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### **The end of the media's "war on terror"? An analysis of a declining frame**

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MSc in Politics and Communication

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# **The end of the media's "war on terror"? An analysis of a declining frame**

Dominik Cziesche

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## **ABSTRACT**

A common notion among media scholars holds that in the aftermath of the terror attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 the Bush administration was able to establish the "war on terror"-frame as a single-sided account of reality. Mainstream media compliance with the official interpretations in this view allowed the discourse to develop a pervasiveness and sustainability only comparable to the cold-war frame. This dissertation seeks to examine if media coverage patterns have changed significantly since. At the heart of the research design is thus the question if the single-sided frame has broken down, hence, if the "war on terror" in the media is over. In applying a quantitative content analysis to print media coverage of the three largest national newspapers (New York Times, USA Today and Wall Street Journal) it is investigated if criticising the administration's "war on terror" has become a frequent pattern after the official end of the Iraq war (May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003). A qualitative discourse analysis shall determine if critique still stays within the boundaries of the initial frame. Finally, on a theoretical level, this dissertation should contribute to the debate about the emergence and contestation of frames in general. The evidence conducted here suggests that the Bush administration's power to sustain and renew the single-sided frame has diminished. Not only are the practices of the "war on terror" permanently contested, but also are the government's integrity and competence as such openly called into question. The findings indicate that in assessing the dominance of a discourse greater attention should be paid to the failure or success of the practices accompanying it. These are likely to have contributed to the decline of the "war on terror"-frame, which unlike the cold-war-frame did not prevail its exclusivity for decades, but only for a short period after 9/11.

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## Introduction

Six years after the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 the threat of terrorism still plays a key role in the US's public discourse<sup>1</sup>. Almost permanently, succeeded or uncovered bombing plots are reported from around the world; often they are linked to the events of 9/11. Scholars examining US media coverage in the years after the attacks of New York and Washington have overwhelmingly concluded that the White House was able to take advantage of these actual and perceived threats. The mainstream media, the research suggests, largely stayed within the boundaries of the official framing. As a result, the administration of President George W. Bush could launch two wars and establish laws such as the "Patriot Act" without significant resistance (Norris et. al., 2003: 3).

These findings are revisited here. Apparently, the climate of consensus about the "war on terror" in the US media has been replaced by a dispute about how the White House should tackle the challenges of terrorism. The debates about the situation in Iraq, the human rights-abuses in Abu Ghraib and elsewhere, or the domestic anti-terror legislation – to name a few – seem to illustrate the breakdown of the single-sided "war on terror"-frame.

The aim of this dissertation is to examine to what extent this general impression is substantiated by evidence from print media coverage. It will be demonstrated that critique of the White House's "war on terror"-practices has flourished, undermining the government's ability to exclusively structure the reality of counter-terrorism and to suppress competing narratives. The underlying assumption of this dissertation is that in calling the practices of the "war on terror" into question, the rationales that paved the way for them are weakened as well. Generally, the focus on the media here is a result of the assumption that they are, at least, important transmitters of frames.

A content analysis of a sample of articles from three selected periods after the so-called "end of the major combat operation" in Iraq on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003 will reveal that reports on the "war on terror" are more often opposing the government than supporting it. While the term "war on terror" continues to be used for describing the Afghanistan and Iraq wars as well as any

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<sup>1</sup> How to define terrorism is a contentious issue. However, for reasons of practicability the label terrorist is used here despite some concerns with, for example, the difficulty to distinguish between insurgents, ordinary criminals and terrorists in Iraq.

effort to fight, jail or kill (alleged) terrorists, it has meanwhile been associated with a number of negative events and policy failures as well.

A content analysis can quantify the frequency of dissent and its broad patterns, it however cannot explore to what extent the meaning-making of counter-narratives diverts from the official framing. Therefore, an additional discourse analysis is carried out, examining a presidential speech on the one hand, and a selection of newspaper editorials and commentaries to compare the official account with on the other hand.

While this paper cannot fully determine why a single-sided frame breaks down, drawing from the theoretical literature in the field allows for some "educated guesses" to be explored in the discussion-chapter: In short, evidence collected here suggests that the performance of the US government's counter-terror measures over time presumably has limited its power to maintain a single-sided frame. This indicates that the relevance of practices may have been underestimated thus far.

Two realms are excluded from the discussion here. In analysing "war on terror"-coverage (first) the so-called major combat operation in Iraq is circumvented (March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004 to May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004): Amongst others, due to the embedding of journalists in military units this period is not representative for the "war on terror"-coverage as such (for the discussion of embedding see e.g., Miller, 2004).

Secondly, due to time and scope restrictions an analysis of public opinion and the role it possibly plays in the emergence or breakdown of a frame cannot be carried out. Generally, what is perceived as public opinion potentially has an influence on elite discourses and media coverage (Gershkoff and Kushner, 2005: 525). Entman for example argues, that if the elite perceives the public to be on its side, this alone may be sufficient to silence opposition (Entman, 2003: 420). On the other hand, elite discourses and media coverage possibly have an impact on the scope of opinions voiced by the public. To capture the mutual relations between these realms a far larger study, including interviews with politicians and media practitioners, would have to be conducted. In this sense, this dissertation should be seen as the starting point of further investigation.

## **Literature review**

The aim of this literature review is first to introduce the dominant discursive elements of the White House's "war on terror"-frame. Then explanations for the emergence or contestation of a single-sided frame will be examined.

### *The "war on terror" frame*

The "war on terror" itself can hardly be defined as discourses are never fixed (Carpentier, 2007: 15). Since its emergence the concept has been stretched over a variety of issues, including anti-terror legislation, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as a number of international conflicts that involve political violence, such as those in Chechnya or Palestine. Similar to the cold war-frame, the "war on terror"-frame is thus categorising these issues using a single familiar concept – in this case, international terrorism (Norris et. al., 2003: 4).

The core function of the "war on terror" frame according to Norris et. al. is that it helps leaders to communicate a simple and coherent message as well as to reshape "perceptions" of friends and enemies (2003: 15). But of what do these simple messages actually consist? Two broad, re-occurring elements have been identified by a variety of scholars.

*a). Binary Constructions:* Generally, binary constructions are according to Hall dominant discursive patterns as they are the simplest way of making a difference (1997: 31). In the case of 9/11, the core dichotomy was created by framing the conflict as a fight of "good against evil" (Archetti, 2005: 13; Coe et al, 2004; Kellner, 2005: 33), as symbolised by president George W. Bush's well-known quote:

*"Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." (2001)*

The president's notion of an "axis of evil" later reinforced this reading of the events (Bush, 2002). Jackson, in the presumably most comprehensive discourse analysis of the "war on terror", specifies this as a binary construction of "barbarism" against "civilisation" or "freedom" against "tyranny" (2005: 31). A summary of how "civilization" and "barbarism" were contrasted is provided by Macdonald (2003: 177):

*"In the developing discourse of this day [9/11, the author], the attacks came to be defined as an assault less on civilians than on symbols of American power, and on 'civilization' itself. Mythic constructions of American-ness as synonymous with civilized values were repeatedly reproduced."*

For Carpentier the idea of a binary discourse is also linked to the notion of "threat", as in the case of the Iraq war 2003, where a threat "to world peace" was constructed: In a "us versus them" construction the "us" is then identified as a threatened self (2007: 12).

*b). The Counter-Violence-Rationale:* Ryan, from his study of newspaper editorials during the four weeks after 9/11, concludes that a second dominant strain of the "war on terror" frame is the description of military intervention as inevitable (2004: 367). As a subcategory of counter-violence we shall also include the limiting of civil and human rights, domestically (in the so-called legal war on terror) as well as internationally (e.g. by the establishment of the new category "enemy combatant") – though not necessarily "violent" in itself, these policies are part of the "tough answer"-frame. A threat-discourse for Ryan again is a necessary condition for the evolving war-frame as extraordinary threat requires extraordinary reactions (ibid.). While the cold war-frame constantly reminded the public of the danger of a fatal nuclear war, after 9/11 scenarios like the possible use of dirty bombs by Al Qaida became widely discussed (Norris et. al., 2003: 3).

The permanent reference to Pearl Harbour added up to the impression of an attacked nation that has the right to defend itself (Kellner, 2005: 29). In sum, the "counter-violence"-paradigm is described as born out of the government's ability to frame the attack of 9/11 as a declaration of war that requires a military response (Moeller, 2004: 64). Instead, the attacks could for example have been interpreted as criminal acts that have to be countered by an international law enforcement initiative (Jackson, 2005: 31) or by a limited hunt for al Qaida operatives (Moeller, 2004: 64).

