

READY . . . READY . . . DROP!

A Content Analysis of Coalition Leaflets Used in the Iraq War

Andrew M. Clark and Thomas B. Christie

Abstract / This content analysis of coalition leaflets dropped in Iraq during the recent war is viewed through a framework developed to analyze government international communication efforts to affect international public opinion and policy support. Under the framework, such messages have three main functions: survival, countering disinformation and facilitative communication. The study's hypothesis that most leaflets would have 'survival' messages is supported. Such messages have the strongest potential to influence public opinion, based on the positive effects of limiting casualties and ensuring economic survival. Messages countering disinformation address enemy propaganda, and messages used for facilitative communication create a friendly atmosphere. The study also analyzed intended audiences and categorized specific leaflet messages. The study is useful in understanding the nature and effectiveness of government efforts to influence public opinion during times of crisis or war.

Keywords / Iraq / leaflets / psychological operations / public opinion

An important part of any military campaign is not only winning on the battlefield, but winning the battle of public opinion, be it at home or abroad. The public opinion war is especially important when that battlefield is in the Middle East, a region with historically hostile attitudes toward outsiders, particularly those whose motives and actions may not be trusted.

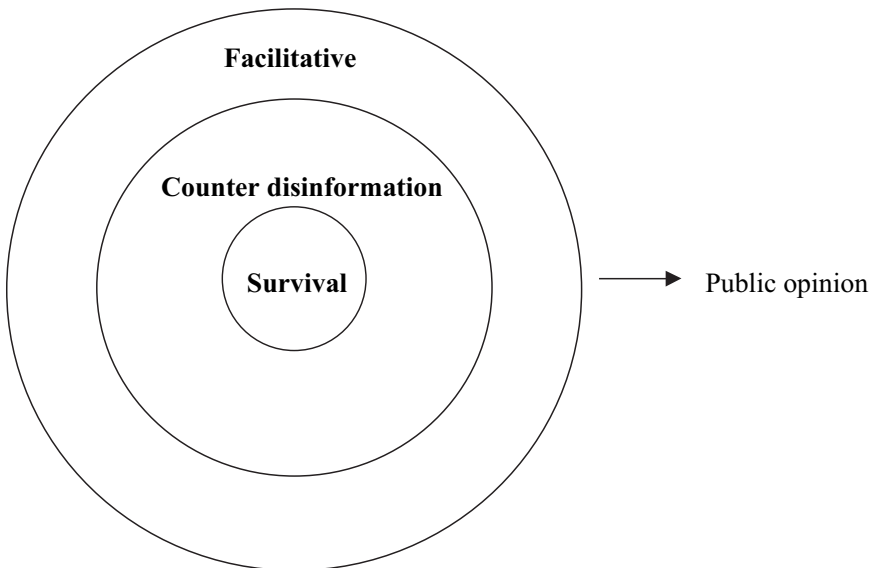
When the US began to make moves to enter Iraq it was necessary to ensure the military and civilian populations of that country be warned that the US would follow through on promises to attack certain military targets. Realizing the importance of communicating with the people of Iraq, messages and media systems were developed to assure the general population that they would not be targeted, and that important historical and religious sites would not be harmed. Targeting Iraqis with these messages was necessary because of the need to portray the US and its allies in a favorable light. Beginning with initial efforts to establish trust and credibility, the battle to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people and the world began long before the first shot was fired.

Traditionally, such messages have been delivered by radio, television and even satellite. However, in crisis situations other methods of communication have also been used to reach important target audiences. Specifically, during the Second World War (Herz, 1949; Schmulowitz and Luckman, 1945-6), in the first Gulf War and in the recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US

Air Force has conducted leaflet drops targeting both civilians and military personnel. The drops were part of a larger psychological operations effort considered by the US government to be effective (O'Rourke, 2003). The primary objectives of the psychological operations effort in Iraq were to convince the population that the war was against the government, not the people; to persuade the Iraqi military to surrender; and to stop any planned use of weapons of mass destruction or oil field sabotage (O'Rourke, 2003).

