



# Media Coverage of the Iraq War: A Critical and Retrospective Analysis

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the role and impact of mainstream Western news coverage and government speeches of the Iraq War on public perception and opinion. It does so by analysing articles, speeches and news coverage from the period leading up to the war, as well as during and after the war. The aforementioned media is analysed using two sets of theoretical frameworks: the first comprising Edward Said's Orientalism and Noam Chomsky's Manufacturing Consent, while the second applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to ground language in socio-political contexts. The intentional and calculated vocabulary and language contribute significantly to the Western audience's perspective which paved the way for decisions in favor of military action against Iraq. In this respect, this study contributes to a growing canon of Social Science research which applies critical discourse theory to historical events. It also highlights the role of mainstream media and its responsibilities in terms of transparent journalism. While existing research has analysed media bias and political rhetoric surrounding the Iraq war, this study contributes to a focused analysis on how language and framing in Western media and government discourse shape public consent, something omitted from existing scholarship. This paper highlights the role of linguistic framing in legitimizing war through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Manufacturing Consent and Orientalism. This study is needed to better understand and interpret how the public can be swayed and the responsibility of mainstream media in times of conflict.

*Keywords: journalism, media transparency, critical discourse analysis, military action, manufacturing consent, Middle East*

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## I. Introduction

The Iraq war was a major political event in which the media government had a big influence on public perception and opinion. It began in March 2003 and lasted officially until December 2011. The U.S.-led invasion was launched under President George W. Bush. Many false narratives were publicised and this impacted opinions of the war at the time, which allowed governments to garner support for causes that were not truly justified. This, in turn, impacted thousands of lives and is impacting Iraq to this day.

This paper will analyse, using CDA, how government speeches, news articles and media play a role in influencing public behavior and perception and highlight the deep-rooted fallacies and misconceptions in Iraq war coverage. It will do this through analysis of both historical wartime and retrospective contemporary articles and speeches. By using the frameworks of theorists such as Edward Said, Noam Chomsky, Teun Van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, Norman Fairclough - it will

contribute to the academic canon. It will allow for reflections on transparency, media bias, orientalism, and other related concepts. Further, by using a variety of sources, it will highlight the role of a retrospective lens on media in shaping our understanding of past events and narratives.

## II. Literature Review

In the past, in order to effectively interpret and examine news at the time, as well as in the present, academic analyses of media coverage surrounding the Iraq war generally applied van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. CDA is a research approach that examines how language is used to construct, maintain and legitimize power and ideology by analysing text in their broader social and political contexts. For instance, "Bias in CNN news about Iraq in Media Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis" a paper written by Ameer Ali Hussein, uses CDA to specifically dissect CNN news coverage of the war. Hussien highlights the prominent bias, its causes and their consequences. He details how framing and bias portrayed in media, specifically CNN news coverage, impacts and shapes the audience's beliefs. Similarly, in this paper, various elements of government and media coverage will be analysed for bias.

Edward Said's theory of Orientalism is also prevalent in modern academic research concerning the Iraq war. His idea emphasizes public biases toward regions such as the Middle East and how that is portrayed in the media. Research papers such as "How the media frames our understanding of war through biases and representation." by Vira Dranhoi uses orientalism to explain the partiality of some beliefs in the West about the Middle East. This paper also uses Robert Entman's Framing Theory, which explains how the media and political figures frame issues to influence public belief and perception. His theory states that by highlighting and omitting certain aspects of reality, the media can shape interpretation, perception and responsibility. His theory explains change and trends in public opinion surrounding the Iraq war, connecting to many themes of this paper.

Lastly, Noam Chomsky's and Edward S. Herman's Manufacturing Consent perfectly captures the process in which biases and partiality develop in the media, framing the public to think a certain way. For example, Robert W. McChesney's paper, "telling the truth in a moment of truth: US media and the invasion and occupation of Iraq" uses the propaganda model to suggest that the United States government has consistently relied on media structures that facilitate public support for policy agendas since the Spanish-American war in 1898. He states that the news and media were placed in a recurring dilemma in many such instances.