There is little disagreement among researchers in the field that binary constructions and the counter-violence rationale are core contributors to the emergence of the single-sided "war on terror"-frame after 9/11 (e. g., Norris, 2004: 3; Ryan, 2004: 377; Moeller, 2004: 64). In this view, the frame was almost unique in its ability to suppress counter-narratives in the media, among elites and in the public. However, there is far more dissent about how a frame can

become dominant or contested. A variety of accounts will be discussed in the following section.

### *Framing Power*

According to Ryan "the creation of the war narrative clearly was an exercise of power" (2004: 378). Although Macdonald reminds us that we should be cautious to equate discursive and political power (2004: 40), in the case of 9/11 the single-sidedness of the discourse has indeed translated into executive power, as Coe et al. convincingly argue: The "war on terror"-frame in their view is a "discursive foundation" in order to justify and establish policies such as the Patriot Act, the restriction of civil and human rights, or the launch of two wars (2004: 246). Together, the government's ability to sustain and renew single-sided interpretations and to pursue accompanying practices almost uncontested is called "framing power" here.

But how and why did binary discourses become dominant, and how and why was counter-violence allowed to appear as the only possible response?

Coe et. al. argue that binary discourses fit the media well as they are easily reproduced patterns, highlight conflict and thereby attract and entertain audiences (2004: 235). They found that US newspaper editorials uncritically reflected the binary constructions of good/evil established by the government. Carpentier assumes that such "antagonistic discourses on the enemy (and on the self) tend to become very quickly hegemonic, defining the horizon of our thought and excluding other discourses" (2007: 2). The emergence of a significant conflict as for example symbolised by a terror attack is then the prerequisite of successfully establishing a hegemonic discourse because usually only then can enemies be easily identified.

The two core frame elements – binary constructions and the counter violence-rationale – in this view are inter-related in various ways which reinforce each other. For example, if the conflict is one of "good" against "evil", violence against the "enemy" becomes not only a right, but a duty.

Despite what has been said thus far, much of the literature about terrorism and the media traditionally has been less concerned with the influence of government's than with the influence of terrorism on news coverage. Deadly attacks, a common notion holds, give



terrorists what they want: publicity for their cause, on the hand, and capacity to incite fear in the target population as well as gaining support from sympathizers, on the other hand.

Nacos for example suggests that the media unwillingly play in the hand of terrorists by reporting their often "newsworthy" activities (2002: 3). In this widely shared view (see also Taylor, 2003: 101; Wilkinson, 2000: 177) the dominant news logic leads to a symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the media.

In a more complex account, Wolfsfeld seeks to characterise conflicts between governments and for example a terrorist group (a "challenger") as a struggle for media access with an unpredictable outcome (2003: 84). In contrast to Nacos (2002), he sees governments as enjoying a structural advantage for getting media attention (2003: 83/84). From this point of view "challengers" can overcome their structural disadvantage by pursuing spectacular activities (ibid: 86).<sup>2</sup>

But what if the launch of anti-terror-measures is spectacular as well? Hence, can the same logic according to which an "event" is the more newsworthy the more original (or violent) it is, play into the hands of those conducting counter-terrorist activities?

Kellner demonstrates that the media's permanent coverage of 9/11 was inciting hysteria and thereby facilitating the "war fever" the Bush administration sought to bring about (2005: 29). About four weeks after 9/11 an international coalition launched a war against the Taliban government in Afghanistan; later Iraq was invaded. A war is in particular "newsworthy" if soldiers of a media outlet's country are involved. Thus Dimitrova and Stroembæck found that the New York Times in its "war on terror"-coverage more often than a leading Swedish newspaper referred to military conflict and war strategies (2005: 412) instead of discussing other anti-terror-measures.

Apart from the greater attention that is paid to military operations, a variety of further benefits for the administration are summarised by Denton (2004: 3): In times of war the public usually places more trust in elected officials, the president is safer from attacks, citizens are more willing to make sacrifices, and the opposition is silenced. While for example

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<sup>2</sup> A different debate is concerned with the "CNN effect", i.e. the question if media are an actor in themselves in so far as they may coerce governments to pursue certain foreign policies such as military operations (for a summary of the debate: Livingston, 1997). However, the discussion is of limited relevance in this particular case as the research conducted after 9/11 overwhelmingly suggests that the government itself was favouring a war.

opposing views about the “war on terror” were available from international sources, Norris et. al. argue that terrorist events are mostly described and interpreted from a local angle (2003: 12). Conversely, Norris et. al. hold that in war times there is often a rally around the flag-effect in domestic media (ibid: 296) and journalistic dependency on official sources is thought to be increased (Carpentier, 2007: 7). For example, Ryan reports that the ten largest US newspapers in their editorials after 9/11 heavily relied on government sources in constructing their frames (2004: 374). In sum, interpreting a terrorist incident as a declaration of war that requires a military response therefore possibly neutralizes what Nacos (2002) has seen as the terrorist’s structural advantage: getting attention through violence.

It lays in the nature of the “war on terror” as declared by the Bush administration that it is potentially unlimited as its objective is to stop only when the threat is eradicated. This leads to fuzziness in the academic literature about which periods are covered when speaking of “war times”. Usually, we shall assume that “war times” refers to the start phase of a combat operation whereas later dissent may increasingly emerge, especially when conflicts get protracted such as in Vietnam or currently in Iraq.

However, according to Hallin’s study of Vietnam coverage, dissent generally only appears in the media after it was voiced in mainstream politics:

*“In situations where political consensus seems to prevail, journalists tend to act as ‘responsible’ members of the political establishment, upholding the dominant political perspective and passing on more or less at face value the views of authorities assumed to represent the nation as a whole.”* (Hallin, 1986: 10)

Bennett explains this process by establishing the “indexing model” (1990) according to which it is a “standard journalistic practice” to index “story frames to the range of sources and viewpoints within official decision circles, reflecting levels of official conflict and consensus” (Bennett et al, 2006: 468). This, according to Bennett et al., holds also true for the coverage of the Abu Ghraib scandal, in which neutral words such as “abuse” were more frequently used than evaluative terms like “torture” (ibid.). According to Bennett et. al. this resembled the official framing. However, the research design of their study narrowly focuses on linguistics, whereas particularly in quality papers, neutral and administrative language is born out of the pre-dominant news values. This does not necessarily imply that an article indexes official positions.

Drawing from Chomsky's and Herman's propaganda model (2002) a different perspective holds that framing power is the result of a system of "propaganda". Propaganda here is not only, as commonly understood, a particular (usually disingenuous) rhetoric attempt to influence the public, but a set of unexpressed media production rules that favour contents in accordance with (political and economic) elite interests, including those of media conglomerates.

For example, with regard to the "war on terror", for Kumar there is a convergence of commercial media and government interests (2006: 51). In this view, the government's legislation facilitates increasing concentration in the media sector, in turn, big conglomerates comply with the "official" line of thought. Kumar describes this as a conscious trade-off but provides little if any evidence for this assumption.

A model that seeks to explore the rather subtle processes behind framing power is provided by Entman's notion of "cascading activation". Entman attempts to depart from the propaganda model and the indexing model by incorporating them, but allowing for greater flexibility in the explanation of the "war on terror" frame.

*"As hegemony theorists would predict, 9/11 revealed yet again that media patrol the boundaries of culture and keep discord within conventional bounds. But inside those borders, even when government is promoting 'war', media are not entirely passive receptacles for government propaganda, at least not always, and the cascade model illuminates deviations from the preferred frame."* (Entman, 2003: 428-9)

He imagines the establishment as well as the contestation of a frame as a network cascade model with the government on top and the public on the bottom (Entman, 2003: 419). Similar to the indexing model, Entman thus holds that political elites usually have greater framing power, but he also seeks to account for the possibility that frames are contested from below (the media, the public).

In Entman's model the actual shape of events is allowed to explain the emergence of counter-frames. However, he does not further explore the circumstances under which events gain influence, and he does not clarify why the same matter that was yesterday culturally congruent today can be contested.

Conversely, Jackson (2005) explicitly states that language and practice cannot be disentangled. The linguistic "war on terror"-frame is in this view inseparably connected with the practices of the "war on terror"; both are reinforcing each other: For Jackson here lays the deeper reason why the Bush administration after 9/11 was able to turn to policies such as wars, aid and support to dictators, political assassinations and torture (ibid: 180).

*"The 'war on terrorism' therefore, is simultaneously a set of actual practices – wars, covert operations, agencies and institutions – and an accompanying series of assumptions, beliefs, justifications and narratives – it is an entire language or discourse."* (Jackson, 2005: 8)

In turn thus the power of the linguistic frame should depend on the performance of the practices: If violent counter-measures could be established because dominant linguistic discourses were paving the way for them (and vice versa), then it should be only reasonable to assume that these policies and actions need to be regarded as successes by elites, the public, and the media in order to maintain the discourse in boundaries that work to the White House's advantage.

