular narrative forms, such as Shock and Awe, do not represent the spectacle in its entirety; instead, spectacular media events are component parts of a much larger integrated promotional system of commodity production, circulation and exchange. For heuristic purposes I call this

promotional system the integrated news spectacle. The term is used to refer to the "constellations" of social forces, new technologies and institutional logics that have converged in unique and contingent ways to produce a highly complex integration of the cultural, economic, social, professional and political realms.

**Dramatic Narratives and the Political Field**

Dramatic narratives constitute what Pierre Bourdieu (1991) calls the *tools* of "perception and expression" available to social actors in the political field. The performance of politics and the narratives and cultural texts employed by political actors are part of a struggle to narrate the social. Murray Edelman describes the situation well.

> The spectacle constituted by news reporting continuously constructs and reconstructs social problems, crises, enemies, and leaders and so creates a succession of threats and reassurances. These constructed problems and personalities furnish the content of political journalism and the data for historical and analytic political studies. They also play a central role in winning support and opposition for political causes and policies. (Edelman 1988: 1)

The news spectacle is, in partial form, about the dramatization of collective life, not its direct experience. It is a dramatic representation of social relations. News narratives, according to Edelman "objectify," in dramatic form, the hopes and fears of people (96). The news spectacle dramatizes a political world beyond the everyday experiences of people while simultaneously offering explanations, admonitions and reassurances for social problems ranging from unemployment and crime to healthcare and abortion. Dramatic storytelling—whether it be tales of political sex scandals or the hagiography of political image making—is constitutive of the process by which cognitive maps are constructed and used by individuals and social groups to assess social life and to make sense of the seeming chaos of the modern world. It is through the news spectacle that social actors are characterized using a binary code of the sacred and profane (Alexander and Jacobs 1998). In politics, actors are viewed as democratic/antidemocratic, trustworthy/deceitful, or populist/elitist, ally/enemy, etc. The news spectacle represents social reality by telling stories about collective life that make it possible to imagine political communities based on class, race and gender, and to mobilize these communities in support or opposition to particular public-policy

initiatives, political candidates and the platforms they represent. The meaning of news spectacles, from hotly contested presidential elections to the symbolic excommunication of President Bill Clinton, is always ambiguous because people draw upon different narratives explanations of events. “It is the ambiguity and the controversy that make developments political in character” (Edelman 1988: 95). The clichéd adage that one group’s freedom fighter is another group’s terrorist is true. Researchers need to ask which groups possess the ability to define social and political deviance and its legitimate limits. In other words, one must understand which individuals, social groups and institutions have the resources to represent rival groups and their interests as deviant (i.e., undemocratic, unpatriotic, elitist, etc.). This struggle involves the exercise of symbolic power. As Steven Livingston and W. Lance Bennett write “Understanding who constructs what is political about news events remains one of the most important subjects in political communication” (Livingston and Bennett 2003).

**Dramatizing Politics and the Politics of Drama**

The social relations of power of mediated politics—what form it takes and whose interests are served—must be investigated through a historical analysis of the *use* of dramatic narratives and the social relations of which they are a part. In other words, one must examine how the mediated production of political representation is structured by social relations while simultaneously investigating how the mediated production of symbolic forms, itself, is a structuring process that contributes to the maintenance of social relations. One must refer dramatic narratives back to historically situated interests and the media apparatus in which the struggle to legitimate political agendas is played out. Dramatic narratives used in political struggles over such things as social or fiscal policy reform, and the social norms in whose name this practice is conducted, are the tools of “perception and expression” offered by the political field; as such, dramatic narratives, contribute to “the universe of political discourse, and thereby the universe of what is politically thinkable” (Bourdieu 1991: 172). One’s ability to play the game of politics, therefore, is linked to one’s access to the resources of the political field.

Dramatic narratives fall under the rubric of the integrated system of news production and distribution to the extent that commercial news media remain the primary site through which competing social forces appeal for support within civil society. The logic and structure of what I choose to call the integrated news spectacle is thus a factor in determining which individuals or groups have the resources to fully pursue their agendas, represent their interests, and potentially have them accepted as common sense. It is also responsible, in part, for the style of politics. The organizing mechanism of our image-saturated media culture—and therefore, image politics—is the impersonal network of market exchange. The cultural texts stemming from the promotional packaging of political life have been aestheticized through marketing and advertising in an attempt to bridge the gap between consumers and producers—i.e., the broader public and political professionals. Dramatic narratives—mediated through a particular set of market transactions – have become constitutive of economic competition and the rational organization of journalistic institutions and political professionals; they have become objects of rational and strategic action by commercial and political interests. Political practice has become reified and susceptible to forms of domination to the extent that: (1) political life is conducted according to the logic and rules of the integrated spectacle; and (2) politics favors particular social actors and dramatic narratives—*those more fully integrated within the promotional logic of the system of production, distribution and exchange.*

**Shock and Awe**

On March 21, 2003, millions of television viewers around the world watched the night sky light up over Baghdad as U.S. and British forces rained close to 1500 bombs and cruise missiles down on the ancient Iraqi capital. One could be forgiven for thinking the focus of news coverage would be on the plight of civilians frantically taking what shelter they could find from the bombardment. Such was not the case. The aerial attack was the beginning of a much-anticipated military spectacle dubbed “Shock and Awe.” Reporters, both in Baghdad and those safely tucked in their network studios, were bursting with excitement. “The sky is lit up, Tom!” shouted veteran war correspondent Peter Arnett to NBC News

anchor Tom Brokaw. “Just like out of an action movie, but this is real, this is real, this is shock and awe, Tom!” Brokaw took his cue. “The overture is over,” he replied. “This is the main piece” (Rosenthal 2003). Jingoistic U.S. cable leader Fox News would not to be outdone. “It’s fascinating and amazing,” enthused conservative host Brit Hume, “to see this with the lights on in Baghdad” (Barnhart 2003). CBS took a few minutes before the network broke from its NCAA basketball coverage, but once it had made the switch, channel surfers looking for a sense of the potential human cost of the attack would be similarly frustrated. CBS News anchor Dan Rather did feel the need to comment on what he thought was the “somewhat historic” nature of waging war “when we have 24-hours-a-day” media coverage worldwide. In contrast, a less spectacular attack on one of Saddam Hussein’s palaces two days earlier—the object of Brokaw’s overture remark—received less glowing reviews. “If You Have to Ask, It’s Not ‘Shock and Awe,’” read a graphic on Fox News. “It could be called ‘Shock and Pause,’” said NBC reporter Jim Miklaszewski (Rosenthal 2003). Although Dan Rather, known for his over-the-top one-liners, could not contain his own enthusiasm, comparing the air raid with “the rocket’s red glare, and bombs bursting in air” (Houston 2003a). Rather’s corny patriotism notwithstanding, the lack of “awe” generated from the earlier, and much smaller, air raid had left broadcasters with a palpable sense of disappointment. They had been primed for a full-blown spectacle, a performance that, in their view, had not been delivered. So when it finally came*,* as they had promised viewers it would, they could not contain themselves.

