

SOURCING THE COVERAGE IN THE INVASION OF IRAQ: A COMPARISON OF DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN NEWS

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ABSTRACT: *In the recent U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, serious questions have arisen over truth claims made to justify the war and the reporting of these claims in the media. These include allegations about weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq and possible links between Saddam Hussein's regime and terrorist groups like al Qaeda. Prior to the invasion of Iraq there was some debate over the legitimacy of these claims and subsequent information from Iraq reveals that there were a number of inadequacies. The paper examines the extent to which American newspapers and their counterparts in Canada, India and the United Kingdom accurately presented information on Iraq to their readers during the build-up to the invasion and the extent to which the selection of sources played a role in the reporting. A content analysis of the specific claims was performed on articles published during the period between 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq. Results were compared between American papers and their international counterparts, including a discussion of how the selection of sources influenced the discourse.*

Keywords: *Discourse, Content analysis, Mass media, Sources, Iraq*

INTRODUCTION

In the U.S., the function of the press to maintain an informed citizenry is something that has been held in the highest esteem. Perhaps no one captured that thought better than Thomas Jefferson, who wrote in a personal letter to his friend Edward Carrington, as quoted in McChesney (2004, p.29):

“The basis of our governments, being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate to prefer the latter.”

The role that Jefferson and others envisioned for the press was that of a Fourth Estate, a counterweight to the power of the church, nobility and government. However, the role of an independent press serving as a guardian of the public is one that has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years (e.g., Alger, 1998; Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney, 2004). With increasing concentration of ownership, decreasing number of perspectives, and increasing barriers for

entry into the market, serious questions about the mass media's control over information have arisen. Perhaps nowhere are these problems with mass media more acute than in the newspaper industry where massive consolidation has been taking place for decades. If one goes back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was not uncommon to find ten or more papers in a particular city. Of course, many of the newspapers in question were highly partisan, presenting the news from the perspective of a particular interest group, political party, etc. In order to quell fears in the general public about the impact of newspaper consolidation and counteract the growing anti-trust sentiments, the newspaper industry adopted the concept of professional journalism. Professional journalism attempted to introduce greater objectivity into newspaper reporting by being non-partisan and simply reporting on the facts. In theory, any two reporters using the standards of professional journalism would be able to write essentially the same story about an event, thus eliminating the need for multiple newspapers. But today many doubt the ability of the press to present the news objectively and provide the independent Fourth Estate to serve as a check on government (e.g., Cook, 1998; Bennett, 2007).

Perhaps nowhere has the objectivity of the American press come under greater scrutiny in recent

years than with respect to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Given the global importance of the event and the controversial nature of allegations made through the media, much has been written about the role of the press in the invasion. Members of the press have themselves begun to reflect on their involvement in the war effort (e.g., Rich, 2006; Ricks, 2006). Media and communication scholars have also looked critically at the role of the press in facilitating the rush to war (Bennett et al., 2007). Not surprisingly, geographers have also been examining the role of the press in geopolitics. Dalby's (2003) look at the ideological underpinnings of the U.S.-led invasion from a constructivist perspective details the rhetorical devices that were used by the Bush administration to craft an image of the invasion based on principles of self-sacrifice and anti-imperialism. Falah et al. (2006) took a different geographic approach, looking at how the U.S. was portrayed in political cartoons in the Arab language press. Our work seeks to build on these examinations by looking at the previously unexplored geographic theme of how location may have affected the reporting that took place and the types of sources that were used at the national and international scale.

While there has been increased attention on the media, specifically, and discourse, generally, in the social sciences, what geographers are lacking at this point is an adequate methodology to combine the two (Sharp, 2005). At this point, the most relevant study methodologically comes from Bendix and Liebler (1999) in their examination of media coverage of the spotted owl controversy in the Pacific Northwest. In their study, Bendix and Liebler examine ten newspapers from across the country and find a distance decay pattern with respect to the volume of coverage given to the issue. The study is valuable for it is one of the first attempts by geographers to examine variation in media coverage using a content analysis. Still, the results of the study lack conclusiveness answering the question of why the framing varied from one part of the country to another. Furthermore, the research does not get into more complex discursive questions as to the rhetorical devices employed or the sources that were used. This research project seeks to build on the research methodology of Bendix and Liebler by incorporating the quantitative aspect of their content analysis along with an examination of the sources that were used. The focus on sourcing should begin to explain why particular frames were used and the omission of certain voices from the discourse should conversely reveal why certain frames were excluded.

Our previous research on this project examines statements made in the national and international press that supported or rejected claims

made by the Bush administration regarding the presence of WMD in Iraq and ties between Iraq and the terrorist who carried out 9/11 (Sharp and Kiyani, 2007). In other words, to what extent were questionable claims left unchallenged and to what extent were they balanced with claims to the contrary? To quickly summarize our findings, we found that: 1) rarely were claims made in support of the Bush administration position challenged in the mass media, particularly in the domestic media and; 2) there was little geographic variation between media, particularly within the domestic market (see Figures 1 and 4 below). However, our initial research did not satisfactorily answer the question as to why the reporting in the media was so similar, both nationally and internationally. We surmised that some of the explanation for the congruency between media had to do with the way in which media companies operate on a day-to-day basis, particularly as it relates to similarities in the sources that are routinely used. Thus, similarities in the daily news gathering process led to redundancies in the types of sources. This research seeks to answer that question more definitively.

METHODOLOGY

The overarching goal in this research is an examination of the sources used in the media's coverage of Iraq's alleged possession of WMD and links to terrorism. Because we were looking at the broadest forces that shape public opinion, we concentrated on mainstream media, specifically newspapers. Newspapers fit particularly well with our research design for two reasons. First, newspapers serve as one the primary sources for day-to-day coverage of foreign affairs. Second, the ability to access and search electronically archived databases offers researchers more powerful tools than can be found in other media.