This article examines the content of the leaflets dropped over Iraq before the war and immediately following the initial invasion. The leaflets were designed by the Fourth Psychological Operations (PsyOps) groups in Ft Bragg, North Carolina. The content analysis was conducted within the context of a framework (see Figure 1) developed to analyze US international communication efforts affecting international public opinion and support of US policies abroad, flowing from the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. The framework assumes that, in general, international communication efforts will fall relatively equally into the three categories presented, deliberately considering the audience in mass communication strategy. Before looking more closely at the framework and the results of the content analysis, it is necessary to understand some of the past research on public diplomacy and propaganda.

FIGURE 1
Framework for Use of International Mass Media as a Tool of Security



Facilitative: Promotion of ideology and image to the affected people or regions.

Counter disinformation: Transmission of key news events and policies (usually done to counter enemy propaganda) to the affected population.

Survival: Use of international mass media resources for basic protection and well being of the affected population.

Propaganda and Public Diplomacy

While the US government couches its international communication efforts in terms of public diplomacy, others may view it as little more than propaganda. Robert Stevenson (1994) in *Global Communication in the Twenty-First Century* notes that in many western countries propaganda has a 'pejorative connotative meaning' (Stevenson, 1994: 346). He says in some countries it may be translated as advertising or public relations, but usually the social meaning includes some element of deception. Stevenson says the negative framing of the word propaganda stems from two events:

The first was the Catholic church's 'Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith' – Congregatio de propaganda fide in Latin – established in 1622 to counter the Protestant Reformation. It led to the Inquisition, whose members were, to say the least, unsympathetic to independent minded skeptics such as Galileo. The second was Lenin's definition of propaganda as a legitimate function of the party media. From both sources, we get the idea that we ought to be alert for propaganda and suspicious of anyone who is out to win our hearts and minds. (Stevenson, 1994: 346)

According to Severin and Tankard (2001), Harold Lasswell's study, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, was one of the first attempts to define propaganda. Lasswell (1927: 9) defined propaganda as 'the control of opinion by significant symbols, or, to speak more concretely and less accurately, by stories, rumors, reports, pictures, and other forms of social communication'. Lasswell said that there were four major objectives of propaganda: 'To mobilize hatred against the enemy, to preserve the friendship of allies, to preserve the friendship and, if possible, to procure the cooperation of neutrals, and to demoralize the enemy' (Lasswell, 1927: 195).

About 10 years later, Lasswell (1937) refined his definition to read, 'Propaganda in the broadest sense is the technique of influencing human action by the manipulation of representations. These representations may take spoken, written, pictorial or musical form' (Lasswell, 1937: 521–2). Lasswell influenced communication research through his research into propaganda techniques that paved the way for theoretical thought about the general effects of mass communication, and about attitude change (Severin and Tankard, 2001). While Lasswell's work was not solely about international broadcasting, there are other authors who have focused on the relationship between international broadcasting and propaganda.

Lee (1945) notes that whether or not an act of communication is labeled propaganda or given some other term depends on the person describing the communication. If it is an idea the communicator supports, then the communicative act becomes a 'manipulative virtue word' (Lee, 1945: 127) such as education or science. However, if it is an idea they are opposed to it is given 'an evil label' (Lee, 1945: 127) of propaganda.

Martin (cited in Fischer and Merrill, 1976: 262) saw propaganda as a function of a government, defining it as 'a persuasive communicative act of a government directed at a foreign audience'. Martin believes that the most money is not spent by propagandists on propaganda, but on 'facilitative communication' (cited in Fischer and Merrill, 1976: 263). Facilitative communication

would constitute what many international radio stations engage in, including radio newscasts, press releases and artistic and cultural programs. This type of communication serves no other function than to create ‘a friendly atmosphere, or, as a psychologist might put it, a favorable affect’ (cited in Fischer and Merrill, 1976: 263). He believed that the majority of government-funded communication is not propaganda and that even if it was, governments would never label it propaganda because of the negative connotations associated with the word. Martin said he thought most governments engaged in international communication because they thought it was the thing to do not because it was necessarily effective.

In terms of international broadcasting, Rawnsley (1996: 8) writes that propaganda is ‘the attempt by the government of one state to influence another to act or think in ways which are conducive to the interests of the source by whatever means are considered appropriate’.