The now-infamous branding slogan first gained public notoriety in January 3003 when CBS News aired a report by correspondent David Martin. The story contained information leaked by unidentified Pentagon sources who confirmed that “Shock and Awe” was indeed the label given to the attack plans being prepared for the anticipated invasion of Iraq. Alongside a “Showdown with Saddam” logo that was set against an American flag and a combination gunsight/radar-screen graphic, Martin told viewers that “Shock and Awe” is predicated on a spectacular, and overwhelming display of military might aimed at destroying an opponent’s will to fight. It centers on the psychological intimidation of the enemy

and downplays the need for traditional military ground forces. The concept is associated with Harlan Ullman, coauthor of the book titled *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance*. Ullman acknowledges his debt to famed military strategists Sun Tzu and Carl von Clausewitz, both of whom wrote about the importance of extinguishing an adversary's will to fight. What makes Ullman's use of the concept unique is its attachment to an integrated information environment that combines high-speed technological surveillance, communication and spectacular display.

> Battlefield awareness requires three information technologies: collection, fusion, and dissemination of real-time actionable information to a shooter. Rapid Dominance requires an unprecedented level of real-time information collection.... It would be hard to overstate the importance of information dissemination within Rapid Dominance. Administering Shock and Awe requires a spectrum of attacks that the adversary is unable to fathom. (Ullman and Wade 1996)

If successful, Ullman told Martin, there would be no ground war involving large-scale tank battles, as was the case in the 1991 Gulf War, and fewer lives would be lost (CBS News 2003). The aestheticized discourse of "Shock and Awe" promises the "surgical" use of "smart bombs" and other weaponry in order to create a strong psychological effect while minimizing the material destruction of military and civilian infrastructure. War without blood. That is to say, viewers at home would not be exposed to blood, especially American blood. The online version of the story contained a personal note from anchor Dan Rather, who reassured the public that the report contained no information that the Defense Department thought could help the Iraqi military.

There were two intended audiences for the discourse: foreign military adversaries and their civilian populations, and domestic citizens. "Shock and Awe" is designed to strike fear in the enemy, while at the same time reassure those on the home front concerned about the carnage of war. The phrase was quickly added to the popular lexicon. A flood of trademark applications for the term began to appear for products and services ranging from teddy bears and ski boots to men's and women's underwear. Sony backed off plans to market a "Shock and Awe" video game following accusations of war profiteering (BBC News Online 2003a; Harper's 2003).

"Shock and Awe" is simultaneously a battle strategy and an ideological discourse connected to what military strategists call the "Revolution in Military Affairs" (RMA), or as Kevin Robins and Frank

Webster prefer, "Information Warfare" (1999). Robins and Webster contrast Information Warfare with Industrial Warfare to highlight the heightened importance information and communication technologies play in the rational administration and control of warfare. They admit that the use of information has always been an integral part of warfare. Nonetheless, Robins and Webster argue that important differences exist. First, in the modern industrial period, roughly from the First World War through to the Vietnam War, warfare involved the mobilization of large elements of the general population with a commitment to total warfare. Since the end of the Vietnam War, citizens have become more apprehensive about sanctioning large-scale human casualties. As a result, it has become more difficult to mobilize an entire society for war—both in terms of shifting industrial production from domestic to military products and in the curtailment of the consumption of everyday goods and luxury items. Meanwhile, a shift has occurred, particularly following the collapse of the Soviet Union, toward what Manuel Castells calls "Instant Wars." These are relatively short-lived conflicts that are waged without conscription by professional forces, and that rely upon technological improvements in weaponry and information management to limit public knowledge of the material and human consequences of battle (Robins and Webster 1999: 154–157; Castells 2000: 486). The 1991 Gulf War, it is argued, provided the most fully developed example. Power was in effect operationalized, not simply by brute military force and large-scale industrial production, but through administrative surveillance—the monitoring of enemy forces and domestic political opposition—and spectacular display.

> Well-trained, well-equipped, full-time, professional armed forces do not require the involvement of the population at large in the war effort, except for viewing and cheering from their living rooms a particularly exciting show, punctuated with deep patriotic feelings. (Castells 2000: 486)

In a sense, the "Gulf War did not happen" for most viewers of the war spectacle—to borrow Baudrillard's well-known line—that is, when compared to women who gained their first work experience in factories during the Second World War, and who, while waiting for their husbands, sons and brothers to return from abroad, went without many everyday comforts. The mediated version of the war was experienced at a distance through self-referential discourses, such as Shock and Awe.

The use of perception management by nation-states is not, of course, particularly novel. And we must be cautious not to overstate the extent of the historical shift represented by the so-called RMA. After all, as John Downey and Graham Murdock remind us, the use of information contained in maps was integral to the swift movement of Napoleon's forces in the early-19th century, while "the stubborn persistence of core features, and failures of Industrial Warfare" remain (Downey and Murdock 2003: 75). Technology fails, humans make errors, and people still die in large numbers, particularly those unfortunate enough to be the target of the world's only superpower. The Associated Press estimated that 3,240 civilians perished from the war's beginning March 20 to the end of large-scale military conflict on April 20 (Bedway 2003). A running tally by the Web site iraqbodycount.net, which used a different methodology, more than doubles that estimate. Notwithstanding these warnings, I want to argue that spectacular narrative forms such as "Shock and Awe" are constitutive of the political field. These narratives are fully integrated into military, government, and corporate public-relations campaigns along with the daily production regimes of mainstream news media, particularly 24-hour cable news channels.