The more specific goal of this research is to explore the geographic variation of media coverage and sources used at both the national and international scale. Previous research (Sharp and Kiyani, 2007) looked at the general trends in media coverage while this paper explains specific sources that may have shaped media coverage.

To generate a sample of domestic newspapers for analysis we started with a list of the 20 newspapers with the largest circulation in the U.S. From this list we eliminated papers that aim to be national in scope--e.g., *USA-Today*--because we hoped to glean some regional differences in

American coverage. We also eliminated tabloids--e.g., *New York Post*--because they tend to lack adequate foreign staffs to generate enough of their own reporting on Iraq to meet the criteria we set for our analysis. Finally, using a Lexis-Nexis database we arrived at four papers whose full content was available and represented a geographically dispersed sample: *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Washington Post*.

Selecting foreign papers for our sample was more difficult owing to the lack of available databases. Thus, in Canada we included the *Toronto Star*, Canada's largest circulation newspaper, but could not consider the *Globe and Mail*. In India it was possible to include one of the leading papers, *The Hindu*, but not *The Times*. In Australia, China and Israel none of the major English language papers had adequate databases and had to be excluded from the study. In the United Kingdom the problem was slightly different. Papers there tend to exhibit more of the outright partisanship that was typical of the early American press and, thus, we wanted to include both a right-of-center and a left-of-center paper in our study. To this end we selected the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian* respectively.

After establishing our sample of foreign and domestic papers, we then created a database detailing the coverage from 9/11 up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Because the two stated reasons for the invasion were WMD and links to al Qaeda, we conducted searches on each factor. For WMD we searched for articles that contained the terms (1) Iraq, (2) weapons of mass destruction, and (3) biological or chemical or nuclear. We set our search parameters to select articles from September 12, 2001, the day after 9/11, and March 19, 2003, the first day of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. After retrieving the articles, we further refined our search by eliminating stories from wire services--*Associated Press*, *Reuters*, etc.--and stories that contained fewer than 500 words. Because we were analyzing the reporting of geographically specific newspapers and trying to distinguish differences between them, we thought it best to eliminate wire stories that were printed in multiple papers. We also wanted to analyze articles that attempted to offer explanations of the conflict in some depth and so we eliminated the shorter articles that typically report on day-to-day changes. Our construction of a database to explore links to terrorism underwent a similar process. In this case of we searched for articles that contained the terms (1) Iraq, (2) terror, and (3) al Qaeda. We set the parameters to look for articles on the same dates as above and also eliminated articles that came from the wire and those that were under 500 words.

Once the searches were conducted we selected a random sample of 30 articles from each paper. In all but one paper, *The Hindu*, there was an adequate sample size. Excluding the Indian paper, sample sizes on WMD ranged from 56 articles in the *San Francisco Chronicle* to 486 in the *New York Times* and on al Qaeda it ranged from 43 in the *San Francisco Chronicle* to 340 in the *New York Times*. In *The Hindu*, sample sizes were only 20 and 17 articles respectively. In order to obtain an adequate sample size for *The Hindu*, we eliminated one of the terms from each search; biological or chemical or nuclear from the WMD search and al Qaeda from the terrorism search. After eliminating one term from each search our sample size for *The Hindu* was 148 and 63 articles for the respective searches and we proceeded with our study.

With our articles selected we began the process of going through each article to identify all of the statements that were made about WMD and links to terrorism and coded them as either (1) agreeing, (2) disagreeing, or (3) remaining neutral in regard to their agreement with Bush administration claims on the existence of WMD in Iraq or links between the Iraqi government and terrorist networks. We made no attempt to characterize the stance of entire articles as agreeing or disagreeing with administration claims as some studies have done (e.g., Bendix and Liebler, 1999), but instead we tracked the total weight of all the attributed statements. Our reasoning was that there were multiple positions expressed in each article and we wanted to calculate the total weight of each position, which could be more accurately done by looking at every statement in our sample. This methodology also has the benefit of allowing us to analyze exactly who is given a voice in the discourse, which reveals a lot about how certain individuals were allowed to frame the debate over the invasion that took place in the national and international press. After coding all of the statements, we began to break them down into categories, the results of which follow.

THE DISCOURSE ON WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Looking at the issue of WMD claims, it was striking how similar the percentage of positive statements was in the American press. In the *New York Times*, 47% of the attributed statements supported positive WMD claims, while 44% of statements in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *San Francisco Chronicle* supported such claims, and

43% of the statements in the *Washington Post* (Figure 1). The reason for this similarity lies largely in the sourcing that the four papers we studied were using. In each case, the preponderance of statements supporting WMD claims came from American officials, primarily members of the Bush administration, which had a vested interest in presenting claims that supported its position. In the *New York Times*, for example, 68% of all of the attributed statements made *vis-à-vis* WMD came from U.S. officials. In the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the figure was 70% while in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *Washington Post* it was 42% and 37% respectively (Figure 2).

The remainder of the sources that supported the claims of WMD in the American press tended to be official or establishment sources as well. In the *New York Times*, the other sources were British officials, United Nations (UN) officials and Iraqi defectors, which I will discuss below. In the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *Washington Post*, similar official sources were present, but there was also a role for non-governmental organizations as well. This consisted primarily of claims made by members of various think tanks, ranging from the Hudson Institute to the Brookings Institute. In the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the same trends continued, though it was notably the only American paper in which we found no evidence of Iraqi defectors in the discourse.