Meanwhile, however, the conflict in Iraq has exacerbated, neither WMD (weapons of mass destruction) have been found nor has the alleged link between al-Qaida and Saddam Hussein been convincingly demonstrated – both were core arguments for the war (O'Shaughnessy, 2004: 210). Furthermore, human rights scandals like in Abu Ghraib have been uncovered, the Taliban and Al Qaida resistance in Afghanistan appears to grow again, and Osama bin Laden has not been captured yet.

It is therefore striking that thus far possible consequences of the "war on terror"-practices on the government's framing power have not been examined. It is exactly here where this projects starts.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The key insight from the discussion thus far is that the practices and linguistics of the “war on terror” are interlinked. Although this is a theoretical assumption rather than a falsifiable hypothesis, it can hardly be assumed that the failure or success of practices is not connected with the strength of the discourse accompanying it. Therefore, the concept of framing in connection with what has been called “framing power” builds the basis of this research project.

In its simplest terms, framing in this paper is understood as the ability to organise the perception and interpretation of events and actions in a way that excludes other accounts of reality. Framing therefore goes beyond agenda setting theory (Dimitrova and Stroembaeck, 2005: 405) – to adapt a famous quote about agenda setting: framing does not necessary tell people what to think, but how to think about an issue (McCombs and Shaw, 1993: 61).

While no simplistic stimulus-response-connection between media coverage and public opinion should be assumed, framing theory nevertheless enables us to make some inferences about the scope of voiced views. This in particular is facilitated if a frame is single-sided, as Entman (1993: 56) writes:<sup>3</sup>

*“If the text emphasizes in a variety of mutually reinforcing ways that the glass is half full, the evidence of social science suggests that relatively few in the audience will conclude it is half empty.”*

To frame an event or activity in such a way that counter-frames are suppressed or subordinated is an exercise of power (Ryan, 2004: 378). Power in this context means “discursive control” (Macdonald, 2003: 39) or in other words: to control the emergence of “common sense” about a matter. Analysing such framing power, however, leads to two difficulties.

First, it implies that we can clearly identify from which direction a frame flows and in whose favour it works. This generally may be a problem, but the “war on terror” in this sense is an

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<sup>3</sup> Including international media in this study would increase the variety of observed opinions. However, the majority of US citizens presumably exclusively consumes domestic media – their analysis therefore should suffice here.

exemption: Many documents and speeches are publicly available so that the origins of particular interpretations can be traced.

Secondly, however, the concept of framing power does not explain if a dominant frame is the only reason for the emergence of particular social practices. For example, we can hardly determine the origin of a rally-around the flag effect in the media during a war: Does framing power mean that journalists are “coerced” to silence opposing views – or are they driven by an ingenious patriotic feeling? We may, in general, doubt, that such reasons can be disentangled at all.

### **Objective**

Given the research conducted in the years after 9/11 it is sought to examine here whether the notion of a single-sided frame that works in favour of the US government still holds true. A variety of studies, while analysing the pervasiveness of the frame, have not yet raised the question of its sustainability (e.g., Kellner, 2005; Norris et. al., 2003) that is central for this project. However, the objective of this dissertation is not to produce a representative account of how the “war on terror” has been covered in general (this would require a far larger study). Rather it is an exercise in investigating if there is any significant contestation of the Bush administration’s “war on terror”-frame since the official end of the Iraq war (May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003) and if so – of which quality the diversion is.

Thus the *research hypothesis* is that the single-sided “war on terror” has broken down and that the Bush administration has lost a considerable degree of its framing power. The hypothesis is tested by

- a) measuring the amount and broad patterns of criticism against the practices of the “war on terror” in a content analysis
- b) examining the quality of counter-narratives in a discourse analysis of newspaper articles.

While the research question should be satisfactory answered, we can not demonstrate for sure *why* the strength of the frame may have changed over time. Nevertheless, the findings should contribute to the theoretical debate about the emergence and contestation of frames by establishing the likely influence of real-world-practices.

## **Methodology: Rationales and Procedures**

To examine whether the White House's practices and framing of the "war on terror" is significantly contested we shall do both, analyse the breadth and the depth of dissent voiced. On the one hand, in applying a quantitative content analysis, it is sought to examine in a larger population the frequency and key characteristics of critique against the Bush's "war on terror", hence the aim is to capture the "big picture" (Deacon et al., 1999: 117). On the other hand, an additional discourse analysis should further qualify the nature of counter-narratives. This implies that none of these methods alone would suffice, ideally, they should neutralise each others deficiencies.

However, there is one core weakness that cannot be overcome by either of them – we cannot determine here how particular contents are influencing audiences or how audiences influence discourses, if at all (Bauer, 2000: 134).

### *Content Analysis*

For the detection of common features in large amounts of texts a content analysis is the most suitable method (Hansen, 1998: 123). It not only allows making inferences about larger populations, it furthermore facilitates comparisons between different studies in the field if similar patterns have been examined before, as in the case of the "war on terror".

However, there is a particular shortcoming of content analysis as applied here that goes beyond the loss of detailed meanings of texts: the absence of visual aspects. This cannot be avoided in a study conducted via electronic databases, although it threatens to miss the context in which an article was published (Deacon, 2007: 10). From Artz' research on the visual coverage of the 2003 Iraq war in the New York Times it can for instance be learned that the selection of photos does significantly contribute to the framing of events (2004). Similarly, also the discourse analysis conducted here due to scope restrictions focuses on verbal communications only, and therefore is likely to miss visual contributors (Macdonald, 2003: 4). Despite the absence of a visual analysis, however, it should be reasonable to assume that between the textual and the visual elements there is some degree of coherence.

Another problem may occur from the selection of a relatively small sample. This is taken into consideration by stretching the sample over three different periods in order to avoid that one

event becomes predominant. The selection of the periods was guided by the assumption that “milestone”-events usually cause a higher level of media attention and invite journalists to reflect issues within a broader historical and societal context. Given the research question, this should facilitate the investigation of critique. Generally, it is not sought to cover the time span between 9/11 and the start of the Iraq war here as much research has already been dedicated to this period.

The sample is drawn from the New York Times (NYT), the Eastern Edition of the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) and USA Today, the three US national papers with the largest circulation. They can be seen as agenda setters for other news outlets and the electronic media; this should soothe the negative effects caused by the omission of an electronic media sample. Together the three papers represent an interesting variety. The Times is traditionally a liberal paper whereas the WSJ represents a conservative perspective. Unlike the NYT and the WSJ, USA Today seeks to mix tabloid with broadsheet elements.

Only articles that are mentioning the term “war on terror” in its common variants are included in the population (war against terror/terrorism, war on terrorism). The themes of the “war on terror” can be traced through articles that do not directly name it, however, a direct mentioning is the most transparent criteria to define the population.

The population consists of texts published during the month after the president declared the war as over (1st to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2003), the month after the Abu Ghraib abuses were first reported (29<sup>th</sup> April to 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2004), and the month after the Iraq Study Group (ISG, 2006) launched its report which recommended major changes in the Bush administration’s Iraq policies (7<sup>th</sup> December 2006 to 7<sup>th</sup> January 2007)

The events chosen are likely to produce more articles covering Iraq-related matters than other aspects of the “war on terror”. Indeed, the Iraq war is nationally as well as internationally presumably the most contentious element of the “Bush doctrine”, it has, in Bush words, become the “central front” of the “war on terror” (Bush, 2005). Thus the Iraq-focus is directly born out of the objective of this research: The aim to investigate dissent rather than to provide a full account of how the “war on terror” is covered.

NYT and USA Today articles could be obtained from Lexis Nexis, WSJ texts from the ABI-Info database. From the population all doubles were excluded (generally, the longer articles were



included) as well as articles largely covering different issues (in approx. more than. 80 per cent of the space) while using the keywords in passing only. For each period one third of the texts were randomly selected. This resulted in a sample of 109 coding units; letters to the editor, though often grouped as one document in LexisNexis, were counted separately each.

The term "main" as in the variable "main focus of the text" is used to identify key issues rather than to produce large amounts of detailed data for which we have no measure of significance. The variables were developed after having examined occurring themes in a pilot of five texts for each period. The rationales for the variables, in short, are as follows:

- Identifying the "main focus of the text" shall provide an impression of the salient issues of the "war on terror" coverage.
- "Type of article" is primarily to distinguish between pieces that take a clear stance and pieces that apply a neutral style.
- Three codes that shall, amongst others, help to determine the origin of a story or a critique: "type of author" (in particular to identify guest authors), "source of critique" and "main source of text".
- Four codes to analyse key features of possible critiques: the proportion of quotes in favour or against the government, the author's overall position with regard to the government's "war on terror", the "main focus of the critique" (if critique was voiced), and the use of the term "war on terror" (distanced or not).