This paper enters this complex conversation on Iraq war coverage by providing an insight into both retrospective and concurrent media (including articles and speeches). These sources were most accessible to the public at the time and were a main source of communicating developments and information, adding to their influence. By using the CDA framework, it addresses gaps within existing research and opens up new avenues for future academic work. Examples of these gaps are omissions of government responsibility in analysis; the CDA framework addresses subtle linguistic techniques and choices that sway viewers' opinions and perspectives, however other analysis doesn't recognize the importance of verbal and rhetorical tools. Omissions consist of avoiding or misplacing responsibility or exaggerating responsibility of Iraq, and most prevalently misusing and publicizing false evidence and claims to support political narratives. Moreover, the propaganda model acknowledges government involvement as the main source of information acquired by news publications.

## III. Theoretical Framework

Edward Said and Noam Chomsky's theories form the methodological basis of this paper due to their focus on geopolitical structures and the interplay of media and power. In addition, given the journalistic data covered in the pages that follow,

their work is very applicable to news coverage surrounding the Iraq war and how it shaped public opinion.

Orientalism is a concept introduced by Edward Said in his 1978 book *Orientalism* and it refers to the way Western societies have historically represented the “East”, meaning the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa, as backward, irrational, and uncivilized, in contrast to the rational, modern, and “superior” West (Said 1978). These portrayals served to justify Western actions such as military interventions and political control by framing Eastern societies as needing Western guidance or help. In this sense, Orientalism reinforces power imbalances by defining the East through a Western lens and is prominent in media today.

In fact, Orientalist narratives still shape news coverage, entertainment, and public opinion, especially when it comes to portrayals of the Middle East. News publications primarily portray Middle Eastern countries through a lens of war, terrorism, or religious extremism, while Western involvement is framed as “freeing” or “rescuing”. This is evident in Bush’s State of the Union Address which he delivered in January of 2002. He stated that the US “saved a people from starvation, and freed a country from brutal oppression”. These descriptions influence how the public perceives the Middle Eastern as a region and helps form stereotypes and prejudices in order to maintain the image of Western countries as “saviours” or as “superior”. These subtle actions to maintain power make it easier for governments and political figures to gain support when discussing foreign policy measures in the region.

Further to Orientalism, Manufacturing Consent and the propaganda model is a key methodological foundation of this paper that ties in well with Orientalism. The propaganda model is a theory proposed by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in their 1988 book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. It refers to the process by which mass media and large corporations are able to shape public opinion to fuel the interests of those in power. Rather than forcing compliance, by controlling the narrative, information and framing, the media is able to subtly “manufacture” agreements such that it benefits those in power.

Chomsky and Herman constructed a propaganda model that demonstrated and explained how information is tampered by using 5 “filters”. The first factor is ownership, as media outlets are often controlled by large corporations or wealthy elites and influenced by the government; consequently, the information published is often manipulated to reflect the interests of powerful actors. Second is advertising, by publishing their advertisers interests, news outlets will gain more revenue, influencing the information they choose to put out. Moreover, news outlets get the majority of their information from government sources which may already be inaccurate, false or biased. The fourth filter is flak, meaning that media publications won’t release information or perspectives that could receive a lot of backlash or strong criticism to maintain support. Last is ideological influence: stories can be framed to support dominant ideologies in society or that of the news corporation itself.

This theory appears consistently in research that focuses on how western media shapes views on the Middle East as it is apparent in contemporary new publications and society. Rather than resulting from overt manipulation, such patterns are often understood as emerging from structural power relations and institutional biases that influence how news is produced, framed, and circulated, thereby contributing to partial representations and, in some cases, the formation of public opinion based on incomplete or misleading information. Throughout the paper, these theories are applicable considering the scope, geographical focus, and historical power struggles between the nations covered.

This paper uses sources mainly from Western media outlets, and thus its scope is restricted to audiences from those regions. The focus on these outlets, however, forms the argument for this paper and allows for deeper analysis given the

topics chosen. While the findings cannot be generalized beyond this context, they provide a foundation for future research that could expand the scope to include a broader range of media and audiences.