The role of Iraqi defectors in the discourse was a curious and, ultimately, troublesome part of the discourse as regards claims making. In the years since the invasion, it has been revealed that most of the actual claims *vis-à-vis* WMD in Iraq came from just a handful of “defectors” coming from Iraq (McCollam, 2004). These Iraqi “defectors” were essentially hand-picked by the exiled Iraqi National Congress (INC), who was promoting their stories in

order to persuade American leaders to overthrow Saddam Hussein and place themselves in a favorable position to assume power during reconstruction. Numerous red flags were raised that should have cautioned the press in the use of their statements and their subsequent reiteration by American officials. For example, when Saeed Al-Haideri, who claimed to have visited over 20 secret weapons sites, was being brought from Iraq to the U.S., he stopped first in Thailand for a prearranged meeting with Judith Miller of the *New York Times* so that she could have access to him before the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had a chance to interview him, and possibly suppress or discredit his information. It should be noted that none of the claims stemming from the Iraqi defectors was ever proven, nor could any of them be verified at the time (McCollam, 2004). What was evident from these examples was the championing of WMD claims by the American press based, in part, on the unverifiable statements of a handful of Iraqis working for an opposition party seeking to overthrow Iraq’s dictatorship. This is not to pass judgment on the eventual overthrow of Saddam Hussein, it is only that suggest that the behavior of the press in this matter does not fit with the standards of objective journalism that are expected of an independent and objective press.

While the role of Iraqi defectors in the discourse was problematic, so too was the sourcing of claims that were negative *vis-à-vis* WMD. In terms of overall percentages, the number of statements made disagreeing with WMD claims was small (Figure 1). In the *San Francisco Chronicle* the number of such statements accounted for only 4% of the statements, in the *New York Times* the figure stood at 7% while in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *Washington Post* it was 12% and 16% respectively. In the case of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, every statement in our sample refuting

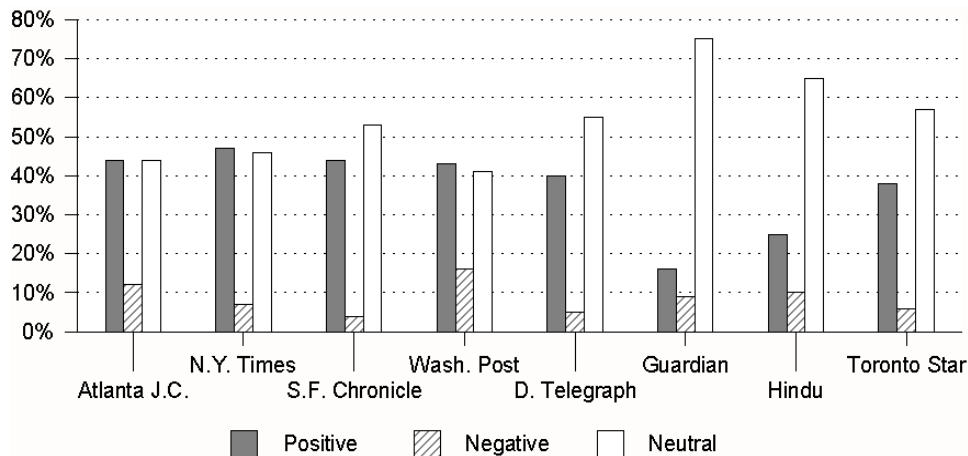


Figure 1. Statements supporting WMD claims in Iraq (adapted from Sharp and Kiyan, 2007).