Using 20 % of the sample, an intercoder-reliability of over 80 per cent for all variables was achieved despite a number of highly evaluative codes (see Appendix). Presumably, this is a result of the clarity with which authors have positioned themselves and the often strict line drawn between news and opinion. This holds also true for the more tabloid-like USA Today.

### *Discourse Analysis*

As a dominant discourse does not necessarily imply that no dissent at all is voiced, but rather that the dissent stays in the narrow boundaries of the single-sided frame, a content analysis can hardly establish the significance of different attempts of "making meaning" (Macdonald, 2003: 1). Therefore, an additional discourse analysis is conducted.

First one presidential speech is analysed in order to estimate the difference between the government's and the media's account (Entman, 2003). For we cannot assume that the

discourses have remained unchanged (Hall, 1997: 32), we need this update of the government's "war on terror"-frame. One particular speech from May 2004 is chosen because it comprehensively summarises key positions of the administration towards Iraq at this particular time and thereby includes also the Abu Ghraib incidents that played a role in the sample for the content analysis. In general, a presidential speech in particular in war times is of utmost relevance as the president is the supreme commander of the military.

Then, a small selection of editorials, commentaries and analyses *critical* of the government are chosen in order to establish whether they substantially divert from official accounts. The limited number of units examined here does not allow drawing any conclusions about a larger population, neither can we make assumptions which of these discourses is more dominant. However, the sample texts were chosen because the author assumes that they are "typical of certain discourses" (Meyer, 2001: 25).

In contrast, a content analysis appears more objective due to the random selection of a sample – although we should be careful to take this assumption at face value. For instance, our choices of populations and variables are not 'value-free' decisions either (Hansen, 1998: 95) and the co-coding may only produce reliable results within the same cultural and historical context (often, as in this research, the co-coder even comes from the same academic discipline). In sum, a content analysis, like a discourse analysis, therefore constructs reality (Deacon et al., 1999: 131).

Nevertheless, there are some difficulties with reliability and validity specific to discourse analysis. In interpreting texts within their context, for instance, one researcher might relate the "war on terror" to a conflict between so-called Western and so-called Islamic values while another might refer to a history of imperialism.

Generally, any reading and interpretation of meanings depends on our cultural background. The research considered in the literature review for example was conducted by Western scholars, and most of them have an outspoken critical perspective towards the US administration. Someone coming from a different background has a high chance to come to different conclusions. Reliability thus does not mean that any researcher will produce the same results. Instead, it means making transparent the methodological decisions to the greatest possible extent.

This includes clarifying my own background. Having worked as a journalist covering international terrorism for five years, through my research I repeatedly learned about disingenuous declarations and illegal practices of the Bush administration, including the kidnapping of a suspect I had interviewed before by the CIA. This in mind, I may have a particular critical view of the White House. I am aware of this process and unlike critical discourse analysts seek to avoid a deliberate subjective reading wherever possible, although this is rather an ideal than a realistic goal.

As for the methodological perspective, the focus lays on a micro- and meso-level analysis. On a micro-level, word choices and grammar will be examined to identify how linguistic features unfold social functions (Kroger and Wood, 2000: 23). On a meso-level, the speech and the newspaper articles are compared to determine the degree of congruence between their discourses, narratives and word choices.

On a macro-level – where necessary for the understanding of a discourse – some references to larger political and historical contexts will be made (Meyer, 2001: 15). However, the broad contexts of the “war on terror” are so recent that they should still be well known. The benefit of including periods in the analysis that exceed over centuries (as e.g. in Graham et. al., 2004) is seen of limited use to answer the research question. Such periods are not likely to be a common point of reference of audiences, political elites and journalists in the debate about the “war on terror”.

Generally, it is sought here to engage in depth with each text rather than to universalise findings from a small sample – for there is a temptation to routinely claim in the methodological outline that a study is not representative only to pretend exactly this in the presentation of results. For example, to declare that “many articles” share a particular feature on the basis of two or three texts potentially produces spurious evidence. Nevertheless, the relatively small sample allows for some generalising statements – but where they occur, their basis will be made transparent.

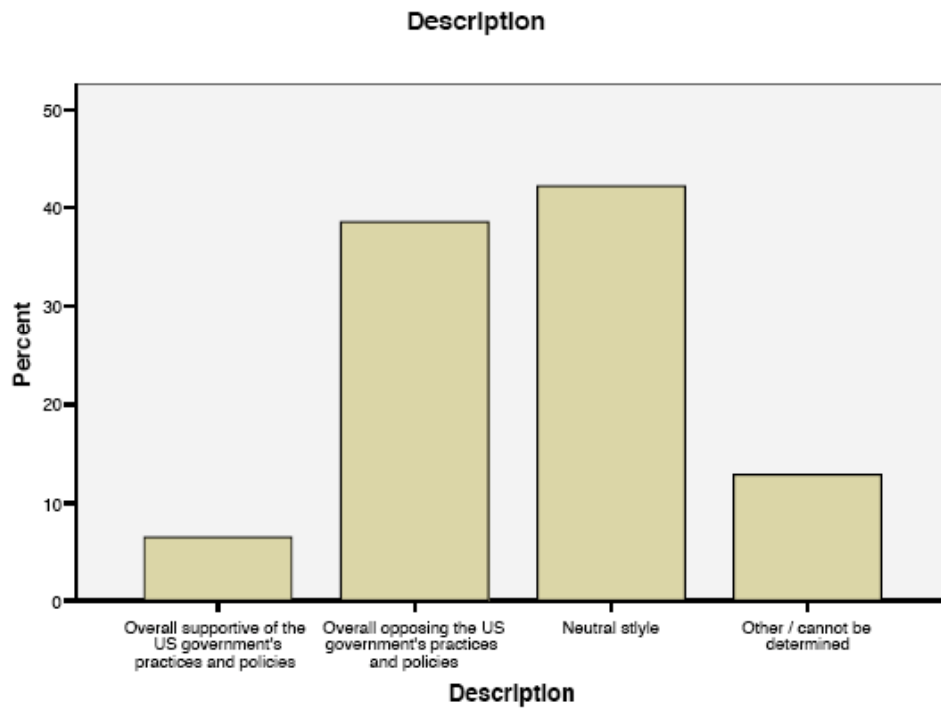
## **Results and Analysis**

### *Content Analysis Findings*

First, findings will be presented for the accumulated data that include all three periods, then some features for each period will be summarised separately. Generally, despite a small sample size mostly percentages are provided as they are easier to interpret and compare.

Indeed, the focus of the “war on terror”-coverage examined here is on Iraq (41.3 % of the articles). This is not surprising given the dates chosen for analysis. The second most frequent value is “treatment of alleged terrorists / human and civil rights/ anti-terror legislation” (26.6 %). This is partly an outcome of the fact that the Abu Ghraib-sample was the largest of the three samples (52 out of 109 articles). Thus it accounts for 21 of the 29 mentions in the “Human Rights”-category. None of the articles was mainly covering Afghanistan; the hunt for terrorists as such – though it occurred as a theme in a number of texts – did rarely play a key role either.

In contrast to earlier research in the field, a constant high level of critique voiced against the government’s “war on terror”-practices is observed. Only 6.4 % per cent of the articles were overall supportive of the government. Conversely, 38.5 % were overall critical (Table1); about one third (33.9%) did not voice any critique at all, neither directly nor quoted from a third party (Table 6). In the three papers, news – written in a neutral style – and opinion pieces were usually separated.