#### **IV. Critical Discourse Analysis: An Introduction**

Critical Discourse Analysis is a framework studying how language is used to create, maintain, or challenge power in society. Through this lens, language is viewed as a social practice that both reflects and shapes public belief and perception. Norman Fairclough highlighted this through his three-dimensional model of text, discourse, and social practice (Fairclough 1989; 1992). In his seminal work, “Language and Power”, he argues that everyday language can promote agendas and ideologies to which readers are unaware.

Furthermore, Teun van Dijk focused on how people in power use discourse to influence public thinking (van Dijk (1991; 2000)). Moreover, Ruth Wodak emphasized history and context in her approach and the role the past has to play in contemporary discourse and language. Together, these theorists established Critical Discourse Analysis as a way to reveal unseen ideologies and agendas used in day to day language.

CDA is relevant to this current discussion because before, during and after the Iraq war, media publications and the US and UK government were working to garner the public's support for Iraq's invasion despite the main reasons being based on false claims. This aligns well with Fairclough's idea of language being a “social practice” and Van Dijk's idea that it influences public perception. Ruth Wodak's emphasis on language in a historical context is also reflected in Iraq war media with language being a key aspect of persuasion. Thai refers to how discourse draws on past events, shared experiences and common historical narrative to support and legitimise present political actions as well as public understanding.

Applying this framework to media coverage brought many frequently used terms and practices to the surface. These terms are very relevant to this research and had a lot of impact on public perception. Firstly, the term “weapons of mass destruction” was repeatedly used in the context of Iraqis, specifically by the government and news publications. It is a very loaded term that reflects fear and terror, appealing to the emotions of the viewer. This communicated urgency and severity to the viewer and assisted the governments in gaining support for the military invasion.

Furthermore, the introduction of embedded journalism played a key role in news coverage of the Iraq war, heavily impacting public perception. Embedded journalism was the practice of journalists going on site to report and gather information. This gave audiences direct viewing access to the battle field and, as per the Pew Research Center, about 94% of reports were completely factual and most accounts came directly from what reporters observed (Pew Research Center 2003). However, this had some drawbacks, as it lacked diverse perspectives and was limited to that of the US and British military. Moreover, 60% of reports were live and unedited, often rushed, which led to errors, confusion, and exaggeration.

The following paragraphs comprise critical discourse analysis of various articles and speeches, further showcasing the interplay of power, language, and social theory in Iraq War media coverage.

##### *4.1 “TV Goes to War”: An Article Analysis*

Nancy Franklin's "TV Goes to War" analyses how television coverage of the Iraq War often painted the conflict as something that felt more like entertainment than a serious crisis. She describes how dramatic visuals and comparisons to action or disaster films made the bombing seem like a spectacle, distracting the audience from the suffering it caused. Franklin also draws attention to the use of military terms like "embed" and "decapitation strike," which made the violence seem less personal (Franklin 2003). The Pentagon's embedding program, where reporters lived and travelled with soldiers, gave the public detailed, close-up accounts from the front lines, but also meant journalists were very limited to the military perspective. This close relationship sometimes blurred the line between reporting and supporting the military's message, leaving out important stories about civilians and the broader political context (Pew Research Center 2003; Berkeley News 2004). Franklin's message is that when the media gets too close to the institutions it is supposed to cover, it can shape public opinion in ways that show war and conflict in a light where it is more justified. At the micro level, words like "decapitation strike" depersonalize violence. At the meso level, embedding exemplifies the techniques that structure access and narrow coverage. At the macro level, these dynamics connect back to Edward Said's theory of Orientalism and Chomsky and Herman's concept of Manufacturing Consent, both of which explain how Western power structures dominate narratives of war and make intervention appear legitimate (Said 1978; Herman and Chomsky 1988; The Independent 2010).

#### 4.2 "The Bombing of Baghdad": An Article Analysis

In Jon Lee Anderson's "The Bombing of Baghdad" published in *The New Yorker*, the author challenges the limited stereotypes of Baghdad by reinforcing it as a lively city. He uses sensory detail and active verbs to describe life before and during conflict, such as "roosters crowing," "birds singing," or "a boulevard lined with watch shops and kebab restaurants and movie houses." This narrative juxtaposes the violence of war with the ordinariness of daily life, resisting the Orientalist tendency to portray Baghdad as simply chaotic or backward (Anderson 2003).