Stevenson (1994) says that in the study of governmental activities and a government’s effort to reach and influence people overseas, the term propaganda is seldom used. Instead, the favored term is public diplomacy. Stevenson notes that public diplomacy differs from other types of governmental communication, traditionally from an embassy to a foreign ministry, because it ‘represents the efforts of one *government* to influence the *people* of another country’ (Stevenson, 1994: 347). Stevenson writes that shortwave broadcasting falls under the domain of public diplomacy, but so do libraries, cultural centers, educational exchanges, publications distributed overseas and even ‘get acquainted tours of the homeland for VIPs’ (Stevenson, 1994: 347). In terms of size, he states that the US operates one of the largest public diplomacy programs in the world at an annual cost of about US\$1 billion.

In looking at how the audience perceives messages broadcast from one country to another, Washburn (1992) notes:

In cases where media audiences simply do not attend to the constructed nature of media accounts of politics, they are likely to label such accounts news. When they are more aware of their constructed nature, they are more likely to label such presentations editorials. When audiences understand media accounts of political phenomena as constructed explicitly to serve political goals, particularly goals they do not share, they are more likely to label such presentations propaganda.

According to Cole (1998: 622), propaganda can be examined through ‘the channels and techniques by which it is disseminated, by its objectives, and by means by which its objectives are delineated and achieved’. Cole says the most useful way to examine propaganda is by the ‘public or group activity’ it attempts to influence (Cole, 1998: 622).

Ellul (1973) says propaganda influences the political and social activities of groups and can be divided into two categories: political propaganda and social propaganda. Other types of propaganda fall under either political or social propaganda. Both political and social propaganda can be disseminated by either official or unofficial agencies. Cole (1998: 622) defines political propaganda as ‘selective and manipulative communication by governments, political parties, or pressure groups with a view to influencing the political

behavior or beliefs of the public'. Conversely, social propaganda is an attempt by 'organizations or institutions to influence the social behavior of the public' (Cole, 1998: 622). This includes human rights, civil rights, health, education and many other areas. Cole (1998) goes further than Ellul by subdividing propaganda into a number of other categories including ideological, military and war, diplomatic, cultural, ethnic, economic, public health and educational. He notes that propaganda does not necessarily have to be true or false and that scholars have argued, and continue to argue, the merits or lack thereof of propaganda.

International relations theorist E.H. Carr (1964) refers to propaganda as power over opinion. He notes that absolute power over opinion is limited because there needs to be some conformity with fact. Carr says Hitler condemned German propaganda during the First World War as futile because it portrayed the enemy as ridiculous and contemptible; something the German soldiers in the trenches discovered was untrue. Carr says education promotes 'a spirit of independent inquiry' which is one of the strongest antidotes against propaganda (Carr, 1964: 144). Carr also believed that because of 'the inherent utopianism of human nature' propaganda is not always effective (Carr, 1964: 145). He writes:

It is a basic fact about human nature that human beings do in the long run reject the doctrine that might makes right. Oppression sometimes has the effect of strengthening the will, and sharpening the intelligence, of its victims, so that it is not universally or absolutely true that a privileged group can control opinion at the expense of the unprivileged. (Carr, 1964: 145)

McQuail (2003: 446) says that the term propaganda can be applied to any issues where there is strong belief and that propaganda differs from 'simple persuasion attempts'. McQuail (2003) writes that propaganda

. . . is often coercive and aggressive in manner; it is not objective and has little regard for the truth, even if it is not necessarily false. It comes in a range of types from 'black' (deceptive, frightening and unscrupulous) to 'white' (soft and with selective use of the truth). Finally, it is always carried out to further some interest of the propagandist, not the target audience. (McQuail, 2003: 446)

Whether the communication efforts of the US and other countries are propaganda or not, one thing is clear: such efforts have been very important in the past and for the US are still a very important part of foreign policy. US international communication efforts in a crisis situation such as war cannot be viewed as simply attempts to influence political behavior or beliefs. This study notes that these efforts serve at least one of three functions: survival, countering disinformation and facilitative communication. Depending on the audience and the communication tool used, some efforts may fulfill several functions. Thus, the US efforts to reach audiences abroad are multifaceted, attempting to reach people on many different levels through different types of media. Kenneth Tomlinson, chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors and former head of Voice of America, believes choosing which technology to use, and the type of programming, varies depending on the target audience. Tomlinson (2003) says,

... we need to choose carefully the combination of these various technologies to ensure that we effectively reach every one of our target audiences. In making that choice, we need to remember that one size does not fit all. In some markets, we will need one kind of programming and in others a very different kind. Moreover, in some places, we will be best able to reach our audience via television, in others via the Internet, and in still others via radio either short or medium wave.

