

“Blood Looks Very Red on the Colour Television Screen”: The Evolution of Representing Modern War in America

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One wonders if in a future democracy which has uninhibited television coverage in every home will ever be able to fight a war, however just...The full brutality of the combat will be there in close up and colour, and blood looks very red on the colour television screen.

Robin Day (Knightly 2002: 452)

Given the crucial role that the media plays in our understandings of war, it is important to examine the ways in which *Operation: Iraqi Freedom* has been represented in mainstream American media. In order to do so, this paper will demonstrate how US television news was called upon to play a supportive role in legitimating an attack that was carried out in the absence of any substantively damning evidence, UN sponsorship, or a fully obliging American public. The paper argues that a symbiotic relationship between the military and mainstream media has emerged that is paving the way for a new kind of battlefield where the lines between soldier and journalist are blurred.

In the last few decades, conventional wars between state armies have become rarities “and nuclear wars cannot be fought lest the world be devastated” (Creveld 2002: 64). The tenets of democracy and capitalism are spreading around the world, raising the importance of capital and the free market above guns and bombs. Wars based on the division between government, army, and people are becoming obsolete, making the ‘black and white clarity’ of good vs. evil in WWII a thing of the past. In place of more traditional war, “low intensity conflict” (Ibid.) has become the new norm, meaning that enemies will be less obvious, often nameless and stateless, holding loyalties not to their nations but rather, to themselves. Although these changes have been made explicitly evident through terrorist activities such as the attack on the World Trade Center and bombings of various embassies around the world, the United States continues to base its military actions around more conventional understandings of war – both how it should be fought and how it should be reported.

In order to maintain its national identity as the hyper-masculine, heavily militarized, world hegemon, the United States needs to ensure that the American public still sees conventional war as a legitimate problem-solver, for, as David Campbell (1993) has written, it is in war that identity is most effectively secured (3). The evolution from conventional towards ‘low-intensity’ could be highly damaging for the United States since their Pax-Americana-induced military-industrial complex is part of the glue that holds the national identity together – an identity desperately reliant upon the easy identification of the enemy ‘Other.’ However, since conventional war has become less and less legitimate to so many people, and ‘evil,’ ‘naturally-occurring’ enemies have become harder to find (no matter how many the US may attempt to construct), the United States government and military have had to rely extensively on the news media in order to legitimate its war efforts and maintain the status quo.

As Miskin, Rayner and Lalic (2005) have written, “when one’s nation is at war, reporting becomes an extension of the war” (13). Throughout its own evolution, the media has engaged in a complicated dance with the Pentagon and the military. The media can act as ‘home-team’ cheerleaders, boost or lower troop morale, and persuade those who allocate funds for defence that their money is well spent or squandered (Baroody 1998). In the case of *Operation: Iraqi Freedom*, the media itself is not only the purveyor of stories, but is a story in and of itself. Given that more than a year after the invasion, a majority of Americans still

supported the government's war in Iraq (Hiebert 2003: 253) it has become increasingly important to examine the influence that the US mainstream broadcast media's relationship with the military has had in promoting such encouragement. News does not mirror reality but rather, it helps to shape it, or at least our understanding of a *version* of reality. Television news is especially important to examine because "for two-thirds of the people who watch television in the industrialized world, that medium is their primary source of information" (Sauvageau 1991: 51). That amounts to hundreds of millions of viewers accumulating millions of opinions – all of which are based around a constructed frame.

As mentioned above, a large percentage of Americans agreed with the war in Iraq and Bush's reasons for being there in the first place. Many accepted the 'humanitarian assistance' excuses, the 'Hitler-esque' slander of Saddam Hussein, and the national security rhetoric. Many accepted this discourse and the war that it represented because the discourse, so frequently and successfully communicated, has traveled into the sacred territory of 'common knowledge.' According to Belsey (2002), the press is

silently and anonymously informed by the representation the bourgeoisie transmits of the relations between human beings and the world. This understanding of the way things are is so pervasive that it comes to seem like a law of nature, and its hero is 'Eternal Man,' a classless (and generally male) figure who recognizes his own ideals in the norms of good sense and good taste that prevail at any given time (31).

Decades of US political groups not only defending the truth as they perceived it, but initiating devastating violence against people who did not share their convictions, has left many seriously doubting the assertion of truth claims (Ibid.:71).