#### 4.3 "News Under Fire": An Article Analysis

In contrast, articles such as "News Under Fire" and coverage of "shock and awe" airstrikes often turned the war into a spectacle. Phrases like "adrenaline rush" and "shock and awe" carried connotations of excitement and fascination, sanitizing destruction by turning it into a visual showcase. Dramatic imagery, such as "bilious yellow" and "apocalyptic orange" to describe sandstorms, further contributed to the spectacle. Irony and tone also trivialized high-casualty events, with expressions like "Boy Scout Field Trip" mocking the seriousness of military operations. This coverage contradicted the intended purpose of embedding, which was to increase transparency. Instead, by exposing journalists only to the U.S. military's perspective, coverage sentimentalized American sacrifice while marginalizing Iraqi suffering. Television news portrayed war as chaotic, confusing, and emotionally charged rather than fact-based, undermining trust while keeping audiences hooked (Washington Post 2003).

#### 4.4 "War Ultimatum Speech": A Speech Analysis

In George W. Bush's "War Ultimatum Speech" (2002), various ideologies are emphasized through strategic language. By using phrases such as "honorable efforts," "good faith," and "peaceful" to describe U.S. involvement, Bush framed American actions as pure and justified. In contrast, Iraqis were described as "not peaceful men," "thugs and killers," and "lawless men who rule the country," framing them as aggressors (Bush 2002). These descriptions painted the U.S. as a victim and a savior, while delegitimizing Iraqi leadership. Bush further reinforced this framing by directly addressing Iraqis with promises such as "the day of your liberation is near" and "we will help you build a prosperous future," displacing the U.S.'s own motivations for invasion.

Bush also instilled fear by repeatedly invoking “weapons of mass destruction,” “apparatus of terror,” and “genocide,” terms that dramatized events and lent disproportionate urgency. The UN defines genocide as specific acts of killing, harming, or displacing a population with the intent to destroy it; applying this charge to Iraq exaggerated the threat and fueled public alarm (United Nations 2014). Statistics later showed the real outcome: over 210,090 Iraqi civilians killed since the invasion, contradicting Bush’s narrative of liberation (Al Jazeera 2023).

#### 4.5 “Address to the Peoples of Iraq”: A Speech Analysis

In the joint Bush and Blair speech “Address to the Peoples of Iraq,” the leaders presented themselves as liberators. Though the speech was subtitled in Arabic, its phrasing suggests it was also aimed at global audiences. Terms like “whose aggression and weapons of mass destruction make it a unique threat to the world” framed Hussein as a danger beyond Iraq, justifying intervention. Both leaders relied on anaphora—“we will”—to promise liberation, hope, and certainty, while Bush emphasized freedom: “free to build a better life,” “free to speak your mind,” “free to join in the political affairs of Iraq” (Bush and Blair 2003). Antithesis sharpened contrasts between Saddam’s regime and Western intentions. Harsh terms like “tyranny,” “brutal regime,” and “corrupt gang” portrayed Hussein as illegitimate, while metaphors like “nightmare” evoked imagery of terror. By claiming “Saddam gave us no choice,” Bush and Blair displaced responsibility, presenting the war as inevitable. This rhetorical framing aligns with van Dijk’s theory of how political discourse shapes public perception of social groups, reinforcing Western savior narratives while demonizing Iraqis (van Dijk 2009).

#### 4.6 A Speech Analysis: Colin Powell’s Address to the UN

In Colin Powell’s Address to the U.N Security Council, he employs many devices and persuasive strategies to convince his audience of the threat Iraq poses on the world. Firstly, his consistent use of rhetorical questions forces the audience to view the situation from his lens, making war seem to be the only logical choice. For instance, Powell challenges his audience when he questions “Should we take the risk that he will not some day use these weapons at a time and the place and in the manner of his choosing?” suggesting that by taking military action now, the world is avoiding a future of uncertainty and fear of when Saddam will strike. Another instance is when he questions the validity of Iraqi claims, “Could any member of this council honestly rise in defense of this false declaration?” By doing so, he leaves no room for dissent, subtly persuading the audience of his claims.