The experience of warfare is, for a majority of Western citizens, limited to spectacle. Western liberal democracies require the support of public opinion to wage war. The bulk of the population is mobilized, not as soldiers and producers of war armaments, but as "spectators of war," who are sold on the rightness of battle in the name of sacred universal values. Citizens are told the so-called War Against Terrorism is undertaken in the name of security, democracy, freedom and human rights, not to secure vital oil interests. The Manichean struggle between good and evil was engaged, not only on the battlefield (or in "battlespace," as proponents of RMA prefer), but also through the spectacle of dramatic narrative forms. America—a "target of hate because of its freedoms" —takes on "evildoers" in a just global struggle that will require eternal vigilance and flexibility of response. "Perception management," conducted by war-time governments, says Frank Webster, "must therefore attempt to combine ways of ensuring a continuous stream of media coverage that is positive and yet ostensibly freely gathered by independent news agencies" (Webster 2003: 64). Governments need to appear to practice what they

preach. Perception management of this type is achieved most efficiently by tapping into the resources made available to political actors by the integrated news spectacle. My argument is that the administration of George W. Bush enjoyed an enormous amount of political success packaging and selling the America-led invasion of Iraq under the rubric of the "War on Terror" narrative by making deft use of those resources.

**Branding War**

September 11 was a spectacular example of "mass-mediated terrorism," planned and executed to attract media interest in order to further a political agenda (Nacos 2002). It was also the promotional fulcrum point for a host of major policy initiatives from the Bush administration, including arguments justifying the U.S. invasion of Iraq. From the beginning, the events of September 11 and the declared war on terror were invoked as justification for the Bush doctrine of "preemptive military strikes." As Douglas Kellner makes clear, the Manichean logic used by Bush, and he correctly adds radical Islamists, rhetorically empowers those who wield it with a flexibility of purpose. "This amorphous terrorist Enemy...allows the crusader for Good to attack any country or group that is supporting terrorism, thus promoting a foundation for a new doctrine of preemptive strikes and perennial war" (Kellner 2003a). Part of the appeal of the discourse of terror, among those who would deploy it, is that it trumps international law that explicitly prohibits nation-states from engaging in unprovoked invasions. As one Fox News.com headline put it: "Why Now? A Better Question Is Why Wait?" (Adelman 2002). To be against the invasion of Iraq, following this logic, is to side with evil. It implies that one is callously willing to put the lives of one's fellow citizens at risk. It, in turn, conveniently brands opponents as unpatriotic.

The Bush administration tapped into America's newfound vulnerability to terror to push through a series of draconian security measures that stripped citizens of civil liberties and awarded powers of surveillance to the state previously thought intolerable. The USA Patriot Act, backed by the bureaucratic muscle of a new secretariat ominously named the Office of Homeland Security, gave the state power to

eavesdrop on private phone, e-mail communications and detain citizens without warrants, all in the name of their own security. Color-coded terror alerts issued by the Homeland office soon became institutionalized, each warning receiving a ritual media response. Reports accusing police of misusing their authority began to accumulate, including abuse of prisoners and the creation of police databases containing names of people arrested during antiwar protests (McCool 2003; Shenon 2003). Bush would eventually cite the "national emergency" created by September 11 to justify his decision to limit scheduled pay increases for federal workers (King 2003).

The Bush administration was not alone in its desire to tap into the spectacle. Following September 11, Washington lobbyists wasted no time in connecting their pet issue to the tragedy. "No self-respecting lobbyist," said Democratic Representative Edward J. Markey, has failed to "repackage his position as a patriotic response to the tragedy." In one of the more ridiculous examples, the *New York Times* reported that the American Traffic Safety Service Association, whose members make traffic signs, petitioned the federal government for increased funding to install more signage. The reason offered was that they would prevent potential traffic jams after terror attacks (Rosenbaum 2001). Selling fear made good business sense. The *Guardian* newspaper quoted *PR Week* as offering this bit of advice: "The trick in 2002, say public affairs and budget experts, will be to redefine your pet issue or product as a matter of homeland security.... If you can convince Congress that your company's widget will strengthen America's borders, or that funding your client's pet project will make America less dependent on foreign resources, you just might be able to get what you're looking for" (Rampton and Stauber 2003).

Public-relations analysts Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber argue that while the Bush administration failed to convince the UN Security Council and other NATO allies such as Germany, France and Canada to endorse its unilateral attack on Iraq, it enjoyed incredible success at home. "And a key component has been fear: fear of terrorism and fear of attack" (Rampton and Stauber 2003). Kellner has dubbed the strategy "Terror War" (Kellner 2003b). Fear, according to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, is the glue that holds together the society of the spectacle.

> The society of the spectacle rules by wielding an age-old weapon. Hobbes recognized long ago that for effective domination 'the Passion to be reckoned upon, is Fear.' For Hobbes, fear is what binds and ensures social order, and still today fear is the primary mechanism of control that fills the society of the spectacle. (Hardt and Negri 2000: 323)

But the spectacle of war, and its corollary fear, does not simply intimidate and pacify citizens. At the heart of the spectacle is a promise to reunite what has been sundered, to return what is feared to have been lost; and this promise is resolved at the level of myth. Samuel Weber argues that "the spectacle" of terror and war, "at least as staged by the mainstream broadcast media, seeks simultaneously to assuage and exacerbate anxieties of all sorts by providing images on which anxieties can be projected, ostensibly comprehended, and above all *removed*" (Weber 2002: 457). That is why, he argues, it is imperative that the object of one's fear must be named and located. "In the images of catastrophe that dominate broadcast media 'news,' the disunity is projected into the image itself, while the desired unity is reserved for the spectator off-scene (and for the media itself as global network)" (455).

There is no centralized "man behind the screen" whose job it is to manipulate the spectacle, although the spectacle's unity of appearance may give the impression that one exists. The integrated news spectacle is both concentrated and diffuse. It operates through the efforts of disparate social actors, some (governments and corporations) to be sure with more power than others, but each pursuing its own interests. What unifies them is their adaptation and use of the spectacle's logic. As for spectators, one might say, following Debord, that what unites them is the same thing that maintains their separateness from one another—the image of the spectacle.