Stepping in a New Direction

Operation: Iraqi Freedom could be labeled as one of the most protested wars ever fought by the US military since Vietnam. Under such conditions of dissent, the US military and government were faced with difficult challenges, and the subsequent strategies undertaken to organize the hoards of press became crucial both to the representation of the war and to the legitimization of war itself. In order to satisfy disenchanted journalists angry over the overt and pooled censorship of *Desert Storm* and still be capable of maintaining the secrecy required to wage a popular war, the US government and military had to develop a new strategy for media participation in times of war. With 'embedding,' a balance was found that combined the control and censorship of pooling in the Gulf War with the feelings of freedom, adventure, and independence that the press had experienced during Vietnam.

The representational projects of war-framing during *Iraqi Freedom* were attempts to change public perception of the nature of war itself (Knightley 2002: 494). In *Desert Storm*, war was represented in a frame constructed by a commitment to narrating a bloodless conflict motivated by US humanitarian intentions. Thanks to the US administration's "Revolution in Military Affairs" media blitz, Patriot and Tomahawk missiles garnered a great deal of the US mainstream media's attention, a strategy that shifted the focus away from human involvement towards exacting technology. For very different reasons, the frame outlining

Operation: Iraqi Freedom, offered a more personalized, human, and heroic face to the war – a frame that emphasized emotion over technology.

This paper will explore the interests that are produced and supported by the particular frames that have been constructed in Iraq and conclude with an understanding that whatever extent the US Administration may choose to involve the American mainstream broadcast media in the future, in order to preserve the hegemonic status quo dominated by the United States, the dominant narrative frame of war will likely be constructed, censored, and controlled by the US military. After the last page is turned, I hope to have shed some light on the carefully planned media-military relationship, how it supports the frames for war, and what the consequences of this relationship are, not only for the media or the military, but for the innocent victims left out of the headlines.

Frames and Framing Effects: The Method Behind the Madness

According to David Mutimer (2000), practicing critical security scholarship “begins by suspending what is commonly taken as given: the objects of international security (and security policy), the identities of the subjects of international actions, and even the interests these actors pursue” (13). He argues that “traditional approaches to security take as given the objects, the identities of those who act, and the interests they have” while *critiquing* traditional security studies allows for a more valuable questioning of the objects of security study, the practices through which security is sought and the identities and interests of those who act to secure (Ibid.: 15). It is here, standing in this critical realm, outside of any traditional approaches to security, that it becomes possible to see that people in fact construct their understandings of issues and do so “by tapping into the symbolic resources that are available to them in their everyday lives” (Pan and Kosicki 2001: 39).

But where do these ‘everyday’ understandings come from? Roxanne Doty (1993) has argued that policy makers function within a discursive space that imposes meanings on the world, meanings, which in turn, create reality (303). David Mutimer (2000) has also argued that, because of the privileged position of the state in international relations, what is claimed by the state often carries the greatest weight (6). In today’s society so enamored with CNN and celebrity reporting, so captivated by the ‘IMAGE,’ I would argue that what is asserted and presented by the mainstream US television news media also carries a great deal of weight if not equal to, or more powerful than that which the government carries. Clearly, the combination of two such powerful purveyors of discourse (the state and the US mainstream media) exerts a profound influence in the process of meaning making.

In an effort to see beyond the formations that make up our understanding of the world, this paper “adopts a view that ‘reality’, as played out by what we perceive as facts, values, and knowledge, is socially constructed” (Driedgera and Eylesba 2003: 1280). When one subscribes to this critical mode of thinking, mainstream American television journalism can be seen not simply as a service used to present facts to the world, but instead as “an inherently rationalizing practice, reifying social meanings into ‘frames,’ while excluding other meanings from the dominant discourse” (Durham 2001: 128).

How Frames Function

According to Reese (2001), a frame is an active, information generating, screening device that acts as a central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration... Frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world (10-1).

What we 'know' about the nature of the social world depends upon how we frame and interpret the cues we receive about that world (Durham 2001: 123). Mainstream US television news is a major interpreter of this world and a major enabler of produced frames. According to Durham:

By treating news frames as evidence of a system that defines what we know and how we know it, it is possible to consider the mass mediated practice of framing as a social process that enables society to function. As an exercise in the construction of meaning, it codifies some social experiences or voices into discrete units of social meaning recognized as 'frames' (Ibid.: 123).