Moreover, Powell utilizes vivid imagery to portray Iraqis as violent and brutal. For instance, “An eyewitness saw prisoners tied down to beds, experiments conducted on them, blood oozing around the victim’s mouths and autopsies performed”, this detailed description helps frame Iraqis intentions as savage and barbaric. This is also seen when Powell references terrorist poison and explosive camps in Iraq, “Less than a pinch of ricin - imagine a pinch of salt-less than a pinch... Death comes within 72 hours and there is no antidote”. For context, ricin is a lethal poison often used for terrorist purposes. The repetition of the word “pinch” emphasizes how a small dose can be so lethal to humans. In his speech, Powell verbalizes how determined Hussein is to use his weapons of mass destruction, claiming he will use them “regardless of whether he has to put them in a warhead, or spray them, or disperse them in other ways.” This specific description of the manner in which Saddam might employ his weapons of mass destruction communicates the urgency this issue must be addressed with. These vivid descriptions instill fear in listeners, motivating efforts to invade Iraq.

Throughout his speech, Powell's use of metaphor and symbolism also assists in dramatising the situation. First, he likens the “discovery” of Iraq's WMD to “the tip of an iceberg” implying that there are many more threats to be uncovered. Moreover, he compares “Leaving Saddam Hussein in possession of weapons of mass destruction” to “leaving a loaded gun in the hands of a criminal” suggesting that his immediate intention is to harm and physically hurt people and that his

actions are uncontrolled. By comparing a political leader to a “criminal” makes the audience question his government or regime as a whole. These metaphors also work to create fear and uncertainty surrounding Iraq.

Powell uses antithesis and contrast to frame Iraq as duplicitous, illegitimizing their government and political actions. For instance, Powell uses a play on words to call out the Iraqis for “hiding” their weapons when he says “Call it ingenious or evil genius, but the Iraqis deliberately designed their chemical weapons programs to be inspected.” Powell contrasts “ingenious” with “evil genius” to make Iraq’s actions seem not just clever but purposely harmful, which makes the audience see the regime as deliberately dangerous rather than accidentally misleading. Moreover, Powell claims that they made their chemical weapons programme “to be inspected” suggesting that they were prepared to conceal their weaponry from the start. Furthermore, he states that “They are not just lying about the past, they are lying about the present.”, portraying Iraq and its intentions as cunning and duplicitous. This framing makes the audience lose trust in the Iraqi government and doubt their legitimacy.

Lastly, the consistent application of statistics to prove points adds credibility to the speech, gaining the audience's trust. For example, “100 to 500 tons of chemical weapons agents. That is enough agent to fill 16,000 battlefield rockets.” The comparison to “16,000 battlefield rockets” educates the audience of a very “real” threat they might be facing and be more convinced of its existence.

## **VI. Critical Discourse Analysis: Combined Insights**

Taken together, these articles and speeches reveal, through the application of the CDA framework, how discourse during the Iraq War framed U.S. actions as justified, necessary, and even benevolent, while marginalizing Iraqi voices and suffering. At the micro level, choices of words like “decapitation strike” and “weapons of mass destruction” depersonalized or exaggerated violence. At the meso level, embedding practices and journalistic framing techniques narrowed perspective and dramatized war as spectacle. At the macro level, these texts reinforced overarching theories of Orientalism and Manufacturing Consent. Said’s Orientalism explains how Iraqis were depicted as passive victims or irrational threats, while Herman and Chomsky’s Manufacturing Consent shows how state and media collaboration produced narratives that supported war. The alignment of political rhetoric and media spectacle ensured that public opinion was managed in ways that made U.S. intervention appear both necessary and righteous.