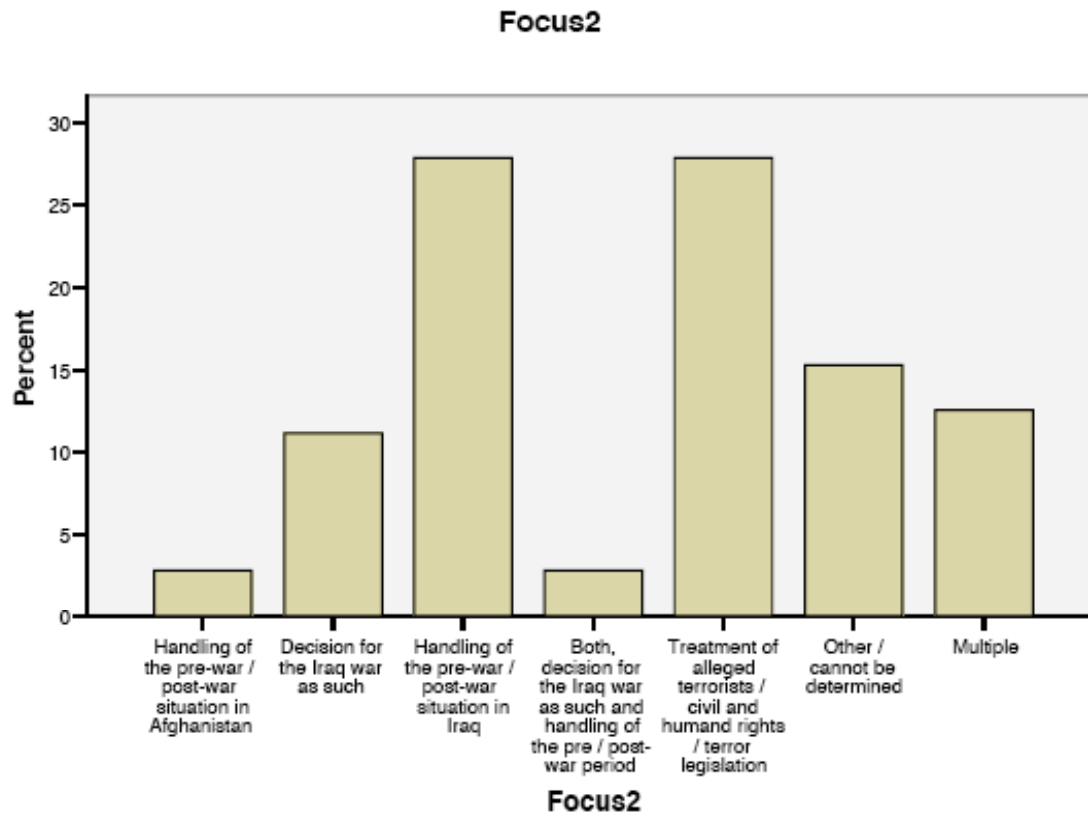
**Table 1: Position of the author across all types of articles**

Type * Description Crosstabulation							
			Description				Total
			Overall supportive of the US government's practices and policies	Overall opposing the US government's practices and policies	Neutral style	Other / cannot be determined	
Type	News	Count	0	2	34	0	36
		% within Type	.0%	5.6%	94.4%	.0%	100.0%
	Commentary / Editorial / Analysis	Count	5	30	9	13	57
		% within Type	8.8%	52.6%	15.8%	22.8%	100.0%
	Other / Cannot be determined	Count	2	10	3	1	16
		% within Type	12.5%	62.5%	18.8%	6.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	7	42	46	14	109	
	% within Type	6.4%	38.5%	42.2%	12.8%	100.0%	

**Table 2: Position of the author for different types of articles**

Therefore, the statistics for the frequency of critique are more meaningful when we examine them for each type of article (the relationship between "position of the author" and "type of article" is statistically significant, P-value < 0.001): Almost all news articles are neutral in

style (94.4 %), whereas of the analyses, comments and editorials, 52.6 per cent are overall critical of the government, 8.8 % are supportive (Table 2).



**Table 3: Focus of the critique (valid per cent, i.e. within the group of texts in which critique occurred)**

Analysing the nature of the criticism reveals that critical accounts not necessarily focus mainly on the launch of a military operation against Iraq (Table 3): From those who voiced critique (valid per cent), each 27.8 % concentrate mainly on civil/ human rights and the handling of the situation in Iraq. Only a small percentage of the critique mainly focuses on the decision to invade Iraq as such (11.1 %). Of the eight cases that fall into the latter category, five are explained by the month-long period immediately after the war.

External authors were more likely to produce texts that take a clear stance towards the government, positive or negative. This may indicate that staff writers were more cautious, however, they naturally produce a far higher percentage of neutral texts as the news

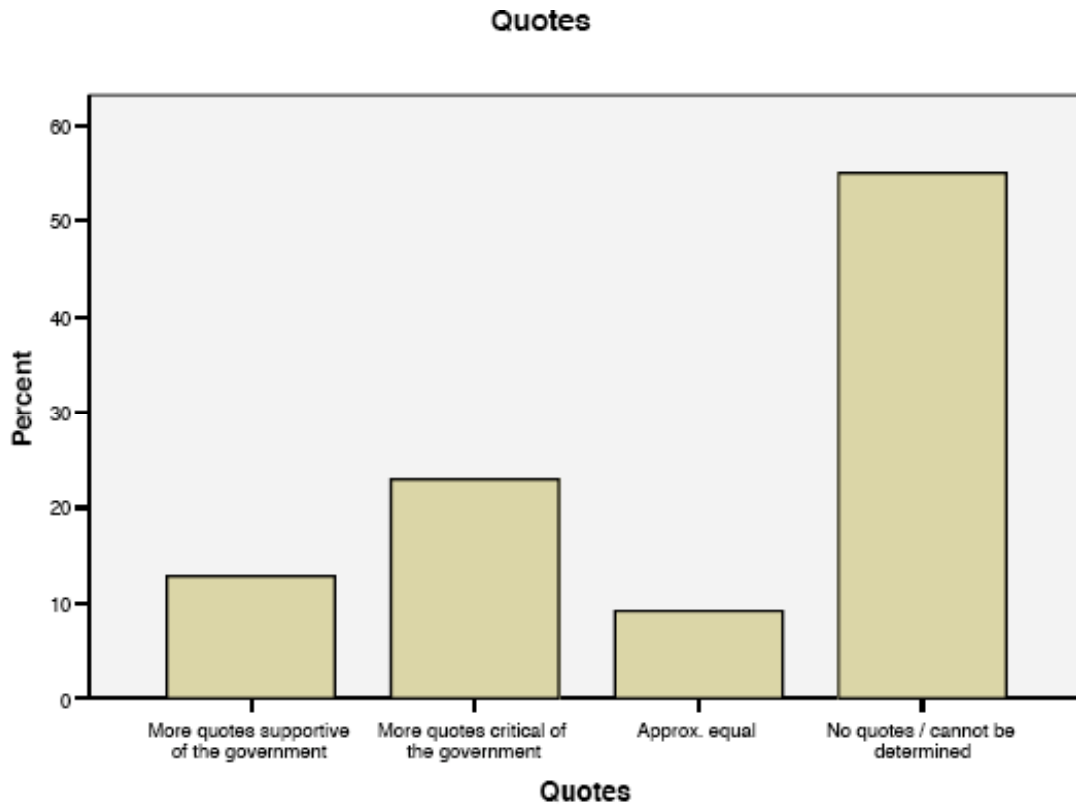
production is usually their realm ("author" and "description of the text" are significantly correlated,  $p < 0.01$ ).

			Source1								Total
			Government officials and/or agencies	Opposition	Foreign countries or leaders / International organisations	Academics, non-governm ental experts	Polls	Authors own judgement and common knowledge	Other / cannot be determined	Multiple	
Type	News	Count	17	5	1	0	5	0	4	4	36
		% within Type	47.2%	13.9%	2.8%	.0%	13.9%	.0%	11.1%	11.1%	100.0%
	Commentary / Editorial / Analysis	Count	5	0	1	1	0	43	0	7	57
		% within Type	8.8%	.0%	1.8%	1.8%	.0%	75.4%	.0%	12.3%	100.0%
	Other / Cannot be determined	Count	1	0	0	0	0	13	2	0	16
		% within Type	6.3%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	81.3%	12.5%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	23	5	2	1	5	56	6	11	109	
	% within Type	21.1%	4.6%	1.8%	.9%	4.6%	51.4%	5.5%	10.1%	100.0%	

**Table 4: Main source of the text for different types of articles**

The results for the variable "main source of the text" indicate that the government enjoys greater prominence. More than half of the texts largely rely on the author's own judgement (usually opinion pieces), therefore we shall again split the value for each type of article ("type of article" and "sources" are significantly correlated,  $p < 0.001$ ): This reveals that about half of the news texts (47.2 %) largely rely on government sources in contrast to only 13.9 % that pay more attention to oppositional voices (Table 4).