Most people are heavily dependent on the mass media for information about international affairs such as war and as a result, "the media can play an important role in shaping mass perceptions" (Brewer *et al.* 2003: 493). Studies by researchers such as Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley have shown that "issue frames affect importance judgments and that these importance judgments mediate the effects of frames on opinion" (Ibid.: 496). Researchers such as Albritton, Manheim, and Perry, have found that exposure to news coverage not only increases general knowledge about an issue or event but can also significantly influence public opinion. Pan and Kosicki (2001) argue that framing potency comes from three sources: access to and control of material resources, strategic alliances, and stock of knowledge of and skills in frame sponsorship. By combining these resources, they argue that political actors weave a 'web of subsidies' to privilege the dissemination and packaging of information to their own advantage (44).

The concept of 'web of subsidies' stipulates that cost reduction is a basic mechanism for enhancing framing potency. Sources of frames such as political elites, "influence media content by raising or reducing the cost of (or 'subsidizing') news production, including news gathering and packaging" (Ibid.: 45-6). Subsidies, such as press kits, scheduling an event to coincide with press deadlines, government issued images and texts from an event are deeply involved in strategic framing projects. Those who create the frames such as political elites and/or public relations firms may use the above mentioned tools in order to subsidize public deliberation through several available routes:

First, they may subsidize the news media, thus influencing media discourse, by (a) lowering the cost of information gathering and (b) generating cultural resonance of their frame with the news values held by journalists... [Second, they] may subsidize the public, thus influencing public opinion, by (a) creating ideologically toned and emotionally charged catchphrases, labels and (b) linking a position to a political icon, figure or group (Ibid.).

By making reporters' jobs easier, a form of information subsidy, the White House can easily successfully frame any event of its choosing (Ibid.: 47). As this paper delves further into *Operation: Iraqi Freedom* we will discover that this idea of the information subsidy, whereby much of the reporters work has been done pre-packaged, is exactly the premise behind embedding.

Since the act of framing consists of selecting various aspects of a perceived reality, presenting them in a 'subsidized fashion' and making them more salient in a communicating text (like television news), "in such a way as to promote a particular problem, definition, interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Brewer *et al.* 2003: 495), what then, are its *effects*? Framing effects are said to occur when, "in the course of describing an issue or event, the media's emphasis on the subset of potentially relevant considerations causes individuals to focus on these considerations in constructing their opinions" (Shen 2004: 125). Framing effects "can be found in how information is processed and made sense of, how people talk about an issue and how they form political evaluations" (Pan and Kosicki 2001: 39). This is not meant to suggest that alone, a frame is enough in and of itself to produce an overwhelming consensus. The public does develop their own interpretations of media messages but they also incorporate these meanings into their store of everyday common sense knowledge (Ibid.: 37). A successful framing effect is more likely to occur when the media frames comport with the existing beliefs and common sense of the audiences, rendering related concepts more prominent than others (Shen 2004: 126). For example, when knowledge such as the patriotism of troop support, the evilness of the enemy and the goodness of democracy have already been firmly established as 'common sense,' then the framing effects, such as those apparent in *Iraqi Freedom*, could be, and as we shall see, have been, easily achieved.

Why Study Framing?

Interest in framing responds to a recommendation made by Hackett that media studies move beyond a narrow concern "with bias-deviation from an objective standard to a more fruitful view of the ideological character of news, thoroughly structured in its content, practices and relations with society" (Reese 2001: 9). As framing helps provide tools for empirically measuring the construction of common sense it therefore needs to be presented as an exercise in power, particularly as it affects our political world (Ibid.: 9-10). In times of political turbulence and international conflict, frames are often at their most formidable and desperately need to be examined. As Durham (2001) has argued: decoding frames as empirical historical records with an understanding of their ideological premises is necessary to understand whose particular meanings are included in a generalized version of history, whose are not, and on whose terms they are either included or excluded (134).

According to Entman, analysis of frames illuminates the precise way in which influence over a human consciousness is exerted by the communication of information from one location – such as speech or news report – to consciousness (Ibid.: 126).

Frames have a profound impact on the way audiences understand and interpret issues. Recent scholarship (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997; Price, Powers, and Tewksbury

1997) has found substantial evidence indicating that news coverage highlighting certain aspects of issues will make these aspects more salient to audiences and therefore more likely to be used in audience decision making or in subsequent evaluations of issues (Shen 2004: 124). Media and political elites define and give meaning to issues and connect them with the larger political environment through framing. According to Shen, “by selecting certain information and highlighting it to the exclusion of other information, framing can help shape public opinions and audience interpretations of issues and events” (Ibid.: 123). In short, frames play a powerful role in guiding people’s understandings of the world and the judgments they make (Brewer *et al.* 2003: 495), a power that, if left unchecked, can have devastating results.