## **VII. Retrospective Analysis**

Before the Iraq war, US government statements were focussed on justifying reasons to wage war on Iraq. The US government accused Iraq of having “weapons of mass destruction” or WMDs and went to the UN with such claims, insisting on an investigation. During this time, Bush called Iran, North Korea and Iraq an “axis of evil” as per the United States National Archives and stated that Iraq was harbouring “the world's most dangerous weapons” (Bush 2002). In 2002, Joe Biden referred to the move to invade Iraq as a “march to peace and security”, however, according to The Washington Post in 2019, Biden claimed he opposed the war the “moment it started” (Viser 2019).

Soon after the war, when it became clear there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, apologies from government officials, new publications and all those who advocated for the Iraq war began to flood in. Bush, for instance, upon his departure from the White House in 2008 stated that “the biggest regret of my entire presidency is the intelligence failure in Iraq” (Bush 2008). However, despite admitting his guilt, he defended his decision and stance at the time, claiming “a lot of leaders of nations around the world were all looking at the same intelligence” (Bush 2008). Senator Hillary Clinton admitted in 2015 that she “made a mistake” when she voted to authorize the Iraq war (Clinton 2015). Senator Colin Powell expressed regrets after presenting flawed evidence to the UN, in his speech he stated that every statement he made

was “backed up by sources, solid sources”. However, 2 years later he referred to that speech as “a blot” on his record, calling it “painful” (Powell 2005). Many have gone on to say that it damaged the United States’ credibility in the UN to a “significant degree”, Richard Gowan, UN director at the International Crisis Group, said that he doesn't think “think that Washington’s credibility at the UN has never entirely recovered from the Iraq war and the false claims on WMDs” (Borger 2021).

The Guardian states that Powell was “exploited” and “misled” by the Bush White House. Powell was told his speech was written by the national security council, however it was actually prepared by Vice-President Dick Cheney’s office who had pressured the CIA to find or manufacture information that supported their claims (Borger 2021). Moreover, both the US and UK relied heavily on the claims of two Iraqi defectors, a chemical engineer by the name of Rafid Ahmed Alwan al-Janabi and Maj Muhammad Harith, an intelligence officer. They claimed they had first hand knowledge about the WMD programme in Iraq, as per BBC. However, they later admitted to tampering and fabricating evidence to support their agenda to oust Saddam Hussein from office (BBC 2011).

This is a prime example of manufacturing consent in the public because news publications and officials used selective government information to influence opinion. According to The Guardian, the CIA was manufacturing and altering evidence manipulation extended even to the Secretary of State who was provided with “flimsy” information to present at the UN, it is very likely that the public would grow to support the war against Iraq whilst consuming false information (Borger 2021). This demonstrates the 3rd filter in the propaganda model, sourcing. Depending on where information comes from, in this case government sources, the information can be tampered with to many Americans began to support the idea of invading Iraq given the information that was being released to the public. As per a Pew Research Center study done in 2023, significant majorities of Americans held the opinion that United States military intervention was justified given Iraq’s possession of WMDs and ties to terrorism. Specifically, 83% of respondents believed that Iraq’s alleged involvement in the 9/11 attacks warranted military action. Similarly, 77% considered the development of WMDs and 73% the harboring of terrorists as sufficient justification for US intervention in Iraq (Pew Research Center 2023). All of the information and evidence used as justification was later deemed false, “flimsy” and inaccurate (BBC 2011).