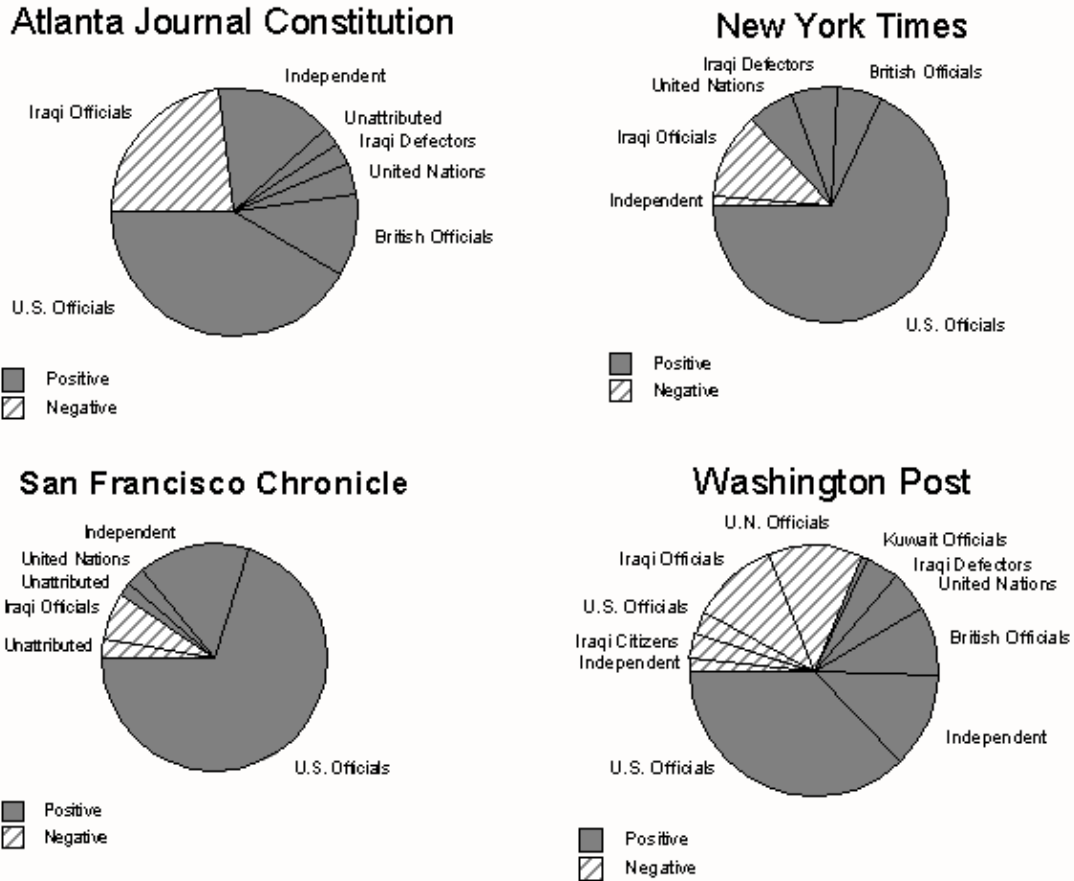


Figure 2. Statements for and against claims of WMD in Iraq--American Press.

the presence of WMD in Iraq stemmed from Iraqi officials themselves, including Saddam Hussein. In the case of the *San Francisco Chronicle* it was nearly the same, the only exception being that there were a few statements made that were unattributed. The *New York Times* did have one independent voice suggesting that there might be a problem with claims of WMD in Iraq, that being former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter. The *Washington Post* not only had the highest percentage of statements refuting the WMD claims, but it also had the most diverse group of sources. In addition to Iraqi officials, our sample captured a number of statements made by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and even quoted a couple of unnamed American officials suggesting that the IAEA's skepticism was well placed (Warrick, 2003).

Looking back at the overall pattern of statements made in the American press on the subject of WMD, the overarching pattern was one of a preponderance of officials and think tanks claiming the presence of WMD in Iraq while only officials in Saddam Hussein's regime were left to suggest otherwise. To underscore this point, in our sample of

articles from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *New York Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle* we found only one statement out of 455 that was from a non-Iraqi source claiming that there might be a problem with the claims being made about WMD. Adding in the 22 statements questioning WMD from non-Iraqi sources in the *Washington Post*, there were still only 23 out of 663 statements in the sample that cast doubt on the claims. What the data makes clear is that in the patriotic fervor following 9/11, the American press was championing the war effort and, judging from the sources being used, not looking to present the claims of WMD in a balanced manner; something many in the press have, themselves, noted (e.g., Rich, 2006). One can conclude from this that the concept of an independent and objective press that emerged in the early twentieth century seems to have given way to the more openly partisan reporting that typified the press of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, if it really existed at all.

While the motivations and performance of the American press have not gone unnoticed, the question of how the foreign press covered the matter is an entirely different matter. Looking at the

coverage of WMD claims in our sample of foreign papers, there was clearly less support for claims made by the administration (Figure 3). Whereas all of the American papers ranged from 43% to 47%, in *The Guardian* only 16% of the statements supported such claims, 25% in *The Hindu*, 38% in the *Toronto Star*, and 40% in the *Daily Telegraph*. Thus, not only were the statements in the foreign press less supportive of claims largely emanating from Washington, but there was greater diversity in the data as well.

However while there was less support for claims of WMD in Iraq, there was not a corresponding rise in statements that disagreed with such claims. In the American press, statements disagreeing with such claims ranged from 4% to 16% of the statements. In the foreign press the figures ranged from 5% to 10%. It follows that a greater number of neutral statements were made in the foreign press, which the data reveals. But to really understand why there was little difference in the number of statements challenging WMD claims, one needs to take a closer look at the sourcing.

The sourcing in the foreign press on WMD claims revealed some notable differences but was

more significant for its similarities with the American press. Not surprisingly, British papers were more likely to rely on British officials than American officials when writing about WMD, though they used many American sources as well and the general tenor of the stories was much the same. The more conservative *Daily Telegraph* used the Iraqi defectors in their stories while our sample of *The Guardian* indicates that they did not.

Interestingly, the use of local sources was not as strong in *The Hindu* or the *Toronto Star*, where Indian and Canadian reporters continued to rely heavily on American sources. Based on the reading of the discourse, the reason for this appears to be that the story was largely driven by the U.S. and Great Britain and their leaders in the Bush and Blair administrations were the ones holding the majority of the press conferences and essentially setting the agenda at the global level. There was a greater use of non-U.S. and British sources in the Canadian and Indian papers that were included in our sample, but they tended to be responding to claims that were being made from Washington. Thus, one can conclude that even though international perspectives on the invasion varied considerably around the world,