CBS News reported September 4, 2002, that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told aides that he wanted them to draw up plans to attack Iraq a mere five hours after doomed American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon. The report by correspondent David Martin cited notes taken by aides who were with Rumsfeld on September 11. Despite intercepted phone calls, airline passenger manifests, and other information linking the Al Qaeda organization to the terror attacks, Rumsfeld reportedly insisted that attempts be made to connect Saddam Hussein to the suicide hijacking. "Go massive," he is said to have written, "Sweep it all up. Things related or not" (CBS News 2002). Rumsfeld's determination is all

the more striking given that reports quoting CIA sources indicate two top-level Al Qaeda leaders had told U.S. interrogators, months prior to the invasion of Iraq, that their organization had no links with Saddam Hussein (Bruce 2003). A leaked British Intelligence Staff report had also cast doubt on any connection, suggesting that Al Qaeda's "aims are in ideological conflict with present-day Iraq," itself a secular dictatorship (Rangwala and Whitaker 2003). Moreover, hawks within the Bush administration had been pushing for an American military presence in the Persian Gulf region prior to the September 11 attacks in order to secure American strategic interests, including oil supplies. The policy was contained in a well-publicized 2000 report prepared for the Project for a New American Century—a neoconservative think tank whose members include Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz.[1] The terror attacks in New York and Washington simply provided the administration with a useful promotional hook for a long-standing desire, on the part of senior administration officials, for a military presence in the region via "regime change" in Iraq.[2]

The dominant media frame following September 11 characterized the attack as an act of war that required a swift military response. The merits of alternative non-violent policy responses were minimized. A study of the structural metaphors used by *NBC Nightly News* in its coverage of the lead up to war shows that stories were framed as part of a countdown to an invasion that was assumed to be inevitable. "Rather than investigate, analyze, or debate the rationale for war, the broadcast instead offered, through metaphor, a dramatization of war unfolding" (Lule 2004: 187). Discussion of how historical context, including the U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia, and past American funding of Islamic fundamentalist groups, might have played a role in sowing the seeds of Al Qaeda was discouraged in many media reports and readily condemned as "blaming the victim." As Kellner indicates Fox News led the charge among cable networks. On September 13, only two days after the tragedy, the host of the network's leading prime- time program, *The O'Reilly Factor*, admonished the former Clinton administration for security lapses and pinned blame for the actual attack on Saddam Hussein. His Republican guests Jean Kirkpatrick and Newt Gingrich agreed (Kellner 2003b: 59). Credible evidence for

either charge was not presented.

The die was cast in January 29, 2002, when President Bush used the State of the Union address to include Iraq, along with Iran and Stalinist North Korea, as a member of the "Axis of Evil." All three "rogue states," argued Bush, possessed "weapons of mass destruction" (WMD) and presented a threat to American security. Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda movement were not mentioned. The protean quality of "rogue" states allowed for the construction of an abstract form of secularized evil for which there are no historical "root causes." Unlike more civilized nation-states, rogues do not pursue rational interests. As Weber argues, these states and their leaders are defined as pathological, "whose roguishness consists in their refusal to follow the norms of international behaviour as laid down by the United States government" (Weber 2002: 456). By now international law had been relegated to an arbitrary "opt-in" status by the U.S. administration. A year later in his January 28, 2003, State of the Union speech, Bush made clear his administration's intentions regarding "regime change" in Iraq: "A brutal dictator, with a history of reckless aggression...with ties to terrorism...with great potential wealth...will not be permitted to dominate a vital region and threaten the United States."

**Promoting Patriotism**

From the beginning, the invasion of Iraq was a cable-TV affair. Significantly, 70 percent of Americans polled reported they had relied on cable as their main source of news about the conflict. Ratings were superb. Nielson data indicate that the number of average daily viewers had jumped 300 percent for CNN and MSNBC. Fox enjoyed a 288-percent spike (Sharkey 2003). The Pentagon was prepared. It understood the importance of television and contracted a designer who had worked for Disney, MGM, and *Good Morning America* to build a $250,000 studio for the daily media briefings. The first Gulf War made CNN a global leader in 24-hour news. In this conflict the all-news pioneer would not be alone. In addition to Fox and MSNBC, 24-hour competition for scoops came from Qatar-based Al Jazeera, which used the international reputation it first gained reporting on the Afghanistan conflict to pursue plans for an

English-language Web site.

The war commodity is problematic; many sponsors, such as Proctor & Gamble, were worried that their brands could be damaged if associated with body bags (Cassy and Milmo 2003; Chunovic 2003). The U.S. networks had to forgo $77 million in advertising revenue in order to air commercial-free news during the first week of the conflict. The cable-news networks sacrificed roughly 71 percent of their weekly ad revenue. But after the initial "awe" had worn off, commercials returned (Beard 2003). Despite obvious financial hurdles, the spectacle of war is in the long-term interests of all-news networks seeking to extend their brand, and expand their audience. China's state-run China Central Television (CCTV) was openly trying to court some of the marketing magic enjoyed by CNN in 1991. CCTV-1, the network's main news channel, ran nonstop coverage on the first day of the war that carried video of advancing U.S. forces. Senior editors talked about the need to adopt Western professional standards of "objectivity" as a way of attracting and holding audiences in what was becoming an increasingly competitive global commercial-television market (Chang and Hutzler 2003). Military pundits would also do well. The expanded number of 24-hour cable outlets meant there was more need than ever for commentary. Whereas in 1999, retired generals provided opinion without pay, for the most part; by 2003 those same experts were striking lucrative, and exclusive, contracts with networks (Tugend 2003). The crucible of war coverage would also lend much-desired gravitas to ambitious reporters, such as CBS News correspondent Lara Logan—a former model—hoping to boost their careers.

The U.S. news media were in Iraq to cover the invasion, but they were also engaged in a vicious branding war, each network trying to project an image of itself as more patriotic than the competition. CNN and MSNBC were feeling the ratings pinch after watching the aggressively patriotic Fox News grab the top spot. Graphics with fluttering flags were ubiquitous, as were the words "we" and "us" when identifying U.S. military personnel. "The conveying of actual news often seems subsidiary to their mission to out-flag-wave one another and to make their own personnel, rather than the war's antagonists, the leading players in the drama," wrote Frank Rich in the *New York Times* (Rich 2003). Both MSNBC