Of course it is one thing to realize that reaching different audiences warrants the use of different technology; it is another thing to understand the audience well enough so that the use of that technology is effective and the audience receives the intended message.

The next section of the article explains in greater detail the theoretical underpinnings behind the categories of the framework used in the content analysis.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Such deliberate considerations of both the audience and communications media are linked to the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion and more generalized theories of audience reach and impact (e.g. Claes, 1968). The elaboration likelihood model notes that either the message or situation can result in persuasion. Under this model, the audience may sometimes be guided by a 'peripheral route', when there is little elaboration of the message itself. This route is chosen when there is a lack of issue-related thinking and when a decision can be simply based on reward or punishment (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). In the case of an urgent message appearing on a leaflet, the audience would simply realize an appropriate guiding principle (i.e. the need to survive), and make a decision on the persuasive message based on this principle. In a similar vein, McQuail (2003: 447) notes that acceptance of, or belief in, a propagandistic message depends on the absence of alternative objective information, the plausibility of content in light of available information and on reaching the audience in a manner consistent with the emotional and ideological climate. In the case of the leaflets, it is important that the message fulfill particular needs of the audience in wartime for persuasion to occur.

Survival

Under the elaboration likelihood model, the audience may be most likely persuaded when an appropriate guiding principle, in this case the need to survive, is realized. The survival function of the framework comes to the fore most often when the US is at war. Survival messages take the form of telling troops how to surrender, or telling civilians to stay away from military targets.

The survival function of the framework is illustrated by the US Air Force broadcasts from an airborne radio-television platform called Commando Solo II. Programming on these broadcasts is often designed to promote the well-being and basic protection of civilians and to provide instructions as to how 'enemy' troops may surrender to US forces and survive. Most recently, this has been used in Afghanistan and Iraq. In recent conflicts, such programming is

usually controlled by the Department of Defense; however, programming featuring leadership statements from the Department of State and even the US president is not unusual (Department of State, 1999).

According to transcripts from the Pentagon, the content of the information messages included messages to the Taliban such as ‘You will be attacked by land, sea, and air’ and ‘resistance is futile’ (Nolte, 2001: A10). Also broadcast from the plane were messages to ordinary residents warning them to ‘stay away from military installations, government buildings, terrorist camps, roads, factories or bridges’ (Garamone, 2001) and reassuring civilians that the US had no wish to hurt them. In addition to basic survival messages, other communication efforts are designed to counter enemy propaganda.

Countering Disinformation

Countering disinformation is a softer approach than the survival function and is used in times of crisis or in times of peace to get the US message out in the face of adversarial messages and propaganda from the other side. This function is particularly useful when enemy broadcast facilities continue to operate and provide disinformation. There are examples where the US uses mass media to counter information from other sources. According to the Broadcasting Board of Governors chairman, Kenneth Tomlinson, Voice of America, RFE/RL, Radio Marti and other such services can succeed simply by telling the truth. Tomlinson (2003: 2) sums up the philosophy behind US international broadcasting efforts by saying:

Success for America’s international broadcasting combines two essential ingredients: trust earned by accurate reporting – which is critical to a democratic people’s ability to make informed decisions. And a free open channel to the other ideas that are at the center of this nation’s being. We are a nation built on ideas. Our international broadcasting must always reflect, examine, question and illuminate these ideas. Truth about the events we report is as critical to our mission as explaining to our audience why we value the truth.

The third part of the framework analyzing US international communication efforts affecting international public opinion is facilitative communication.