Frames provide the boundaries around an issue demarcating what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and above all, how it will not be discussed (Altheide 1996: 3). To demonstrate this technique of highlighting and exclusion, I will use an example employed by Lakoff and Mutimer in order to demonstrate how simple it can be to frame something in a particular way in order to highlight, downplay or hide altogether:

I have invited a Nobel Prize winner to the discussion.

I have invited a prime minister to the discussion.

I have invited a noted freedom fighter to the discussion.

I have invited a former terrorist to the discussion.

Describing someone who you know has all of these characteristics as a Nobel Prize winner serves to downplay the fact that he/she is prime minister and a freedom fighter and to hide his/her past terrorist activities (Mutimer 2000: 21).

This discursive example highlights the kind of information exposure that embedding allows for in times of war. Like the above noted metaphors, story frames promoted through embedded journalism are used systematically, are inspired by careful government planning and censorship, and serve to highlight some aspects and hide others (Driedgera and Eylesba 2003: 1280-1). Essentially, embedded journalists operate much like those exemplified that chose to emphasize “Nobel Prize winner” over “former terrorist.” Government controlled war time journalism, such as the type practiced in “Iraqi Freedom,” is so carefully monitored and structured that certain undesirable characteristics (much like “former terrorist”) or actions taken by the US military are easily downplayed and hidden in favour of more positive renderings and representations (i.e., “Nobel Prize winner”). I will utilize the same technique invoked by Lakoff and Mutimer to illustrate this point in regards to *Iraqi Freedom*:

American soldiers are freeing innocent civilians from Saddam.

American soldiers are fighting a just war.

American soldiers are invading a sovereign nation.

American soldiers are killing innocent civilians.

According to Durham (2001), since “this method of definition by exclusion functions in framing, then other, discarded ‘social narratives,’ or cultural meanings, must also lie beneath every successful frame” (129). While less restricted journalism such as the kind practiced during Vietnam produced a representation of US

soldiers as a cruel and invading force, embedded journalism produced images of the US military as serving just and humanitarian causes while hiding and downplaying the “invasion” and the “killing” scenarios.

As Driedgera and Eylesba (2003) have argued, given the power of language and imagery, there is a need to examine the use of story frames in order to reveal the meanings and context of language, argument, and persuasion, no matter how challenging this task may be (1280-1). In order to demonstrate the incredible effectiveness of framing and the essential role that embedding plays in a frame’s legitimacy, it will be necessary to examine *Iraqi Freedom* for its deeply entrenched framing structures. Such an examination will allow for an assessment of the military approved stories that did fit the pro-humanitarian frames and those stories that did not.

‘Self Defence,’ ‘Rescue,’ ‘Hero’: *Operation: Iraqi Freedom*

(US Population: 287, 973, 924;¹ Televisions in the US: roughly 850 million²)

In 2002, when the United States decided to flex its military muscle in Iraq once more, the similarities between this war and the last were of course, chilling. Saddam Hussein I vs. George Bush II, all taking place on very familiar ground. Bush II even brought along his father’s former team (Colin Powell and Dick Cheney) for the ride. It was clear from the trio heading up this battle that the outcome for the Iraqi people would be bloody and demoralizing, but would the similarities between the press coverage of then and now lead to equally devastating results?

Embedded in the Desert

In *Operation: Iraqi Freedom*, as in the Gulf War, an inherent tension between the goals of the media and those of the military quickly became apparent: to report and critically interpret versus the will to win at any cost, a tension that gives the military an incentive to control the information transmitted to the public in order to ensure public support for the conflict (Miskin *et al.* 2003: 20). This tension led to the development of a new relationship between the media and the military. Called ‘embedding,’ this new ‘cooperative effort’ between journalists and the military has, at least for the time being, changed the way war can be represented. Although similar to its *Desert Storm* predecessor in many ways, embedding differs from pooling for several reasons, most importantly allowing for a more up close and personal relationship between specific military units and reporters. In essence, the reporter and cameraman become part of the action, witnessing it first hand, rather than simply being de-briefed by military spokesmen and pools afterwards. According to the US Department of Defense (2003), embedded media live, work, and travel as part of the units with which they are embedded “to facilitate maximum, in depth coverage of US forces in combat and related operations” (2).