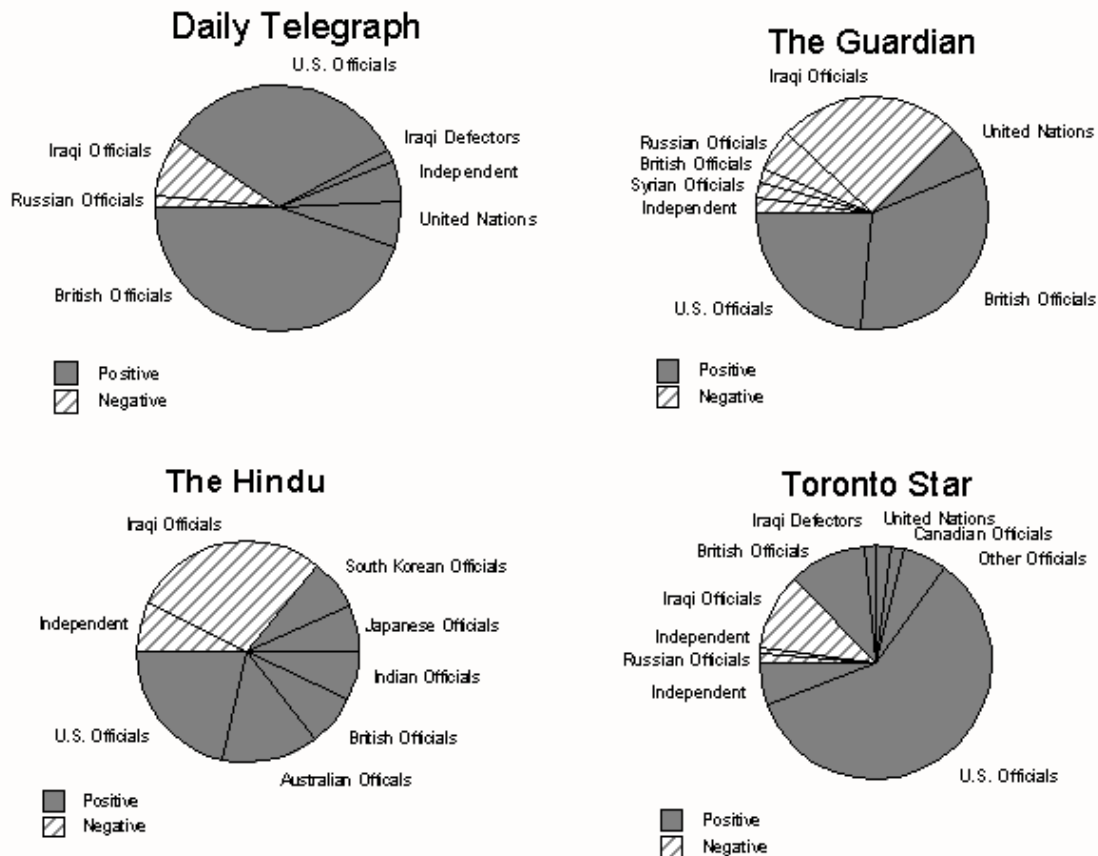


Figure 3. Statements for and against claims of WMD in Iraq--Foreign Press.

the globalization of media has arguably led to a lessening of diversity in the international media.

If one looks at the negative responses in the foreign press, one sees further similarity with the American press. In the *Daily Telegraph*, all of the negative responses came from Iraqi officials with the exception of one quote from Russia's Prime Minister, Valdimir Putin, claiming that he had heard no compelling evidence of WMD in Iraq (Sparrow, 2002). In the *Toronto Star* the results were similar to the *Daily Telegraph*. All of the statements refuting WMD came from Iraqi officials with the exception of one statement by a Russian diplomat in support of Putin's position (Thompson, 2002) and one reference to former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter stating that most of Saddam's WMD had been destroyed during the 1990s inspection regime. In *The Guardian* there were a few more statements countering the WMD claims and they came from a couple of additional sources. While most of the negative WMD statements in *The Guardian* came from Iraqi officials, there were also statements from Russian and Syrian officials as well as from opponents to Tony Blair from within his own Labor Party. There was, in addition, one statement from a nuclear scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council in Washington claiming that imported aluminum tubes were not likely to have any uses *vis-à-vis* nuclear weapons. In *The Hindu* the data was similar, with all of the counterclaims coming from Iraqi officials, only in this case the one exception was a statement made by sociologist Aijaz Ahmad acknowledging the lack of WMD and posing alternative theories tied to oil and U.S./Israeli hegemony.

Despite the appearance of a slightly wider array of negative statements made in the foreign press with respect to WMD, the overall sourcing was much more similar than not. Thus, while there were fewer statements supporting claims of WMD in Iraq,

there was very little to challenge such assumptions. Outside of Iraqi and Russian officials, our sample offered only one statement from Scott Ritter, one statement from a nuclear scientist and one statement from an Indian sociologist in comparison to the 295 statements in support of such claims. When one looks at the weight of the discourse in favor of such claims, based simply on the use of sources, it becomes clearer why opposition to the invasion was so difficult to articulate.

THE DISCOURSE ON TERRORISM

Turning to terrorism, the main concern in this research was the utilization of sources in mainstream newspapers that supported claims of a link between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda. In certain respects, these claims were even more vital to the Bush administration's position, for it was the terrorist attacks of 9/11 that turned the administration's gaze more clearly toward Iraq. However, claims of a link between Iraq and al Qaeda were even more tenuous than claims about WMD. After all, even at a relatively superficial level, Saddam Hussein was a secular leader who was infamous for his attacks on the religious expression of the majority Shia in his country while Osama bin Laden was a radical cloaked in religious zealotry. The likelihood that the two men would have much in common was unlikely, to say the least.

In general, there was somewhat less support for claims of a link to terrorism than there was for WMD in Iraq (see Figures 1 and 4). In the American press the *Washington Post* and *San Francisco Chronicle* presented positive statements 31% and 33% of the time respectively. The *New York Times*