Facilitative Communication

This is a softer approach than the survival function or countering disinformation. Facilitative communication constitutes what many international radio stations engage in including radio newscasts, press releases and artistic and cultural programs. This type of communication serves no other function than creating a friendly atmosphere. As Senator Richard Lugar (2003: 1–2), chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, notes in talking about public diplomacy efforts:

. . . we must resist the temptation to believe that public relations wizardry alone can fix the American image overseas. Successful public diplomacy is not about manipulating people into

liking us against their interests. Rather, it is about clearly and honestly explaining the views of the United States, displaying the humanity and generosity of our people, underscoring issues of commonality, and expanding opportunities for interaction between Americans and foreign peoples.

There are some new initiatives being postulated to help facilitate a more positive view of the US in the Middle East in particular while at the same time benefiting the audience. Such ideas include a Sesame Street program for children, an Arabic-language television channel and an Arabic-language magazine (Beers, 2003).

Radio Sawa is a good example of facilitative communication. The station began broadcasting in March 2001 and targets that valued under-25 demographic. It is available via medium wave in Egypt, Iraq and the Gulf region. The station is broadcasting in FM in Amman, Kuwait, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha. It is also available on digital satellite 24 hours a day, seven days a week (Radio Sawa, 2003). According to Kenneth Tomlinson, news is an important part of what Radio Sawa does:

Radio Sawa news is twice an hour [a full newscast is up to 10 minutes] provides Arabic listeners the kind of comprehensive, balanced and up-to-the-minute news this audience needs to make informed decisions. In addition, Radio Sawa broadcasts many other substantive programs including: 'Ask the World Now', where statements of top US policymakers are used to answer questions from listeners; 'The View from Washington', where a daily summary of major US policy statements on Iraq; and 'The Free Zone', which addresses broader topics such as democracy building, and human rights with special emphasis on women's rights. All of these programs are intended to fulfill Sawa's motto: 'You listen to us; we listen to you'. (Tomlinson, 2003: 3-4)

The US public diplomacy efforts are among the largest in the world, however Senator Lugar (2003) believes the amount of money being spent is not enough. He says:

The public diplomacy budget includes funding for a wide array of activities, including State Department information programs, international academic and cultural exchange programs, and the US government's broadcasting initiatives. Yet the aggregate amount that we devote to communicating the American vision to the rest of the world – about \$1.2 billion – is less than half of what some individual American companies, such as the Ford Motor Company or the Pepsi Corporation, spend on advertising each year. (Lugar, 2003: 2)

As stated earlier, although radio, television and satellite are the favored means of reaching large audiences, sometimes other 'more primitive' methods are also effective in reaching certain populations. Such was the case during the war in Iraq when between October 2002 and March 2003 36 million leaflets with 60 varieties of messages were dropped over regions of Iraq by the US Air Force. As an example, on 21 March 2003, over 2 million leaflets dropped in Iraq, with over 1 million dropped on Iraqi military forces, and the rest dropped on civilian areas (The Information Warfare Site, 2003). A news release from US Central Command on 28 November 2002 stated that 360,000 leaflets were dropped between Al Kut and Al Basrah, approximately 100–50 miles southeast of Baghdad in southern Iraq. Three separate leaflets were combined in this

mission – two urging the Iraqi military not to repair communications facilities and a third stating that coalition aircraft would enforce the no-fly zones. The 3×6 -inch leaflets were dropped by six fiberglass canisters each containing about 60,000 leaflets. The canisters opened over the targeted areas, releasing the leaflets that then drifted to the ground. Other location drops included areas near the cities of Tallil, As Samawah, Al Amarah and Ar Rumaythah (Centcom, 2002).

A content analysis of the leaflets was conducted examining the type of message contained on the leaflets and the intended audience to test the study hypothesis that most messages on the leaflets dropped over Iraq were messages of survival. The hypothesis guiding this research is that because of the urgent international communications requirements during wartime and the guiding principle of survival realized by the audience, the majority of messages on the leaflets dropped over Iraq would be messages of survival, targeting either the military or civilians (see sample leaflet in Figure 2). This hypothesis is based on understanding the audience situation and guiding principles, drawn from the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion.

Two basic research questions were also developed in order to understand more fully the use of persuasive messages and audiences used in the Iraqi campaign:

1. What percentages of leaflet messages were targeted to Iraqi civilians, military or both?
2. What were the specific content categories of messages in the leaflets?