Why, when *Desert Storm* was so defined through its mastery of military briefings and video, had such access been granted for *Iraqi Freedom*? It depends on whom you ask. According to journalist Robert Fisk, the United States provided access because it feared that Saddam Hussein would commit atrocities and

¹ US Census Bureau, “Annual Estimates of the Population for the United States and States”

² Russell Ash, *The Top 10 of Everything 2003: Canadian Edition*, pp 190.

blame it on the Americans. Embeds can be quickly rushed to any scene to prove “that the killings were the dastardly work of the ‘Beast of Baghdad’ rather than the ‘collateral damage’... of fine young men who are trying to destroy the triple pillar of the ‘axis of evil’” (Miskin *et al.* 2003: 10). The seemingly legitimizing advantage offered through embedding was also needed to document the weapons in Saddam Hussein’s arsenal because, as Fisk has said, “the world’s not going to believe the US Army. But they’ll believe [the media],” (Ibid.) a service that, in an environment overrun with a disappointing lack of Weapons of Mass Destruction has of course, yet to be fruitful.

The media also benefits from this new relationship to the military. Some journalists have argued that the embedding process, combined with improved digital cameras and satellite technology, may result in viewers receiving some of the most revealing war footage and reporting ever seen (Miskin *et al.* 2003: 2). Another reason accounting for the changes made to the military-media relationship, stems from the media’s protests against the policies in the Gulf War. As described by Morley Safer,

There was such an outcry after the Gulf war by all the, by the networks. And they realized that the old policy wouldn’t work uh, partly because the whole thing had expanded. It had been a quantum leap in just sheer numbers of reporters and networks and twenty-four hour news, everywhere. So I, I think they realized that they old system would not work (Ives 2003).

More importantly still, the most profitable impetus behind the embedding program was to instill a desperately needed support base for the war.

Building Consensus

Operation: Iraqi Freedom was not as easy for the US to legitimate as the previous war in the Gulf region had been. The reasons for the invasion were not as clear. This time, Saddam Hussein was not invading one of its wealthy, ‘democratic’ neighbours. International support in this combat, barring the assistance of the British and a mild smattering of others, was practically nil. There was little evidence beyond the faulty ‘intelligence’ to substantiate the ‘Weapons of Mass Destruction’ (WMD) reasoning, and the links to terrorism were weak, to say the least. Faced with these hurdles to leap and more critics to convince, the US government was challenged as it never was during *Operation: Desert Storm*. In order to assure the dissenting voices of America of the legitimacy of the conflict and to help them forget about the coming violence, death, and destruction, the images representing the war would, yet again, have to be bloodless, much would have to be ‘subsidized’ and again, there would be minimal room for media interpretation. The government acted quickly, pursuing the construction of a frame that would overshadow all others before it. The press would again serve as it had done in *Desert Storm*. This time, however, the objective of the frame would be very different. In response to this realization, a new strategy was to be implemented embedding roughly 600 journalists with troops and bringing forth a new frame, the only frame through which its creators hoped that this war would be understood by the masses.

Building New Frames for a 'New' War

The Department of Defense (2003) has stated that

media coverage of any future operation will to a large extent, shape public perception of the national security environment now and in the years ahead. This holds true for the US public; the public in allied countries whose opinion can affect the durability of our coalition; and publics in countries where we conduct operations, whose perceptions of us can affect the cost and duration of our involvement (1).

The US powers-that-be have a clear understanding of the influence the media holds over public perception and therefore, are aware of the significant role that a successful, all-encompassing frame will play in winning over the media-saturated public. It is therefore not difficult to understand why the US government and military remain convinced that for their purposes, embedding has become the strategy of choice and the ultimate frame enabler. Elites in the US military truly comprehend that “if there are no pictures there is no story” (Young 1991: 23). They also understand that the pictures must be controlled if the story is to support the actions of the American forces in Iraq. The war has therefore become not simply a battle for the security of territory or of peoples – it has become a story to narrate, a frame to construct.