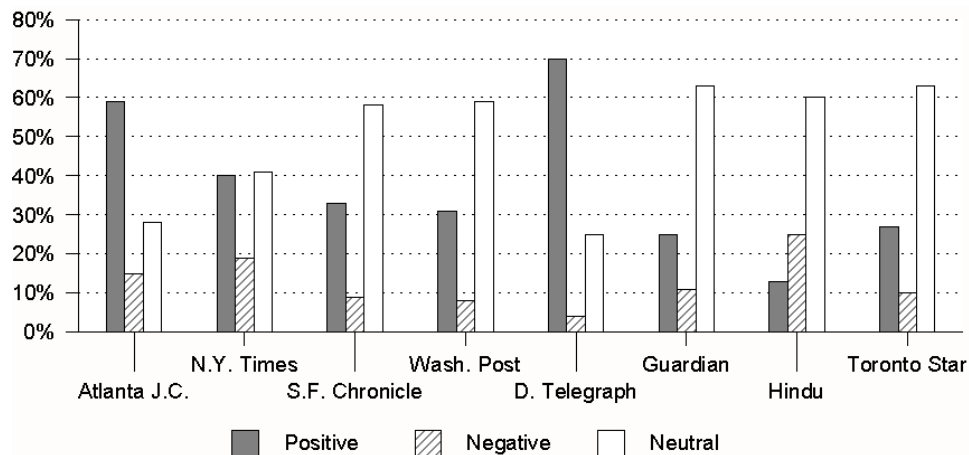


Figure 4. Statements claiming links between Iraq and al Qaeda (adapted from Sharp and Kiyan, 2007).

was slightly higher with 40% of statements in the discourse supporting the claims, but this figure was still below what any of the American papers had for WMD. The one paper that stuck out was the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* with 59% of its comments indicating there was probable link between the Hussein government and al Qaeda. Here, a closer look at the discourse reveals why that was the case. It so happened that our sampling method returned a relatively high number of articles that were written shortly after 9/11 when there was a nationwide anthrax scare. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* spent a fair amount of time covering this story and given suggestions early on that the anthrax was 'weapons grade' it was reasoned that Iraq might have been the source, a plausible scenario given that the U.S. had shipped various strains of anthrax to Iraq in the 1980s to assist Iraq in its war with Iran. While these stories later proved false (Broad, 2006), it was reasoned at the time that Iraq might have been the source and that Osama bin Laden may have been the conduit for its delivery to the U.S. Despite the fact the all aspects of the story were later discredited, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* ran with the story and

that, more than anything, inflated their numbers (e.g., Carr, 2001).

Looking more specifically at the sources (Figure 5), the same basic pattern that was seen in the WMD coverage emerges. The overwhelming majority of statements affirming the link between Iraq and al Qaeda were from American officials. In all of the American newspapers we sampled, over 50% of the positive statements came from members of the Bush administration.

In the *Washington Post*, all but four of the statements supporting links to terrorism came from official American sources while one was a Philippine diplomat and three came from the writer for the *New Yorker*, Jeffrey Goldberg. His reporting on the matter was one of the few instances where solid investigative journalism made it into the reporting on Iraq. Goldberg had spent time in the Kurdish region of Iraq, which stood in opposition to Saddam Hussein's regime but had the protection of the U.S. through the no-fly zones and other means. There were Islamic extremists fighting against the Kurdish separatists, some of whom undoubtedly had received training from al Qaeda and who were also receiving

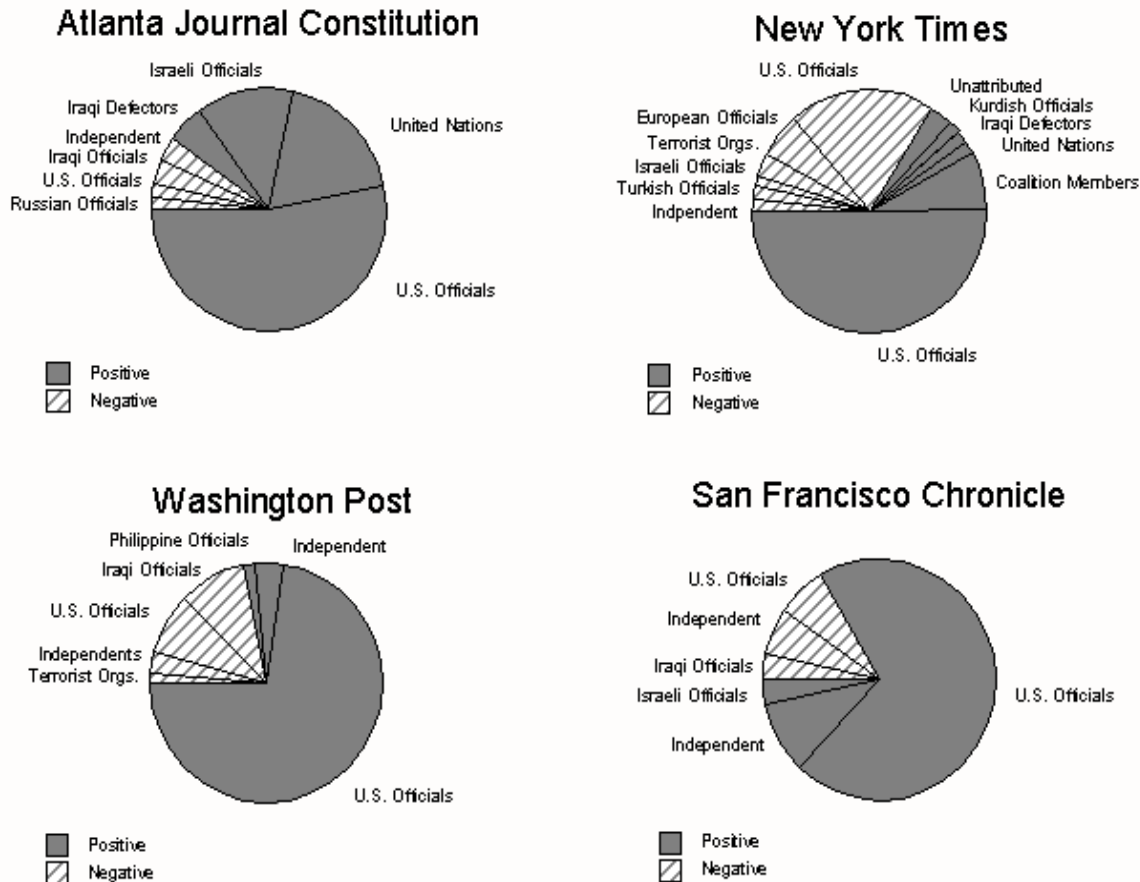


Figure 5. Statements claiming links between Iraq and al Qaeda--American Press.

some assistance from Hussein's regime on occasion as part of Iraq's counter-insurgency plan to destabilize the Kurdish rebels. Given that the links were largely indirect and that issue was one surrounding the internal security of Iraq, it was hard to make too large a case from this information, but it was certainly seized upon by those wishing to make the case for war and it ultimately made its way into the mainstream newspaper discourse.