and Fox News branded their news coverage with the U.S. government's logo for the conflict: "Operation Iraqi Freedom." Fox allowed soldiers to go on camera and send personal messages to loved ones at home. MSNBC created a video-montage bumper in which still photos of military personnel were overlayed with the motto "May God bless America. Our hearts go with you" (Sharkey 2003). CNN boasted after its medical correspondent, Sanjay Gupta, performed emergency brain surgery on a mortally injured young Iraqi boy. Gupta, an accomplished neurosurgeon, was traveling as an "embedded" reporter with a U.S.-military medical unit known as the "Devil Docs." What received less attention was news the boy, who didn't survive surgery, was among three people killed by U.S. Marines when they opened fire on a taxi passing through a checkpoint (MacDonald 2003). One of the more sensational moments in the branding war involved rivals MSNBC and Fox News. Both networks broadcast news items and promotional spots that took patriotic digs at each other. The promotions came after Fox's charismatic Geraldo Rivera ran afoul of the U.S. military by revealing troop locations when he drew a map in the sand while on camera. Veteran Peter Arnett, who had been filing reports for NBC, MSNBC and National Geographic Explorer, was fired after granting an interview with Iraqi state TV. He had told the interviewer that President Bush was facing a "growing challenge" to the "conduct of the war" at home. At the time, this was factually correct, but by granting an interview that could be used by the Iraqi regime for propaganda purposes, he had opened himself up to attack. After running a story about Rivera's run in with the U.S. military, MSNBC broadcast a spot assuring its audience that it would never "compromise military security or jeopardize a single American life." Upset, Fox responded with its own spot that showed a portion of Arnett's Iraqi TV interview. "He spoke out against America's armed forces," said an announcer, "he said America's war against terrorism had failed; he even vilified America's leadership. And he worked for MSNBC" (Rutenberg 2003a).

On the morning of March 26, CNN led newscasts with a report that U.S. forces had killed 200 Iraqis in a large land battle. That same day, at least 15 Iraqi civilians died after an apparent U.S. bombing of a Baghdad marketplace. The marketplace bombing was reported, but attention quickly faded among the

U.S. networks. Coverage shifted to President Bush's visit to the MacDill Air Force Base near Tampa, Florida. The trip was billed as a morale booster for troops one week into the war. "If that rendition of the *Star-Spangled Banner* doesn't stir you, I don't know what will," said CNN's morning anchor Paula Zahn, after Bush was greeted by the singing of the anthem. Zahn would later win her own prime-time show on the strength of her performance during the conflict. Later that day, all the major news channels broadcast live a news briefing from central command's new studio in Qatar. "OK, so, a lot of negative questions there," said Fox's anchor. "But let's focus on the positive" (Burkeman et al. 2003).

Antiwar voices that challenged "Brand America" were hard to find before or during the conflict. Those people who did speak out faced a range of penalties, including threats, job loss, and arrest (Kenna 2003). With the exception of CNN's "Voices of Dissent," a segment created in the weeks leading up to the war, and later renamed "Arab Voices" after hostilities started, antiwar voices were largely absent. "Get the following production pieces in the studio NOW:... Patriotic music that makes you cry, salute, get cold chills! Go for the emotion," read a "War Manual" produced by McVay Media, a Cleveland-based broadcast media consultant. McVay advised clients to downplay protests against the war because they drive away viewers (Farhi 2003). One mass "die-in" staged by protesters in New York, was mocked by Fox News. A few blocks away, a message on the news ticker outside Fox's New York headquarters read: "War protester auditions here today...thanks for coming" (Cowen 2003). On another occasion, a Fox anchor referred to war protesters as "the great unwashed" (Rutenberg 2003b). The pro-war flack emanating from media organizations was extensive. Radio stations owned by Clear Channel Communications, the owner of close to 1,200 stations across the United States, organized rallies that endorsed the U.S. government's position against Iraq (Jones 2003). Country-music stations owned by the corporate giant, along with radio chain Cumulus Media, stopped playing songs by the popular Dixie Chicks after the group's lead singer, Natalie Maines, criticized President Bush while performing in London.

The usual support came from right-wing talk-radio hosts such as Rush Limbaugh; but there was

one TV talk show that regularly included antiwar guests along with supporters of the Bush position. Veteran Phil Donahue had his show cancelled by MSNBC in February 2003, as the build up to war intensified. The official reason offered by MSNBC was that the program trailed Fox's *The O'Reilly Factor* by a wide margin. But while the program was badly behind in ratings for its time slot, it was still MSNBC's top-rated program, ahead of *Hardball With Chris Matthews*. A different reason was offered by Rick Ellis, a columnist with *All Your TV* Web site. Ellis claims he received a leaked internal report from NBC that argued Donahue would be a "difficult public face for NBC in a time of war" (Ellis 2003). MSNBC soon hired conservative radio talk-show host Michael Savage. His views on the war effort were unambiguous. In one program, Savage suggested war protesters were "committing sedition, or treason." On radio, Savage happily swept away hundreds of years of history when he offered his own subtle solution to the Middle East conflict: "We are the good ones and they, the Arabs, are the evil ones. They must be snuffed out from the planet and not in a court of law." Savage apparently went too far and was fired in July of that year after making homophobic remarks on air.

Commentators were now talking about a so-called Fox Effect, whereby CNN and MSNBC were trying to recapture lost market share by singing from the same patriotic song book as Fox (Rutenberg 2003b; Willis 2003). The near monopolization of the meaning of patriotism by Republican and prowar advocates was difficult to break through for anti-war protesters. In San Francisco, a hub of antiwar activity, counter-branding campaigns were launched to "reclaim" the flag using "Peace is Patriotic" bumper stickers (Salladay 2003). While media corporations were openly sponsoring pro-war rallies, one *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter was fired after it was learned he had participated in an anti-war rally on his own time. MSNBC correspondent Ashleigh Banfield, who had been feted by the network during its coverage of the conflict in Afghanistan, was reprimanded by her employer after telling students at Kansas State University that media coverage had not shown the full horrors of battle.

**In Bed with Militainment**

News organizations' desire to brand themselves as patriotic meshed nicely with the Pentagon's and the White House's desire to choreograph the invasion. "After September 11 the country wants more optimism and benefit of the doubt," said MSNBC President Erik Sorenson. "It's about being positive as opposed to being negative" (Rutenberg 2003b). CBS News President Andrew Heyward said he wanted audiences to know that he was "rooting for the U.S. to win the war" (Bednarski and Higgins 2003). Branding synergy between broadcasting media and the military was at the core of the media/military relationship. Careful attention was given by the Pentagon to make sure that their public-relation needs were integrated with the hour-by-hour organizational requirements of broadcasters. The goal was to produce dramatic and sympathetic stories about the troops. Their solution was to attach, or "embed," more than 600 reporters with specific military units. These reporters traveled 24 hours a day under the protection of the same soldiers they were supposed to write stories about. The decision met with condemnation and praise. Liberal critics worried that reporters would lose their prized "objectivity" while living, eating and sleeping under the protection of their military keepers (Tumber and Palmer 2004: 48-63). Proponents such as Heyward argued professional distance was maintained. "We had total freedom to cover virtually everything we wanted to cover," claimed Chip Reid, an embedded reporter with NBC (Bauder 2003). Supporters also praised the ability of embedded reporters to bear direct witness to events, and recalled how journalists had been kept far from the battlefield in previous conflicts. "It broadened the lens on the battlefield," said Terence Smith, media correspondent for PBS (Kelley 2003). Others were more defensive. "Let them try not showering for a week, sleeping out in the desert, living through sandstorms, being under fire—I don't see these people out there," said embedded CBS correspondent John Roberts, speaking of critics of the program. "All they do is criticize" (Kurtz 2003a).