In *Operation: Iraqi Freedom*, George W. Bush pushed two types of stories to create the winning frame, the ‘Self Defence’ story and the ‘Rescue’ story. If Bush II could have shown that Saddam was tied to Al Qaeda and was harbouring Weapons of Mass Destruction then he could have easily made a case for the ‘Self Defence’ scenario and justify war on those grounds. Alarming, the Bush administration had managed to convince 40 percent of the American public of the ‘Self Defence’ frame despite a total lack of evidence corroborating the terrorist/WMD link (Lakoff 2003). Lakoff suggests that many other Americans have accepted the idea that “Iraqi Freedom” is a “Rescue” of the Iraqi people and a safeguarding of neighboring countries although in reality, the war has threatened the safety of the Iraqi people and has inflicted damage on neighboring countries. Clearly, the humanitarian frame has been highlighted while the slaughter of thousands of innocent Iraqis remains hidden. Embedded journalists, whose modes of transportation, protection, and perspectives were so strategically controlled by the military, reported only what they heard and what they were allowed to witness. Because of these restrictions and more importantly, the convincing power of the government-issued “Rescue” frame, the embedded mainstream US press served to further the military’s deceptive war narrative – a narrative driven not only by images, but also by metaphor.

As a key tool in frame creation, metaphorical devices are often utilized to build consensus through language. Some of the basic metaphors used by the US military and publicized by the Embeds throughout *Iraqi Freedom* were strategically communicated in order to define the nation of Iraq through the actions of one single man: Saddam Hussein. His reported crimes against his own people (i.e., the Kurds in Northern Iraq and others subject to his tortures) were offered as evidence to establish a legitimate frame for war, in place of more convincing WMD evidence (Hiebert 2003: 244). When Iraqi resistance stiffened after the first few days of invasion, military briefers began to utilize the power of discourse to vilify their enemy. They

began by blaming ‘Saddam’s Fedayeen’ for the war. A few days later, however, they stopped using ‘Fedayeen’ because they learned of its positive connotation: one who sacrifices himself for a cause. Instead, the US military relayed to the US embeds that the Iraqis who put up a fight against the invading forces would be referred to as “paramilitaries,” a term which was then changed to “terror-like death squads” (Ibid.: 245) and soon broadcast freely by mainstream US networks across the United States. Americans have been conditioned to accept these metaphors by the administration and the first person reporting of the embedded press, making *Operation: Iraqi Freedom* seem like the just, humanitarian war it had been framed to be (Lakoff 2003).

However, the strength of these metaphors and the administration’s previous attempts at framing through fear were soon tested. According to Hiebert (2003) “as the war progressed and Weapons of Mass Destruction were not immediately found, the story line shifted from defense to emphasize rescue” (245). As could have been predicted, the threat posed by Saddam Hussein’s own character and intentions and those of his armies could not reign forever as the most valuable symbols through which to build a frame for war. During wars such as *Iraqi Freedom* where domestic support is weakened and international scorn is paramount, a frame, if it is to survive, must constantly evolve in order to meet the next challenge to its authority. In *Operation: Iraqi Freedom*, once Americans grew tired of hearing of Saddam’s domestic brutalities and suspicious of the terrorism/WMD claims, another frame had to be spun.

A Hero is Born

With the implementation of embedding, *Operation: Iraqi Freedom* offered countless positive images of Americans at war. However, one ‘subsidized’ image stood out among the rest and would serve to create not only a hero, but to reinforce the desired US-friendly frame. The ‘Jessica Lynch Rescue’ offered what were the most important frame-reinforcing images to come out of the war. Her dramatic story captivated millions, uniting war-supporters and war-protesters alike. 19-year-old Army Private Jessica Lynch had been missing since 23 March 2003, the very day her unit, the 507th Ordnance Maintenance Company, made a wrong turn near the southern town of Nasiriyah and was ambushed by Iraqi militia. According to publicized reports, Iraqi forces held Lynch, fettered down by broken legs, arm, and a gunshot wound, at a hospital in the town. Her dramatic 1 April 2003 rescue was replayed countless times in the US mainstream media and was frequently and dramatically narrated by Brigadier General Vincent Brooks in this fashion:

This is a coalition Blackhawk helicopter on the ground, and PFC Lynch on a stretcher, being carried to safety. This, of course, was done under black-out conditions in the compound itself, where the helicopter landed. At this point she is safe. She’s been retrieved. And some brave souls put their lives on the line to make this happen (Lehrer 2003a).