Method

A content analysis of the 60 types of leaflets made available through public sources (primarily through US Central Command) was conducted. These leaflets were dropped from 28 November 2002 to 4 April 2003. Color photographs of the leaflets (front and back) were printed and put in a binder for use in the analysis by the coders. Coders were instructed to categorize each side of the leaflet in terms of the public diplomacy message framework: survival, counter disinformation or facilitative communication. Coders were instructed to enter only one code that best described the content category of the message.

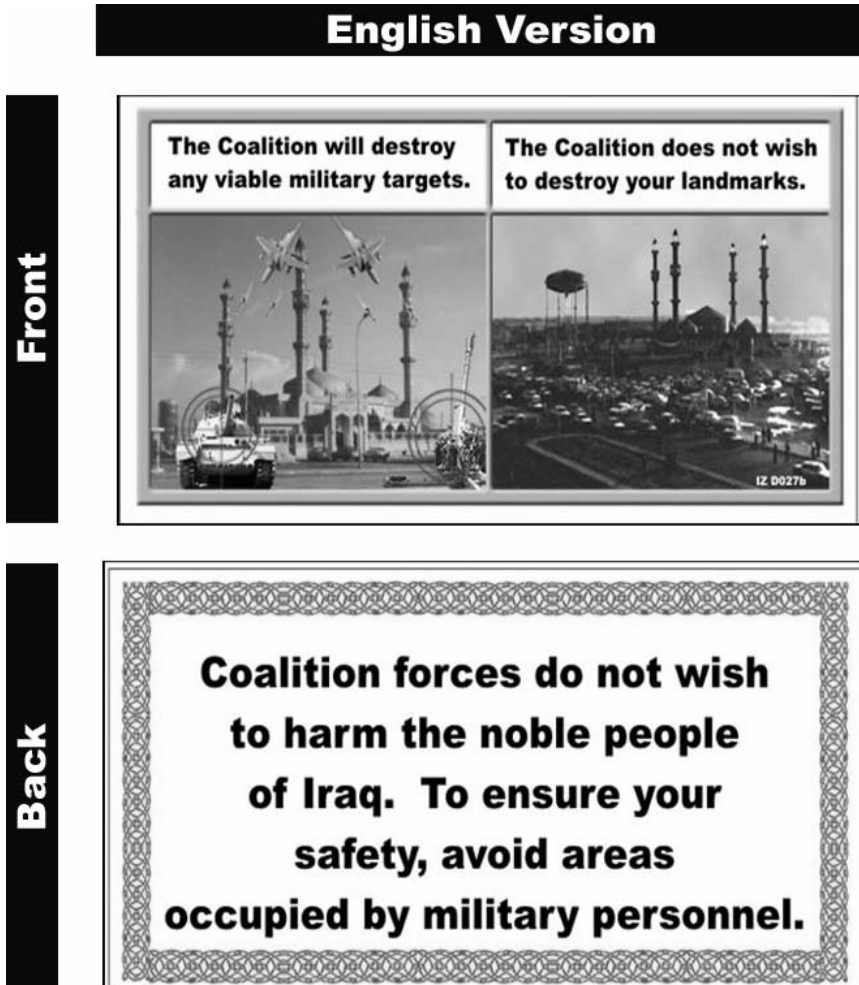
The ‘survival’ code was defined as content that dealt with economic, military or civilian survival. This category included any messages promoting the well-being and protection of civilians, instructions on how enemy troops could surrender, and how the Iraqi people could assist coalition forces.

The ‘counter disinformation’ code was used to categorize content not needed for personal, economic or military survival but needed to get the coalition messages out in the face of probable propaganda from the enemy. This categorization included messages discrediting the source of such propaganda – primarily the Iraqi leadership.

The ‘facilitative’ code was used to categorize content that sought to create an atmosphere friendly to the US government, promote US ideology (freedom,

FIGURE 2

English Version of Coalition Leaflet



capitalism and noble intentions), to explain the views of the US and to portray US military power and capabilities. This code was not used to categorize messages specifically intended to address disinformation.

Two other categories were selected for coding – the intended audience of the leaflet (Iraqi military, Iraqi civilian, or both) and the specific leaflet message. Coders were asked to assess the probable audience by evaluating the written and visual content of the message. A ‘military’ code was entered when the leaflet’s primary message was directed at an Iraqi military audience. Leaflets including visual images of Iraqi military uniforms or military hardware, as well as messages of surrender procedures, were visual cues for this code. A ‘civilian’ code was used for messages including those advising Iraqis to stay away from

military targets. A 'both military and civilian' code was used when the message appeared to be directed to both audiences.