Reporters who chose to go it alone, the so-called unilaterals, were seen as a problem. Some unilaterals were harassed and detained by soldiers as they tried to move around the country (Houston 2003b; York 2003). During the advance into Baghdad, the main hotel housing journalists was shelled by U.S. tanks, killing two cameramen. "It is in fact a brilliant, persuasive conspiracy to control the images

and the messages coming out of the battlefield and they've succeeded colossally," un-embedded Canadian TV reporter Paul Workman concluded, when speaking of efforts to restrict the movement of journalists (Ward 2003). Stories by embedded reporters were also subject to censorship if they revealed information deemed sensitive by military overseers. Many commentators added that "embeds" could only see what military handlers allowed them to see.

American and British military media minders did try to restrict story frames to the governments' daily "message track." The lack of valuable information coming out of the daily briefings at the central-command media center in Doha, Qatar, was particularly frustrating. *New York Magazine* writer Michael Wolff captured a sentiment held by many journalists who were annoyed by the successful efforts to organize and control coverage.

> It takes about 48 hours to understand that information is probably more freely available at any other place in the world than it is here. At the end of the 48 hours you realize that you know significantly less than when you arrived, and that you're losing more sense of the larger picture by the hour. Eventually you'll know nothing. (Wolff 2003)

Reporters had complained during the conflict in Afghanistan about restrictions placed on their movement. Moreover, government communication teams were overwhelmed by the challenge of managing a 24-hour global news cycle. The difficulties faced by NATO media handlers in controlling information during the Kosovo conflict convinced the Pentagon that improvements were required (Tumber and Palmer 2004: 64-65). American and British media specialists responded during the Afghan invasion by creating Coalition Information Centers (CICs). With offices in Washington, London and Islamabad, the centers coordinated the release of information and rebutted opposition allegations across time zones. The CICs were modeled on the so-called war rooms used in domestic political campaigns (DeYoung 2001; Stanley 2001b; Brown 2003). The approach has since been institutionalized. The daily briefing in Doha were timed for 2:00 p.m. so as to coordinate with morning-news programs in the United States.

After the Hussein regime collapsed, U.S. General Tommy Franks gave the embedding program a thumbs up. "Embedding will happen again," he said, "and I remain a fan" (Moses 2003). The British government had struggled to persuade a skeptical public to support its decision to participate in the

invasion. But during the conflict, Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon gave credit to embedding for a swing in public opinion in favor of the war. "The imagery they broadcast is at least partially responsible for the public's change in mood," he said (Cozens 2003). Hoon had identified the core issue. Fear that reporters would lose their "objectivity" missed the point. What really mattered were the lasting images of the fight against terror. Despite tensions between British and American PR staff over this strategy, the U.S. approach carried the day, according to John Kampfner, who helped produce a BBC documentary that was highly critical of military propaganda during the conflict.

> The American strategy was to concentrate on the visuals and to get a broad message out. Details— where helpful— followed behind. The key was to ensure the right television footage. The embedded reporters could do some of that. On other missions, the military used their own cameras, editing the film themselves and presenting it to broadcasters as ready-to-go packages. The Pentagon had been influenced by Hollywood producers of reality TV and action movies, notably Black Hawk Down. (Kampfner 2003)

One could remain true to the "regime of objectivity" (Hackett and Zhao 1998) and still provide the Pentagon spin machine what it wanted—dramatic stories, sometimes mythic tales, about the heroic efforts of men and women in uniform. In fact, while the embedding program was backed by coercive force, its success ultimately depended on reporters doing their jobs as they saw fit. It was important that stories produced by Western media have an air of verisimilitude. Iraq's hapless information minister, Mohammed Saee al-Sahhaf, was nicknamed "Comical Ali" by wags in the Western media for his obvious disinformation. But while he provided suitable fodder for late-night comics, his presence had an ideological dimension. If Disneyland exists, as Baudrillard suggests, to make the rest of the United States appear real, then "Comical Ali's" outbursts— "We defeated them yesterday. God willing, I will provide you with more information"—marked the sophisticated American and British propaganda as truth.

There is no reason to believe that military personnel twisted the arm of embedded *New York Times* bio-terrorism reporter Judith Miller to write the numerous stories she filed, both before and during the invasion, on the search for Iraq's WMD program. Her stories were cited by the White House to justify swift military action. And the imprimatur of the *New York Times* brand gave them enormous credibility. The unnamed source used in the stories turned out to be Ahmed Chalabi, leader of the Iraqi National

Congress (Kurtz 2003b). Chalabi was the Pentagon's favored replacement as a possible new Iraqi leader and, therefore, had a substantial interest in the war's outcome.[3] Reports that Chalabi was the principal source for the stories raised obvious questions as to whether the *New York Times* was manipulated to make it appear *as if* the White House was citing an independent intelligence source, instead of one of its own Iraqi proxies.

The Pentagon did not force the embedding program on an unwilling news media. Their relationship was symbiotic. Moreover, "military and entertainment types have been meeting and greeting over the last ten years or so" at conferences geared towards merging entertainment and military-training simulation technologies (Burston 2003: 166). Hollywood executives, including top people from Warner Brothers television, CBS and Fox were meeting with White House officials about participating in counter-terrorism initiatives as early as one month after the September 11 attacks. "We have not done a good job communicating to people about who we are," said Bryce Zabel, chairman of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. "It's possible the entertainment industry could help the government formulate its message to the rest of the world" (Rutenberg 2001f). Indeed, the idea to embed reporters came out of a program produced for ABC by action-movie king Jerry Bruckheimer (*Black Hawk Down*), and coproducer Bertram van Munster (reality-TV show *Cops*), with the cooperation of the Pentagon. The premise behind *Profiles From the Front Line* was to get "up close and personal" with soldiers fighting in Afghanistan in order to tell dramatic human-interest stories from their perspective (Seelye 2002; Holson 2003; Kakutani 2003; Kampfner 2003). It was a basic story formula first made popular in the 1970s by ABC Sports maven Roone Aldridge. The Pentagon liked the show so much that the embedding program was born.