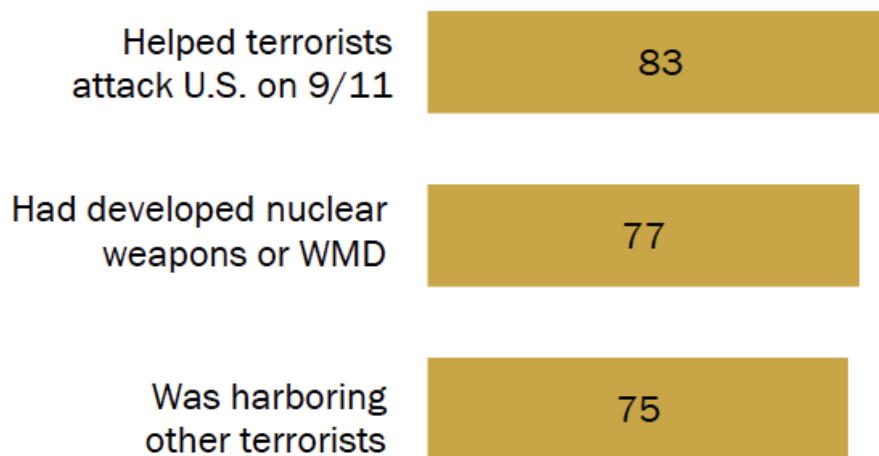
One might ask, how is it that American citizens were so accepting of questionable actions and information given by the US government? Firstly, many were still reeling from the recent 9/11 terrorist attacks which had occurred without the knowledge of the government. They were looking for someone to take responsibility, and that expectation was met. When Bush presented the public with allegations against Iraq, he “manufactured” agreement throughout the pursuit to convince the world of his claims (Bush 2002).

Furthermore, many major news publications began to release information supporting claims made against Iraq. For instance, Fox News, a major news publication in the US, took a pro Iraq war stance and “slanted” Iraq war news. CBS carried a pro-war segment called “Showdown with Saddam” (Kull 2003). Greg Dyke, the chief of BBC, claimed the broadcasters used a clear “pro-American bias” and that they were “outright patriotic” and heated up public opinion over the war. Dyke also criticized the largest radio group in the country, US Cable News Networking, for organizing “pro-war rallies” (Dyke 2004). In the UK, The Sun “staunchly” and “unquestioningly supported the Iraq war”, as per a report done by The Conversation (Cammaerts 2015). However, after Tony Blair issued an apology for going to Iraq based on false intelligence, The Sun “condemned” his duplicity. According to the same article, George Monbiot, a Guardian columnist, stated that even liberal newspapers such as The Independent and The Guardian published false or misleading information concerning the Iraq war. He goes on to say that some journalists were “admittedly unconvinced” of claims made by the government, yet unverified claims were still published (Cammaerts 2015).

All the information that was put out based on false information played a pivotal role in manufacturing consent and agreement in society in support of the Iraq war. This demonstrates how government narratives, amplified by orientalist narratives in mainstream media, can shape public perception to the point where even weak or fabricated evidence becomes accepted as truth. In turn, the propaganda model illustrates the dangerous consequences of uncritical sourcing and media complicity—policies with lasting global repercussions were legitimized through manipulation rather than fact.

## In 2002, large majorities of Americans said Iraqi WMD and links to terrorism would justify U.S. military response

*% who said that learning Iraq \_\_\_\_ would be a **very important reason** to justify use of military force against Iraq*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 9-13, 2002.

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### VIII. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, the media analysed shows how government discourse as well as major Western journalistic channels combine to shape public opinion and manufacture consent in favour of military action.

Firstly, the theoretical framework grounds this research in seminal frameworks such as Edward Said's orientalism and Noam Chomsky's "Manufacturing Consent." It also entered a conversation with academics working on news coverage of the Iraq war such as Norman Fairclough, Teun Van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak. Secondly, this paper analysed media published

at the time surrounding the Iraq war, such as government speeches and news coverage. To do so, it uses CDA to emphasize how language frames the audience's perspective and promotes a political agenda. It found that use of rhetorical devices in speeches and articles such as hyperbolic phrasing to evoke emotion and create narratives of violence, shapes public opinion. Thirdly, retrospective articles were surveyed based on the reliability and accuracy of information publicised by the government and mainstream news channels. It also touched on how the media exploited public sentiment to garner support and legitimize military action.

It is imperative that the tangible impacts of this partial discourse be recognized as such; these narratives condoned actions that led to mass civilian casualties and long-term instability. Along with this, it is important to recognise the risks of unchecked media and increased awareness among audiences to consume media responsibly and consciously. Media transparency and accurate fact-checking has been the need of the hour since long before the Iraq war, and continues to dominate discussions today. This could take new directions, such as youth surveys, a wider scope for journalistic analysis including Middle Eastern sources and ground-level perspectives.

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