Similar to the discourse on WMD, the use of Iraqi defectors as sources made its way into the reporting in the *New York Times* and *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. In the *New York Times* it was an article written shortly after 9/11 about both the alleged meeting between an Iraqi intelligence officer and one of the 9/11 hijackers in Prague in early 2001 and the presence of a terrorist training facility in Iraq (Tyler and Tagliabue, 2001). The fact that this story was not written by Judith Miller and given that it appeared so quickly after 9/11 reveals a couple things. First, it demonstrates that the use of defectors provided by the INC was widespread; the Prague meeting was sourced to a Czech official while the training camp story was reported on *PBS Frontline*. Second, the timing makes it clear that efforts of the INC to shape public opinion on Iraq was part of a longer strategy that predates 9/11 tragedy. Furthermore, the fact that the Prague meeting never took place and that the terrorist training facility was actually an anti-terrorist training facility (McCollam, 2004) underscores one of the major problems with the use of sources in the reporting on the link between Iraq and al Qaeda.

A relatively similar number of statements in the American press refuted claims of a link between Iraq and al Qaeda as compared to the reporting on WMD (Figures 1 and 4). What was different about the sourcing of these statements was a propensity to use fewer Iraqi sources and more official sources. The reason for this seems to be that such a link was so much weaker and many more officials were willing to take a stand on this issue. In the U.S., CIA director George Tenet was on record denying such a link between Iraq and al Qaeda, and argued that the only plausible scenario for such was if Iraq was invaded and became threatened (Gordon, 2002). Even Israeli intelligence officials, who were keen to get the U.S. more involved in assisting with Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian targets, downplayed any link between Iraq and al Qaeda (Tyler and Tagliabue, 2001). This level of counter claims gave politicians much greater latitude to object to the preponderance of terrorism claims emanating from Washington. In California, for example, Senator Dianne Feinstein complained publicly that information Congress was receiving was insufficient

to make claims linking Iraq to al Qaeda (Lochhead, 2003) while Representative Nancy Pelosi urged the country to focus on al Qaeda and not Iraq (Sandalow, 2003).

Curiously absent from the discourse was the inclusion of any of any British voices opposing countering the establishment claims. Where the official position of the Blair administration supported Washington in claiming that Iraq was in possession of WMD, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *New York Times* and *Washington Post* had all made use of British sources to support such claims (Figure 2). However, where the official Blair administration opposed Washington in stating there was no link between Iraq and al Qaeda, the use of British sources was non-existent. This is a striking absence from the discourse in the American press and raises some serious questions as to the way in which news is made and what voices are or are not important on a particular topic.

In the foreign press, there was a greater diversity of opinions, though the overall trend was much the same (Figure 6). The use of sources in the *Toronto Star* was strikingly similar to that found in the American media (e.g., Ward, 2003). The claims in support of a link between Iraq and al Qaeda was bolstered almost entirely through the voice of American officials with the help of one misquote of Tony Blair which made it appear he actually supported Washington's position and one unattributed statement which appears to reflect the writer's opinion more than anything else. But what is most interesting about the use of sources in the *Toronto Star* is how much it reflected who was driving the story. Given the complete lack of Canadian opinions supporting such claims, and their near absence in objecting to them either, it is clear that this story was very much an American story with the voices of Canadians very much pushed aside. This rather passive process of collecting news and simply reporting on what is being said at various press conferences goes a long way in explaining how sophisticated public relations can strongly influence the narrative in a discourse.

The reporting in *The Guardian* tended to be fairly similar to that found in the *Toronto Star*. As one would expect, there was a slightly larger role for British sources, but overall statements from American officials dominated the reporting. What was notably different was the reporting in the other British paper in our sample, the *Daily Telegraph*. There the reporting was more strongly in favor of a link between Iraq and al Qaeda than was found anywhere else, including in the American press. The reason for this clearly stems from the more partisan