Jessica Lynch soon became the ultimate symbol around which to construct the frame of *Operation: Iraqi Freedom*. She had the fighting instinct (it had been reported that she shot several Iraqi soldiers as she attempted to escape) and the feminine vulnerability required to gather the nation around her military’s cause. Her rescuers, depicted as warriors dedicated to never leaving a comrade behind, encompassed all that the US

military hoped to represent to the American public. Bravery, selflessness, and victory in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds were highlighted while, yet again, the slaughter of thousands of innocent Iraqi women and children by US soldiers and bombs remained hidden. Indeed, the ‘Jessica Lynch Rescue’ offered a tantalizing narrative arc to the war, turning the conflict into a frame represented by American heroism and the prevalence of ‘good’ over ‘evil.’ This new ‘Hero’ frame quickly turned Lynch into a news media darling, although the raid, dramatic as it was, may have been totally unnecessary (Hiebert 2003: 252).

It was not until much later that questions surrounding the rescue began to surface. Apparently, after Lynch was hospitalized the Iraqis offered to free her, but according to Hiebert, “news of this Iraq humanity and magnanimity would have damaged the rescue story line. So the American military needlessly staged a “daring raid” on the hospital, and only this “rescue” made the [US] mainstream media, until much after the real facts no longer had any impact” (Ibid.: 247).

In a BBC documentary by John Kampfner, Iraqi eyewitnesses called the rescue unnecessary, saying that the Americans faced no resistance, and “made a show of the rescue, using blanks in their weapons” (Lehrer 2003c). The documentary also reported that Lynch was well cared for by the Iraqis and suffered from no gunshot wounds. The report concluded that the operation was “an epic attempt at news management of an eager American press at a critical juncture in the Iraq campaign” (Ibid.).

The Rules of Embedding

The guidelines that embedded reporters had to follow were just as strict as their Gulf War counterparts. The restrictions outlined by the Department of Defense (2003) “recognize the right of the media to cover military operations and are in no way intended to prevent release of derogatory, embarrassing, negative or uncomplimentary information” (6). Some of the restrictions are as follows:

- “Embedded media are not authorized use of their own vehicles while traveling in embedded status.”
- “...Unit commanders may impose temporary restrictions on electronic transmissions for operational security reasons. Media will seek approval to use electronic devices in a combat/hostile environment;”
- “Media embedded with US forces are not permitted to carry personal firearms.”

Information that the Department of Defense has banned from being reported includes

- “information regarding future operations;”
- “information on intelligence collection activities compromising tactic, techniques or procedures;”
- “information on effectiveness of enemy electronic warfare;”
- “information on effectiveness of enemy camouflage, cover, deception, targeting, direct and indirect fire, intelligence collection or security measures” (Ibid.: 2-9).

In essence, these rules were tantamount to censorship.

Censorship

While framing in itself is a powerful apparatus useful for maintaining a compliant press, a background infrastructure of censorship is required to ensure that the frame's foundation remains firmly intact. Out of its recognition of the importance the media holds over the outcome of the war, the military again enforced censorship on the embedded reporters similar on the surface to its predecessor in the Gulf War. However, keenly aware of the anger over the blatant censorship in *Operation: Desert Storm* from many of the pool reporters, the military has attempted to make censorship seem voluntary, as opposed to being enforced. According to the Department of Defense,

In instances where a unit commander or the designated representative determines that coverage of a story will involve exposure to sensitive information beyond the scope of what may be protected by pre-briefing or debriefing, but coverage which is in the best interest of the DOD, the Commander may offer access if the reporter agrees to a security review of their coverage. Agreement to security review in exchange for this type of access must be strictly *voluntary* [emphasis added]... (Ibid.: 11-2).

While the military's strategic language may have led the media to believe that more freedom of the press would be allowed this time, more importantly, it convinced the American public of the same. The introduction of embedding left the American people with the general impression that there was little room for government censorship. They assumed that under the new policy they were getting "the straight scoop from the battlefield, even though most of the news was soft and feature stuff" (Hiebert 2003: 250). Not simply traditional censorship, but rather, censorship in disguise was the order of the day.