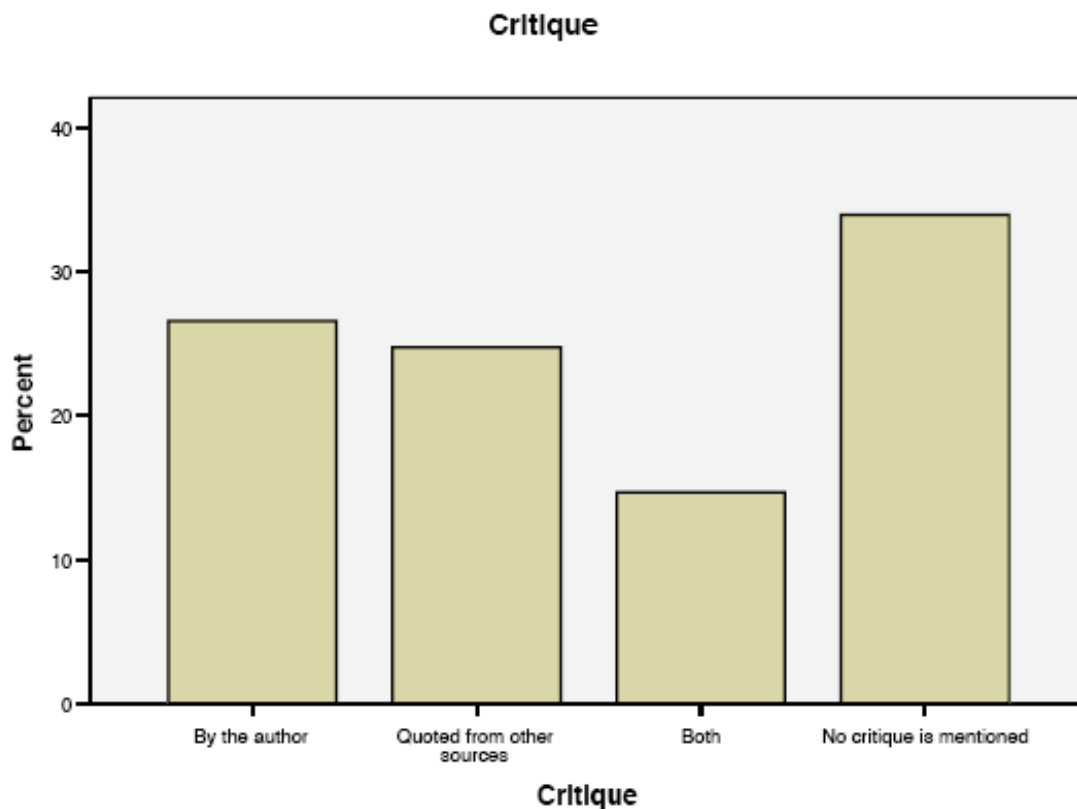
Thus while the linguistic style of the news is neutral, the incumbents are more often heard in the news with regard to the "war on terror" – the term "war on terror", besides, was overwhelmingly used without any distancing across all types of articles (93.6 %).



**Table 5: Proportions of different types of quotes**

However, the greater attention to the government's voices does not necessarily mean that officials were allowed to argue obviously in favour of the White House: In 22.9% of all types of articles there were more quotes critical of the government compared to 12.8 % with more supportive claims (Table 5). Thus while the government seems to have greater access, it was not able to overcome the more frequent expression of critical voices. In 62.5 % of the cases were critique was actually voiced (i. e. again: valid per cent), authors did not (entirely) "hide" behind quotes of a third party (Table 6).





**Table 6: Source of the critique**

There are differences to be reported between the three papers. The NYT has produced far more critical articles in the sample than the two other papers (55.6 % of the NYT texts were overall opposing the government as compared to 27.3 % of the US Today and 13.6 % of the WSJ texts). The WSJ in turn published the highest ratio of supportive texts: 13.6 %.

Finally, some data is calculated for each period separately to examine if themes have changed over time, calculated again within the category “analyses/ commentaries/ editorials” (valid per cent). Most significantly, there is considerably more critique against the “war on terror” practices after the Abu Ghraib-scandal broke: 63.3 % of the articles are critical, 10 % are supportive. In the period after the official end of the Iraq war, however, only about one third of the opinion pieces overall oppose the US government (35.3 %), 11.8 % are supportive; for the time span after the ISG-report the ratio is 50 % opposing to zero supportive. We should not overvalue these results as the samples for each period are relatively small, however they indicate rough trends.

Analysing the focus of the critique reveals some shifts between the three periods. Here, again valid percentages are presented (i.e. only within the group that did voice critique). For the first period the decision for the war as such was the most frequent focus (25%), followed by the civil and human rights variable (20 %). For the Abu-Ghraib-period the latter variable was most salient (32.4 %), followed by the "handling of the situation in Iraq" (24.3 %), and in the last period, the focus laid on the handling of Iraq (37.5 %) and on human rights (16.7%)

### *Discourse Analysis*

In the speech analysed here, George Bush outlines a "new strategy" for Iraq and develops a "humanity-narrative" within the "war on terror"-discourse (Bush, 2004).

While in the discourse after 9/11 binary constructions according to Jackson (2005: 2) were established to justify violence against terrorists, hence the military was the "defender" of the nation, in this speech the signifier "soldier" is represented as a saviour who builds schools, refurbishes hospitals and gifts democracy and sovereignty to the "Iraqi people".

The speech constructs not only the notion of a soldier as a good Samaritan, but unfolds the patriotic appeal of a whole Samaritan nation exporting its "American values", which are portrayed as freedom, democracy and human rights. The US and the "Iraqi people" are represented as sticking to the same ideals; hence the Iraqi people is part of the good "us" (Carpentier, 2007: 12).

The "Iraqi people" is described as an entity that is acting, not acted upon – in so doing responsibility is shifted from the US government. The military here appears like a contractor of the Iraqi people, a guest invited to free and restore the country, not an occupational force. In this reading, the insurgents do not fight the US, rather they seek to strip from the Iraqi people their right to self-governance.

Furthermore, the American government is not described as actively having pursued this conflict, rather it happened to the government. Bush uses the term "history" as a subject that acts, e.g. "history has placed great demands on our country". This pattern of shifting responsibility is further reinforced by stressing the "sovereignty" of the new Iraqi

government and by repeating that UNO and NATO have asked the US to support Iraq. Conversely, the international resistance against the war is not problematised.

We have to understand the particular historical context to make sense of this framing attempt: Neither had at this time any links between Al Qaida and Saddam Hussein been established, nor had WMD been found – both aspects together formed the foundation “myths” of the war (O’Shaughnessy, 2004), and both are omitted in Bush’s declaration. Furthermore, the speech was given approximately one year after the president had declared the so-called major combat operation as over – however, more people had been killed since than during the official war. Meanwhile, the Abu Ghraib scandal had called the US operation further into question. Thus Bush’s speech apparently aims at reassuring the public that the war was “just” and necessary.

Bush continues to use binary constructions of “good” and “evil” (e.g., Coe et al., 2004): The “enemies” are described killers/ murders/ terrorists that seek to establish tyranny/ the death of democracy/ an agenda of death/ fear and fanaticism by being brutal/ shocking and demoralising. Conversely, there are the “Iraqi people” and the US Army, which are patriotic/ strong/ hard working/ skilled and courageous in welcoming or spreading freedom/ hope/ security/ prosperity and sovereignty. On the one hand, this is to manufacture “a catastrophic threat and danger” (Jackson, 2005: 181), but it also paves the way to make sense of the Abu Ghraib scandal which Bush refers to in a short paragraph: Those US citizens who had committed the crimes of Abu Ghraib are represented as undermining the “American values”, hence they are not part of the “us” but of the evil otherness.

On the same day the speech was given a commentary appeared in the NYT (Herbert, 2004), announcing that the president is going to outline his solutions for Iraq later. The article develops a narrative of incompetence and disingenuousness to describe the government: According to the author, Bush started an unnecessary war on the basis of lies (disingenuousness), and now he has no idea how to solve the mounting problems (incompetence). Hence the article seeks to delegitimise the content of the speech before it was actually given.

The text starts with describing private weekend activities of the president (cycling, his daughter’s graduation event) before it explores its critique. This functions to contrast the

protracted conflict in Iraq with an apparently relaxed president; it shall symbolise that Bush is not aware of the seriousness of the situation.

Excluded from the editorial are positive or balanced remarks about the administration as well as any issue that could potentially work in favour of it, such as the capture of Al Qaida operatives in Afghanistan. Thus the intensity of the critique unfolds the picture of moral decay in the government like in the final days of Ancient Rome. The author reinforces this impression by attributing words and phrases like “absurdities”, “madness”, and “deliberately exploiting fear” to the government. Furthermore, ironic distance, such as in writing that the president plans to present a “clear strategy” (quotation marks in the original text), underline the notion of a leader not to be taken seriously.

Generally, in the texts analysed here Bush’s leadership is a common thread; other social agents are thus not held responsible to a similar extent. However, the angles from which critiques of the “war on terror” are linked with Bush’s leadership are different.

For example, a WSJ-analysis (Calmes, 2004) stresses that Bush is the first president holding a “Master of Business Administration”-degree and then discusses “management” mistakes. This is a fundamental difference, as Bush’s personality and ability are not per se called into question – for management mistakes are correctable. In this account the rationales for invading Iraq initially forwarded by the government are not based on deliberate lying but on the [regrettable] use of “bad intelligence”.