Some stories were produced that did not show soldiers in a particularly fond light, but the overwhelming flow of live-broadcast pictures tended to produce decontexutalized tales of heroism, or simply gripping live video. Armed with portable, satellite video phones, reporters were able to keep pace with advancing military forces while filing dramatic footage of troops on the move, or fearless

paratroopers leaping out of aircraft into the pitch-black night. These live shots were often given the added patina of authenticity by their fuzzy green quality. Perhaps the most famous embedded reporter was NBC correspondent David Bloom, who transmitted live pictures while strapped atop his specially outfitted vehicle, nicknamed the "Bloom Mobile." A content analysis of embedded coverage found that most reports were anecdotal, combat focused, mostly live and unedited. That is to say, most reports involved a live standup (49.1 percent; audio-only 12.1 percent), with the reporter describing military action (27.8 percent), combat results (13 percent), or precombat activity, such as troop movements (31.5 percent). Stories about troop morale, the work soldiers did and details about weaponry accounted for another 16 percent. "In general," read the report by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, "the embedded reports tended toward immediacy over reflection" (Project for Excellence in Journalism 2003). As Peter Bart writes: "The dead and dying were always kept at PG-13 distances" (Bart 2003). Even the Pentagon and White House officials admitted, in their more grumpy moments, that media coverage tended to view the conflict "through a soda straw."

### The Myth of the Saving of Private Lynch

Perhaps the most memorable story of the war was the rescue of Private First Class Jessica Lynch from an Iraqi hospital. In this story, the potential for the spectacular integration of military propaganda, the commercial interests of converged-media conglomerates, mythic storytelling, and the organizational requirements of their 24-hour broadcasters were fully realized. A documentary produced for the BBC's *Correspondent* program went as far as to call the story "one of the most stunning pieces of news management ever conceived."

Lynch was traveling with the Army's 507th Maintenance Company March 23, when the convoy was ambushed after taking a wrong turn. The 19-year-old soldier was taken prisoner after she sustained serious injuries to her legs and spine. Five others were captured and held separately from Lynch. Eleven soldiers were killed. That much of the story remains undisputed. Almost two weeks into the conflict, there

was mounting pressure on the White House and Pentagon. Some media coverage had gone negative. Reports from mainstream American news outlets were not challenging the validity of the invasion. That would have damaged "Brand America." Instead, retired generals and other elite sources were starting to question whether the United States and Britain had underestimated the strength and determination of Iraqi soldiers who, at that moment, were putting up much stiffer resistance than anticipated. Many journalists had been swept up by the promise of "Shock and Awe" and expectations were high that there would be a swift and painless victory march into Baghdad. That would change. Negative images of frightened U.S. POWs released by Iraq as propaganda had become front-page news. Word that Iraqi civilians, including women and children, had been shot after the vehicle they were in failed to stop at a U.S. checkpoint, was also making headlines. Some reports dared to raise the possibility that the military operation might slip into a Vietnam-like quagmire.

It was in this media context that reporters embedded with Centcom, in Doha, were raised from their beds April 1. Some reporters thought the military might have captured Saddam Hussein. The story was better. They were briefed on the dramatic tale of Lynch's rescue. Edited video of the operation was distributed by the military to eager broadcasters, who quickly beamed the images around the world. The video showed Lynch, draped in a U.S. flag, being carried on a stretcher into a helicopter that would fly her to a U.S. military hospital in Germany. Soon family photos of the photogenic private would be released. The image of a pretty blond American teenager, with humble roots from Palestine, West Virginia, grabbed media attention. "She Was Fighting to the Death," shouted an April 3 headline in the *Washington Post*. That story went on to quote unnamed Pentagon sources who said Lynch, despite having sustained multiple gunshot wounds at the hands of Iraqi soldiers, had "fought fiercely," discharging her weapon until she ran out of ammunition. "She did not want to be taken alive," said one official. "Talk about spunk!" said U.S. Senator Pat Roberts, who was also quoted in the *Post* story. "She just persevered. It takes that and a tremendous faith that your country is going to come and get you" (Schmidt and Loeb 2003). Other broadcast and print outlets quickly followed the *Post*'s lead and wrote similar stories that

would mark Private Lynch as a national hero—an icon of American grit, determination and patriotism (Chinni 2003). Seemingly overnight, Private Lynch had entered the pantheon of American heroes. And, just as suddenly, media coverage changed. “Boy, one little POW rescue can sure change the tone of the press coverage,” wrote *Post* media critic, Howard Kurtz. “By the time Ari Fleisher [White House press secretary] faced reporters yesterday, many of the questions were about who would be running Iraq once Saddam is permanently sidelined. Goodby, quagmire” (Kurtz 2003c).

The “good news” was soon complicated. Within days reports began to appear that contradicted the storyline as portrayed in the *Post*. Named sources at the hospital in Germany denied that Lynch had been shot and stabbed. The extent and cause of her injuries were being questioned. “Interestingly though,” writes Dante Chinni, in a detailed chronology of media coverage of the story, “given the choice between the two stories, many news organizations chose the more theatric set of circumstances, even though the other version of events had better sourcing” (Chinni 2003). It appears the story of a pretty blond soldier displaying courage and patriotism under fire was simply too good to pass up, particularly for broadcasters predisposed to wrapping coverage in the flag. It was later confirmed that, while Lynch suffered serious leg and spinal injuries due to a motor-vehicle accident, she was never shot or stabbed. Neither did she participate in a gun battle, because her gun jammed. Further information indicates that Iraqi troops that had been guarding the hospital had left before the rescue. This means that the special forces team did not meet any significant resistance during the rescue mission, as first reported—a fact that seriously dampens the dramatic tension required for successful melodrama. On June 17, a chastened *Washington Post* published a lengthy reassessment of the Lynch saga on its front page, in which it corrected many of the errors contained in its heavily quoted story of April 3 (Priest, Booth, and Schmidt 2003). The patriotic mythology of “Saving Private Lynch” was a made-for-Hollywood script. Unlike Specialist Shoshana Johnson, a fellow POW whose frightened image was also widely broadcast, Lynch was, as one columnist put it, the “archetypal blonde-in-peril” (Zerbisias 2003). Shoshana had humble origins, but she was a black single mother. The Lynch mythology was so compelling that a bidding war erupted among news