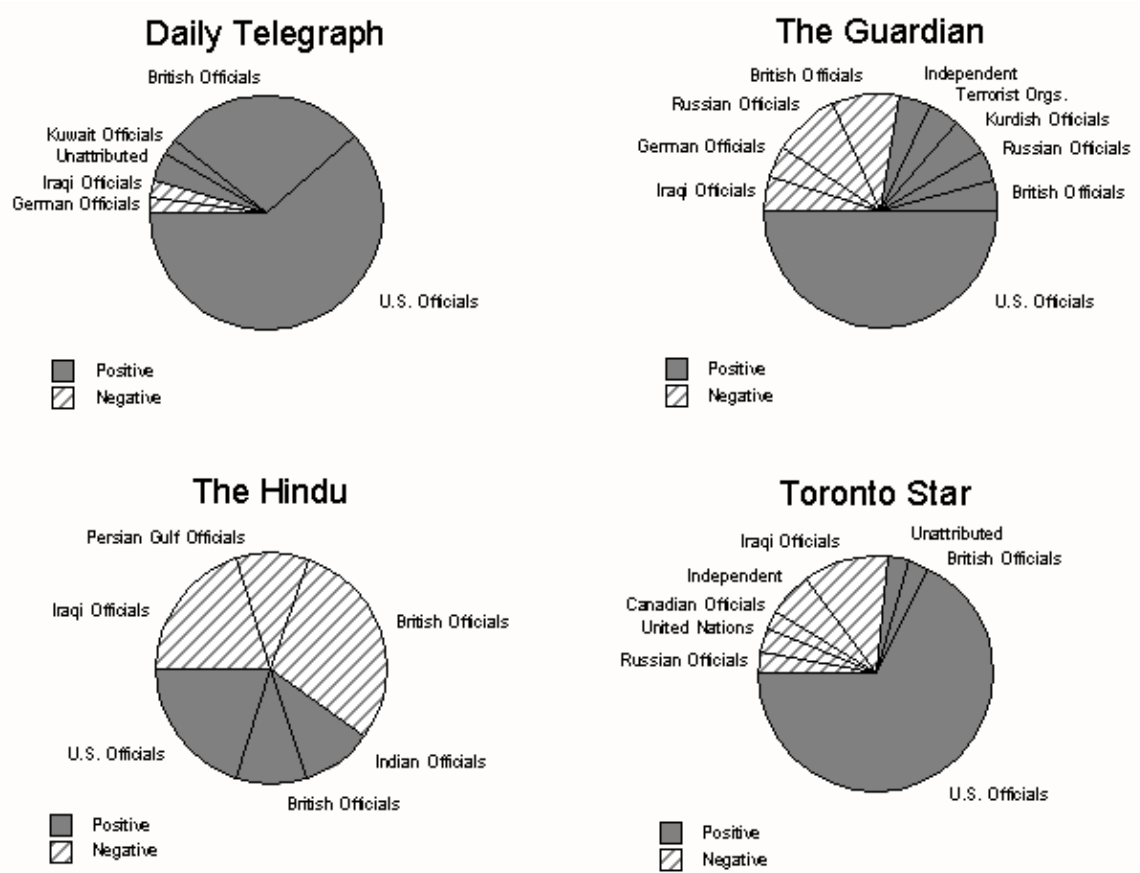


Figure 6. Statements claiming links between Iraq and al Qaeda--Foreign Press.

nature of the British press and the fact that this was a partisan newspaper where the overwhelming sentiment was to paint the world in black and white terms and use any evidence to build a case against the new enemy, Islamic terrorists. Thus the *Daily Telegraph* did not include any refutation of links to terrorism from Western intelligence sources nor did they bother to even include the position of their own elected head of state. Rather, most of the non-American sources were from members of the minority party in Parliament or were rather vague statements from British officials stating a general need to fight terrorism and support the U.S. in fighting terrorism.

The one newspaper that stood out in objecting to any claims of a link between Iraq and al Qaeda was *The Hindu*, which included relatively few statements from American politicians and many more from Great Britain. This is not surprising given the historic links between Great Britain and India. What is surprising is how little attention the coverage received in general. The total number of articles in *The Hindu* was less than half of what was found anywhere else (Sharp and Kiyani, 2007), and that was

after expanding the search parameters to return more hits from *The Hindu*. This suggests the possibility that the story itself was seen as flawed as was not taken that seriously in the Indian press, but more work needs to be done to answer that question definitively.

CONCLUSION

During the period between the events of 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq in March of 2003, a lot of media attention was directed at the WMD program in Iraq and links that al Qaeda had around the world. In hindsight, much of what was reported seems to have strained the truth and the lack of any concrete evidence supporting the major claims that led to the war seems to have led to a number of people in the media expressing their regrets over the way in which things were handled. However, it was not just a patriotic fervor that skewed the reporting in one direction; much of the explanation lies in the way in which news stories are produced. The over-reliance on

official sources and the uncritical dissemination of information from highly partisan sources raises serious questions about the process of making news and the objectivity of the press. What was witnessed in the build up to the 2003 invasion was a passive process of news collection rather than an active process of seeking out sources and critically evaluating information. In the words of Robert McChesney (2004), "the press was largely reduced to the role of a stenographer."

Overall, it appears that the sourcing employed in the discourse played a large role in determining the overall narrative of the stories. With respect to WMD in particular, a landslide of public officials and authoritative intelligence supported such claims. In opposition to this were a few comments made by members of Saddam Hussein's own regime. It is hard to imagine that anyone who was just going by the reporting in the establishment papers would reach any conclusion other than the fact that Iraq was hiding WMD. And yet, as we have demonstrated elsewhere (Sharp and Kiyani, 2007) there were plenty of alternative sources available if the press had sought them out.

The use of sources in the coverage of links between Iraq and al Qaeda also presented some interesting findings. The virtual absence of British voices in the American press raises some serious questions about what criteria were being used in selecting which voices were relevant and which were not. The fact that British politicians who cast doubt on links to terrorism were virtually silenced raises serious concerns. And striking too was the similarity in the foreign press where it seems the news making process allowed the newsmakers in the U.S. to drive the process. Only in *The Hindu* did there seem to be much deviation from this (e.g., *The Hindu*, 2003).

What this suggests is that the very process of making news carries with it a number of structural problems that need to be addressed. The striking similarity of the American and the foreign press suggests that there are perhaps fewer perspectives available to citizens with the shift toward objective journalism and increasing technology. Some would argue that this is a good thing because it demonstrates that the objective process employed by news organizations is arriving at the same end. But, for example, given that some papers used the dubious statements of Iraqi defectors and reached the same ends as those that did not is a troublesome proposition.

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