Conversely, the NYT editorial “Unfinished Business” (2006), which discusses the alterations in the justice system established after 9/11, unfolds a narrative of imperialism. Here the government instead of being a “Samaritan” pursues its own power interests and thereby disgraces the nation.

Thus the patriotism discourse does play a role, but not in favour of the government – while the notion of [good and human] “American values” is implicitly shared, the Bush administration is placed outside of these values.

Although by far not all texts divert fundamentally from the official language, as Bennett et al. (2006) in their study of Abu Ghraib coverage have shown, this particular article dismisses the official linguistic framing (the author’s choice in quotation marks, the wording of the

government in brackets): "torture" [in Abu Ghraib, the author] (abuse), "invasion of Iraq" (operation enduring freedom), "stripping basic rights" from a suspect (illegal enemy combatant), "domestic spying" (intelligence operation), "the president's imperial visions" ("war on terror"), "the CIA's secret illegal prisons" (extraterritorial rendition). If the official versions are used, quotation marks signify a critical distance.

Unlike Bush's speech (2004) the article problematises the human rights of prisoners. With regard to terror suspect Jose Padilla the author writes for example:

*"Government lawyers [are, the author] arguing that a prisoner could not testify that he was tortured by American agents, because their brutality was a secret."*

The quote illustrates the cynical and ironic tone in which the government's actions are represented. This tone functions to shed light on practices that from the author's point of view should never have become "common sense". In this reading, torture of prisoners is not a failure of a small number of guards but a part of a larger imperialism project that included lawlessness as a regular feature. This imperialism has been stretched internationally, by invading Iraq, but also nationally by limiting the power of the judiciary.

Critiques do not necessarily apply such a sharp tone. For example, in a USA Today-article (Keen, 2005) the disingenuousness-narrative re-occurs, although the text is written in the semi-neutral style of a news analysis. For instance, many critical comments are not directly made by the author, but cited from "experts" and "the public"; hence the argument is apparently strengthened by references to larger entities. The sober language in general can serve the purpose of sounding more persuasive than an emotional engagement with an issue.

At the end of the article four pairs of Bush-quotes are listed, each pair highlights fundamental differences between earlier and more recent statements about the "war on terror". They underline the apparent neutrality of the text by presenting "original evidence". Although Bush is not called a liar, this analysis functions like a charge sheet against his credibility.

In sum, none of the texts analysed here resembles the interpretations forwarded in the presidential speech.

## **Discussion**

After 9/11 it has been established that the Bush government's framing of the "war on terror" served the political purpose of pursuing a particular set of counter-terror measures, ranging from civil and human rights constraints to the launch of two wars. We have seen that these practices are meanwhile called into question in media reports – frequently and fundamentally.

In sum it can therefore be concluded that the once single-sided frame observed by a number of scholars (Jackson, 2005; Kellner, 2005; Norris et al, 2003; Ryan, 2004) has broken down. While it might still be used to organise international events, it does not necessarily work in favour of the Bush administration anymore. To further specify the extent to which the government has lost its framing power it is helpful to revisit the two core elements of the single-sided "war on terror"-frame – the counter-violence rationale and binary constructions of good and evil.

The counter-violence-rationale, which holds that a "tough" reaction could be framed as the only possible response to 9/11 (Gershkoff et. al., 2005; Graham et. al. 2005, Ryan, 2004), appears to have been discredited by a variety of practices. In particular the limitation of human rights for imprisoned terror suspects and uncovered cases of abuses are meanwhile amongst the most debated issues in the "war on terror" coverage examined here. Similarly, the current handling of the Iraq war is widely portrayed as a failure.

However, the relatively small amount of critique against the invasion of Iraq as such indicates that the "war logic" is not called into question to the same extent. One should nevertheless be cautious to conclude that the war is supported – the issue is rarely discussed at all. Whereas Kumar might see this as the result of [deliberate] omission in order to sustain economic privileges of media conglomerates (2006), there may be other reasons. For example, it is also possible that media outlets were shying away from the issue as their role in the run-up to the invasion has often been described as a lapdog position (Kellner, 2005: 63). Furthermore, the collection of sample periods in this study may explain the lesser salience of the issue: Interestingly, critique against the war as such was more frequent immediately after the war had been declared as over; later critiques rather focused on the handling of the post-war situation. This could partly be explained by the growth of insurgent

and terrorist violence that attracts more media attention (Nacos, 2002; Wilkinson, 2000; Wolfsfeld, 1997).

The second key feature of the initial “war on terror” frame – binary constructions – continues to be used by the government as the Bush speech suggests (2004). However, in the newspaper sample texts largely ignored the good/evil dichotomy. In those commentaries and editorials that described the US government as undermining the legal system or that blamed it for human rights abuses, the once clear-cut line between good and evil apparently becomes more difficult to be drawn. This statement however is only based on the small selection of texts for the discourse analysis and therefore subject to further investigations of larger samples.

Although the emergence of dissent can be traced through all three newspapers, it plays only a minor role in the WSJ. This could be a result, on the hand, of the WSJ’s more conservative and the NYT’s more liberal position. On the other hand, the particularly high level of critique in the NYT could possibly be explained as a reaction to the large amount of critique that was raised against the paper’s pre-Iraq-war coverage, which was described as to reliant on official sources (Auletta, 2005).

While we can conclude that the single-sided frame has broken down, we shall however be cautious to assume that the government’s “war on terror”-frame as such does not enjoy any influence anymore – as in particular for the discourse analysis only articles critical of the government were chosen. In order to determine how representative these critical accounts are we would have to analyse more texts, including different periods and different media outlets.

Finally, the observation of frequent critique also in the first period of the content analysis sample – i.e. before the insurgent, terrorist and criminal activities had developed to the extent known today – raises one important question: Possibly, the level of critique has been underestimated in research covering earlier periods, as Althaus’s analysis of the first Gulf War suggests.

*"However, because the prevailing view in the press independence literature has been that journalists serve as gatekeepers rather than sources of oppositional discourse,*

*little attention has been given to the possibility that journalists might be making independent contributions to critical policy discourse.” (Althaus, 2003: 385)*

Unfortunately, the only study that compares pre-, post-, and during-the war coverage was conducted for UK media (Tumber and Palmer, 2004). A similar approach should be adopted for the US to determine if the breakdown of the single-sided frame started earlier or even if its strength per se has been overvalued.

The reminder of this section will be devoted to a discussion of possible reasons for the contestation of the frame. Consequently such an exercise is based on reasoning about plausibility, rather than on presenting evidence – its aim thus is not to establish final explanations but to show how the findings here contribute to the theoretical models of framing power.

The design of this study does not allow drawing conclusions as to where dissent emerged first; hence we cannot determine if Bennett is right in assuming that the media are indexing elite discourses (1990). What can however be said from this study is that journalists in the majority of cases do not hide their critique behind external sources.

The more fundamental question not raised by Bennett however is why it has become possible to voice critique at all. The disingenuousness and incompetence-discourses indicate that over time failed policies and wrong predictions unfold a negative accumulative effect and create a climate in which the official frame can be safely contested. This is vividly underlined by the larger amount of critique observed after the Abu Ghraib-abuses became public.

Jackson’s (2005) assumption that practices and linguistics together determine the strength of a discourse indicates that the same then must be true if practices fail. Conversely, it would be far less plausible to assume that the apparent failure to stabilize Iraq after the combat operation was declared to have succeeded, reported inconstancies in the rationales for the war, and human rights abuses did not impact the Bush administration’s ability to sustain a single-sided account of reality. Nevertheless, there are other factors which may explain the higher level of polarisation, such as simply the time that passed since 9/11 or the fact that in the period covered here there were presidential and midterm elections.



Generally, if the failure of a policy is apparent, why should media shy away to take the initiative and formulate critique by themselves, as Althaus has suggested (2003: 385)? The rather static indexing and hegemony models do not account for such a scenario.

Therefore, Entman's assumption of cascading activation (2003) is regarded here as the most flexible and complex model – for it does not necessarily exclude the emergence of a frame contestation from outside the elite. However, it should be complemented with a "frame practice" variable: Any powerful discourse such as the "war on terror"-frame rests on the credibility of those dominating it. Credibility, however, also rests on the assessment of practices. This implies that a cascade is not an entirely correct notion, as depending on the performance of practices the cascade may be turned upside down.

Once critique has been voiced the decline of a frame is likely to be the result of a virtuous circle: Presumably, practical failures, the emergence of elite dissent, a more critical media and a decline of trust in the government reported in survey results mutually reinforce each other.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation has sought to determine if the Bush administration's framing of the "war on terror" still enjoys the almost exclusive dominance that has been observed after 9/11. It has been demonstrated that the term "war on terror" has entered common vocabulary, but the practices linked to it are the subject of an often hefty critique in print media. Coverage thus permanently crosses the boundaries of the official frame.