media thirsting for the first interview with the “plucky” private—what is known in the industry as “the get.” It is the most-prized interview among celebrity journalists. Katie Couric, NBC’s popular host of the *Today Show* reportedly sent Lynch “a bundle of patriotic books, including Rudolph W. Giuliani’s memoir, *Leadership*. Diane Sawyer, of ABC News, sent a locket with a photograph of Private Lynch’s family home.” At CBS News the interview pitch was on a much larger scale. A letter written by CBS News senior vice president Betsy West, offered to bundle a two-hour TV movie along with other possible media projects with CBS Entertainment, MTV and book publisher Simon & Schuster—all of which are owned by parent company Viacom. “From the distinguished reporting of CBS News to the youthful reach of MTV, we believe this is a unique combination of projects that will do justice to Jessica’s inspiring story” (Rutenberg 2003c). The proponents of media convergence at Viacom recognized a platinum promotional opportunity when they saw one. Unfortunately, after the conglomerate’s plans were revealed in a page-one story in the *New York Times*, CBS News was accused of “checkbook journalism.” The news organization fought back by accusing the *Times* of selectively quoting from its offer, and it insisted that the editorial independence of CBS News was never in question. A month later, CBS chairman Leslie Moonves would finally concede that linking the interview pitch to an integrated multimedia entertainment package may have gone too far. In a moment of astounding honesty, Moonves blamed the new competitive environment created by large media conglomerates. “As these companies become more and more vertically integrated, you know, sometimes you do go over the line,” Moonves said (BBC News Online 2003b).

Lynch returned home to a choreographed hero’s welcome July 22, that was broadcast live. She was greeted by thousands of flag-waving well-wishers who lined the streets of the tiny Appalachian town for a glimpse of their home-grown celebrity. Some displayed entrepreneurial spirit. Souvenir hunters could purchase a “Welcome Home Jessica” t-shirt or a CD including a song about her ordeal made by an employee of a local market. It was titled: “She Was Just Nineteen, Became America’s Queen” (Dao 2003; Whoriskey 2003). For $24.95, online shoppers could visit jessicavideo.com and purchase “Faith and a

Community"; promotional copy for the video/DVD promised to "tell the untold story of not just one individual but a whole community that pulled together during a time of war.... This dynamic video tells the story of Jessica's rescue and those who believed for [sic] a miracle."

Media were forbidden from taking pictures of Lynch struggling to get off a Black Hawk helicopter, nor were they permitted to film her at the family home. Reporters were directed to the parade route and a media tent constructed for the occasion. Sitting in front of the stars and stripes, Lynch nervously read from a prepared statement in which she thanked all those people who helped "save" her, including special forces soldiers and a handful of Iraqi civilians, one of whom was Mohammed Odeh Rehaief. The 32-year-old lawyer is said to have tipped the military as to Lynch's whereabouts. He and his wife were swiftly granted political asylum in the United States. Rehaief helped NBC with its unauthorized TV movie about the rescue, and wrote a book for Harper Collins (Priest, Booth, and Schmidt 2003). Lynch declined overtures made by NBC to cooperate with the film, but later signed a deal with publisher Alfred A. Knopf that would see her share a reported $1-million advance with former *New York Times* writer Rick Bragg.

All the reports about Lynch's homecoming produced by major U.S. news broadcasters failed to mention the controversy over her story. However, during her statement, Lynch did make a cryptic comment connected to the media controversy. "I've read thousands of stories that said when I was captured I said, 'I'm an American soldier, too.' Those stories were right. Those were my words. I am an American soldier, too." With these comments, Lynch's carefully crafted statement provided a testimonial as to the veracity of her story, without making specific claims that could be proven factually incorrect. It testified to the truth of her story at the level of myth. Significantly, controversy over whether the Pentagon manipulated the news media in order to construct a convenient war-time hero was not considered to be a problem by locals gathered to view the parade. "Every war needs a hero," 77-year-old James Roberts told the *Washington Post*. "Rickenbacker...Kennedy...she's the hero in this war. The facts don't particularly matter" (Whoriskey 2003). The view was shared by others. "No matter what happened, she deserves every good thing she can get," said a local restauranteur. "We just love her" (Dao 2003).

These neighbors were concerned with phatic communication, not factually accurate reporting. The power of the "Saving Private Lynch" drama is connected to how it is used by people to reinterpret everyday social reality and strengthen social relationships. The myth of "Saving Private Lynch" had "existential utility," that was historically situated, and structured in domination.

To Lynch's credit, she eventually cast doubt on her status as a mythic hero during an interview on the ABC News program *Primetime*. The Pentagon "used me as a way to symbolize all this stuff," Lynch told host Diane Sawyer. "I mean, yeah, it's wrong … I don't know what they had … or why they filmed it" (ABC News 2003). The interview was broadcast November 11, Veterans' Day, to coincide with the launch of her co-authored book – *I am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story*.

**Final Comments**

The invasion of Iraq was sold to America, and the rest of the world, "as a public good" (Rutherford 2004: 99) with the aid of a willing media. Reporters and editors were not in collusion with the White House and Pentagon to dupe the public. Such a conspiracy was unnecessary and undesirable. The successful U.S. and British propaganda made deft use of dramatic storytelling techniques that were tailor made for the 24-hour news environment. News media organizations worked to promote the Bush administration's plans to invade Iraq not because they were pressured by the White House (unilateral reporters notwithstanding), but because the media and military shared converged interests. The legitimate fear felt by members of the American public following the terror attacks of September 11 was leveraged by the administration in order to win public approval for a unilateral invasion of Iraq. "What is worrisome," argue Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay and Evan Lewis, "is that it appears that the President has the capacity to lead members of the public to assume false beliefs in support of his position" (Kull et al. 2004: 596). Instead of acting as watchdogs of power, it appears the media became symbiotic collaborators.

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1. The report is available online at <www.newamericancentury.org>.

2. David Armstrong (2002) argues that Dick Cheney had been developing plans for U.S. domination of the Persian Gulf region as far back as 1992 when he authored the Defense Planning Guidance, a draft paper in which the Bush administration's unilateral foreign policy was first fleshed out.

3. Chalabi eventually fell out of favor with the White House. In May 2004 his home was raided by Iraqi police and American troops looking for evidence of criminal activity by members of his Iraqi National Congress. He also faced allegations that he disclosed secret information to Iran's intelligence service.

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