Researchers provided the coders with 11 predefined subject categories for the messages, including messages of civilian and civilian area protection, liberation, oil and/or economy, and weapons of mass destruction.

Two coders (not including a researcher) were used for this analysis. A training session was conducted, providing the coders with a code book and necessary procedural instructions. After completing training and a trial coding process, the 11 predefined subject categories for the messages were collapsed into eight choices: civilian or civilian area protection, communication information, surrender-consequences of military action, help coalition pilots, Iraqi regime leaders, liberation, oil and economy and weapons of mass destruction.

Intercoder agreement of model categories was .91, using the Kappa method of agreement. The coding agreement for the intended audience was .97, and agreement for the eight-subject category was .90. Upon completion of coding, all data were entered into SPSS for Windows 10.1.

Results

Of the 60 leaflets examined (front and back), two messages/visual images had not been released, resulting in 58 leaflets available for coding. A small percentage of the messages (12.4 percent) contained only a list of coalition radio frequencies for Iraqis to hear broadcast information. As this communication information had no other message content, these messages were considered as missing data when testing the study hypothesis. Of the leaflet messages, 79.8 percent ($N = 79$) contained a survival message, with the remaining messages assigned to categories of counter disinformation and facilitative communication. As shown in Table 1, the clear majority of messages fell into the 'survival' function of the model, and as significant differences in these categories were found, the study hypothesis is supported ($\chi^2 = 96.242$; $p = .000$).

Approximately half of the leaflets ($N = 56$) specifically targeted Iraqi military audiences. Only 21 percent ($N = 24$) were geared specifically to Iraqi civilians, and the remaining messages targeted both civilian and military audiences.

TABLE 1

Model Categories

	<i>N</i>	Percent
Survival	79	79.8
Counter disinformation	11	11.1
Facilitative	9	9.1
Total	99	100.0

$$\chi^2 \text{ (d.f. = 2, } N = 99) = 96.242, p = .000$$

TABLE 2

Message Content of Leaflets

	<i>N</i>	Percent
Civilian or civilian area protection	22	19.5
Communication information	13	11.5
Surrender-consequences of military action	47	41.6
Help coalition pilots	2	1.8
Iraqi regime leaders	11	9.7
Liberation	5	4.4
Oil and economy	6	5.3
Weapons of mass destruction	7	6.2
Total	113	100.0

There were a variety of messages found in the leaflets (Table 2). The most common message ($N = 47$, 41.6 percent) urged Iraqi troops not to take military action, or to abandon weapons and surrender. The second highest number of leaflets ($N = 22$, 19.5 percent) urged civilians to avoid military areas and operations. Other messages included not using weapons of mass destruction and discrediting Iraqi regime leaders.

Conclusion

The dropping of leaflets over an enemy's country during wartime is usually viewed in terms of one of the basic definitions of propaganda reviewed by this study. Even though these leaflets contain messages designed to influence political behavior or beliefs, this study shows that they also promote actions geared towards basic physical or economic survival. In general, these operations were viewed by the US government to be effective, resulting in large-scale military surrenders, more positive civilian attitudes toward the coalition and unexecuted orders to sabotage oilfields (O'Rourke, 2003).

The study supports the hypothesis that most messages of the leaflets dropped during the recent Iraq War were of a survival nature, according to the framework advanced by the authors. As this survival function should not be dismissed as simply another effort to intimidate the enemy or change the political beliefs of the affected population, this key finding illustrates the need to expand the study of such international communication efforts designed to affect public opinion. From this study, it is clear that the survival function is an integral part of the US international communications program.

The framework advanced by this study was originally designed to examine international broadcasting activities by the US government – however, this study also validates the utility of the framework in examining international communication efforts outside broadcasting activities. Leaflets and other forms of mass communication could use this framework to evaluate international communication efforts.

Finally, results of this study will be useful in analyzing the overall nature and effectiveness of a nation's efforts to influence public opinion during times of crisis and war.

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