This result has been substantiated by combining a quantitative and a qualitative method. First, the data from the content analysis has indicated a high frequency of critique against the practices of the Bush administration's "war on terror", in particular against its efforts in Iraq and its civil and human rights policies. Secondly, the discourse analysis has revealed that the dissent voiced in the media marks a fundamental diversion from the Bush government's framing of the "war on terror". The emerging counter-narratives for example in part call the government's "war on terror"-practices and its credibility per se into question.

Some of what has been discussed above may seem obvious to an audience not familiar with the scholarship on the “war on terror”: For example, the mere fact that critique is voiced may appear familiar to someone regularly exposed to US news. However, it should be stressed that in the academic literature the frame has been portrayed as all-pervasive and almost unique in its strength thus far. In contrast to the cold war-frame, to which the “war on terror”-frame has been compared, it appears to be rather short-lived at least with regard to its single-sidedness.

While it could not be determined here where critique first emerged, it has been sought to demonstrate that the failure of practices most likely facilitated the emergence of critique. Therefore it has been suggested to pay greater attention to the performance of practices linked to a frame in order to explain its contestation. As any social phenomenon rarely depends on one cause, however, a variety of possible other contributors to the decline of the frame should be considered as well.

In a way, this dissertation has raised more questions than it has answered: For example, it would be interesting to examine under which circumstances an event or practice facilitates the emergence of critique: Does, for instance, the Abu Ghraib-scandal play a more salient role in the breakdown of the frame because of the symbolic power the pictures of tortured prisoners may unfold, as suggested by Macdonald (2003: 10):

*“Collective images of prisoners herded together in confined spaces, and bowed into submissive pose, cannot be abstracted from a history of imagery stretching from slavery to the concentration camp.”*

Furthermore, it should be examined if the direction from which critique flows can be identified. Hence, did political elites first voice concerns about the “war on terror” and did the media index their discourse, as Bennett’s model holds (1990)? Or were elites in turn encouraged to oppose the government because of more critical coverage? Did both groups influence each other at the same time? Finally, which role did public opinion play?

A research design that seeks to answer these questions needs to include not only an analysis of survey results, but also interviews with journalists and elites. Moreover, we would presumably need to examine electronic media coverage, elite discourses and the gradual emergence of dissent on a timeline.

After 9/11, the emergence of the single-sided “war on terror” frame was explained by a number of studies focusing on different aspects, from media production logic (Dimitrova and Stroembaeck, 2005) to public opinion (Gershkoff et. al., 2005) and elite reliance (Bennett et. al., 2006). Similarly the breakdown of the single-sided frame cannot be accounted for in one, limited research.

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## **Appendix 1: Coding Schedule**

(Inter-coder reliability for each code in brackets)

### **Newspaper (1.00)**

- 1 The New York Times
- 2 USA Today
- 3 The Wall Street Journal (Eastern Edition)

### **Date (1.00)**

Day/Month/Year

### **Type of article (1.00)**

- 1 News
- 2 Commentary / Editorial / Analysis
- 3 Interview
- 4 Other / Cannot be determined

### **Type of author (0.95)**

- 1 External
- 2 Internal
- 3 News agency
- 4 Other / Cannot be determined

### **Main Focus of the text (0.82)**

- 1 Afghanistan
- 2 Iraq
- 3 Hunt for terrorists
- 4 Treatment of alleged terrorists / Civil and human rights / Terror legislation
- 5 Other / Cannot be determined
- 6 Multiple

### **Main Source of the text (0.82)**

- 1 Government and / or government agencies
- 2 Opposition
- 3 Foreign countries or officials, international organisations
- 4 Academics, non-governmental experts
- 5 Polls
- 6 Authors own judgement and / or common knowledge
- 7 Other / Cannot be determined
- 8 Multiple

### **Use of the term "war on terror" (0.86)**

- 1 Distanced
- 2 Not distanced
- 3 Both
- 4 Other / Cannot be determined

**The author's position is best described as (1.00)**

- 1 Overall supportive of the US government's current practices and policies
- 2 Overall critical of the US government's current practices and policies
- 3 Neutral in style / Balanced
- 4 Other / Cannot be determined

**Direct and indirect quotes (0.86)**

- 1 More quotes supportive of the US government
- 2 More quotes critical of the US government
- 3 Approx. equal
- 4 No quotes / Cannot be determined

**Source of the critique (0.95)**

- 1 The author
- 2 Quoted from other sources
- 3 Both
- 4 Cannot be determined
- 5 No critique is mentioned

**Only if critique is voiced: Main focus of the critique (0.82)**

- 1 Decision for the Afghanistan war as such
- 2 Handling of the pre-war / post-war situation in Afghanistan
- 3 Both, 1 and 2
- 4 Decision for the Iraq war as such
- 5 Handling of the pre-war / post-war situation in Iraq
- 6 Both, 4 and 5
- 7 Hunt for terrorists
- 8 Treatment of alleged terrorists / civil and human rights / anti-terror legislation
- 9 Rhetoric of the government
- 10 Other / Cannot be determined
- 11 Multiple



## **Appendix 2: Codebook**

### **General guide**

- The term main, as in “main focus” or “main source” refers to the majority of the text. Many texts contain a number of sources and refer to a number of issues, however, there is usually one big thread that can be identified. Generally, the overall approach of this coding schedule is to capture the broad pattern of texts – rather than comparing the exact length of pro-, and anti-government quotes, for example, the coder should estimate their approximate proportion. Similarly, the question how the author’s position is best described looks for the core message rather than the nuances of a coding unit.
- “Multiple” refers to a combination of at least two of the possible values of a variable and should only be used, if these values play an approximately equal role in the text.
- If not otherwise stated, all variables refer to the US, e.g. US policies, US government, US opposition parties. If a text criticises for instance the UK policies in Iraq this is not counted here.
- References to pre-9/11 problems, e.g. intelligence failures, do not count as critiques.
- The term “war on terror” in all its variations (war against terror, war against terrorism, war on terrorism) is broadly understood as any of the situations referring to the government’s efforts to combat terrorism or to situations where it claims to do so, including all the values listed in the “focus”-variables.
- Speaking about the “government” includes “government agencies” such as the police, the military and intelligence services.

### **Type of article**

- News: Usually neutral in style.
- Commentary / Editorial / Analysis: Refers to any analytical and opinion piece, including most investigative reports which usually contain a high proportion of analysis as well.
- “Other” includes for example letters to the editors.

### **Type of author**

The distinction between internal (staff writer) / external (guest) authors and news agency usually can only be made if an external author / agency is identified as such in a byline. If this is not the case, the variable is measured as internal (a letter to the editor is “other”).

### **Main focus of the text**

- Afghanistan and Iraq refer to any issue related to the two wars (as well as the pre/post-war-periods), including war financing and economic consequences, the size of troop deployment, and the rise and fall of terror groups within these countries.

### **Main focus of the text / Main focus of the critique**

- “Hunt for terrorists” could often be seen as a subcategory of Iraq or Afghanistan, however it should be selected separately if the article mainly covers efforts to capture terror suspects.
- The hunt for terror suspects is distinguished from the moment when someone has been captured. Here we chose the value “treatment of alleged terrorists / civil and human rights / terror legislation”. This value includes the broad debate about prisoner rights after 9/11 as well as the discussion about the US anti-terror legislation, for example the “Patriot Act”.

- Other: For example texts that cover mainly the presidential election, in which security politics played a role.
- Multiple focuses a rare as they indicate that two issues are given equal importance, this may mainly occur in articles that sum up the "war on terror" efforts thus far.

### **Main focus of the critique**

This variable is, of course, only counted if critique is voiced, however small its role in the text.

### **Main source of the text**

- Government and government agencies include government politicians, the police, intelligence services, "the foreign office" and the like.
- Other: For example lawyers or terror suspects and their families
- "Own judgement / common knowledge" often applies to analytical and opinion pieces that are not based on genuine researches.

### **Source of the critique**

This should also be counted if the critique plays a minor role in the text.

### **Use of the term "war on terror"**

Distanced would for example mean that the term is used within quotation marks or that phrases like "so-called" or "Bush's war on terror" are added. This variable pays only attention to linguistics, it does not measure if the author distances him/herself from the practices of the "war on terror".

### **The author's position**

This variable captures the position towards the government and its "war on terror" efforts. "Cannot be determined" should therefore be chosen if the author for example discusses an issue such as torture without making references to the government at all. The same applies to the following category, "direct and indirect quotes".

### **Direct and indirect quotes**

- This variable gives equal importance to direct and indirect quotes.
- "Cannot be determined" should be chosen if the quotes are for example neutral or descriptive instead of explicitly supporting or criticising the government's practices and policies.

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