Perhaps the greatest acts of this covert censorship were the travel restrictions imposed on members of the embedded press corps that were masqueraded as exciting, first person excursions through the desert. By being denied any transport independent of military supervision, exactly what could be seen, digested, and questioned by the American public was heavily controlled by the military. If the US military had bombed schools or civilian homes and shops, the military, no matter how 'transparent' the Department of Defense claims they would be, would never allow the American press to witness the slaughter and as a consequence, never lose control of the frame. By taking control of the reporter's transportation the military was able to achieve a new kind of censorship: censorship disguised as a natural consequence of gaining the exclusive access that embedding permitted. As former embedded reporter George C. Wilson described,

if you couldn't get out of the dog sled team and investigate something on your own because you had no mobility, you had no wheels of your own, and you had to wait in line basically for vehicles to become available, I felt that my auditing function and my responsibility to my reader to give some accountability was very much restricted by the logistics of it and the positioning of the reporters (Lehrer 2003b).

Many reporters claimed that under the restrictions that embedding enforced, the rules could allow the US military to "enforce draconian restrictions on coverage of any operations in the region" (Miskin *et al.* 2003: 2). Though the rules and restrictions were indeed problematic for the journalists, the military and

the government also depended upon other stresses inherent in the embedding program in order to support the censorship system and consequently, support the frame.

Frame-Friendly Effects of Embedding on Journalists

Just as the policies of the Gulf War only served to construct a US-friendly version of the war, so too does embedding continue this tradition. The US military and government were well aware of the advantages that this new media-military design would hold for the future of American war efforts abroad. It was understood that embedding would have a significant effect on journalists, resulting in feelings of “camaraderie that would affect a journalist’s ability to be independent and objective” (Ibid.: ii). As former embedded reporter Chris Hedges explains, journalists linked to military units faced unique challenges: “...when you depend on a unit for protection, your natural tendency is to protect them. And...it effects the coverage. The kinds of reports that you do, are in many ways an effort to boost the morale and exult the exploits of the unit that you're with” (Ives 2003).

According to E. M. Cowardin Jr, a correspondent for the New York Times, the training and group psychology of combat military units, not to mention combat itself, often results in very intense feelings of loyalty and comradeship that most people will ever experience (Miskin *et al.* 2003: 11). As CBC correspondent Paul Workman queried, the ability of journalists to be independent and objective when they are ‘sleeping and living with’ the soldiers they are trying to cover is impossible: “What happens if there’s, say, a friendly fire accident [and] there’s a lot of casualties on the field? Is the American military going to let us transmit those pictures?” (Ibid.: 12). Clearly, the answer is no. Others worry that in the post- September 11 world, many American journalists, especially those embedded in war zones, are openly patriotic (Ibid.: 13) engaging in self-censorship in order to serve their country, rather than the truth. Whether or not this is the case, there can be no question that the conditions reporters had to endure as embeds fully supported the pre-constructed ‘Self Defence,’ ‘Rescue,’ and ‘Hero’ frames.

Serving as an Embed is wrought with difficulties that seem impossible to overcome. As Dan Rather has articulated, “There’s a pretty fine line between being embedded and being entombed” (Miskin *et al.* 2003: 11). Many reporters feel that because of the attachments they built with the units in which they were embedded, they were used as willing propagandists for the US government and military. As Ed Turner of CNN describes, the voice of the media influences as it entertains: “the regular viewers new to US reporting but accustomed to their own government controlled journalism... thought our [CNN] reporters were government spokesmen stating policy rather than providing some interpretive reporting” (Ibid.: 43).

The process of embedding seemed to fulfill all of the framing objectives of the American government and military. As George C. Wilson has described,

you were put in a position where you would certainly not be antagonistic to the kids that you were involved with and admired and you went in, in those conditions without having the ability like I had in other wars to check things out for myself. So in effect I was putting myself in a position to be a propagandist, which was great for the Pentagon, but not so great for the [public] (Lehrer 2003b).

These were not the only problems plaguing the reporters trapped by the embedding process. The technology used by the press to document the invasion was also an issue and unquestionably served to re-enforce the ‘Self Defence,’ ‘Rescue,’ and ‘Hero’ frames.

Live and in Colour

During *Operation: Iraqi Freedom* the Department of Defense (2003) called for the use of small cameras known as “lipstick cameras” as well as helmet mounted cameras when accompanying troops on “combat sorties” (13). The embedded press also used satellite-linked videophones, small enough to set up in the field in a few minutes. Some versions weigh only a few pounds and cost less than \$8,000. They send the jerky images that have become easily identifiable to regular viewers of CNN, while providing voice, data, and video in a single signal. During the original Gulf War, “comparable systems required 14 refrigerator sized boxes, weighing 500–600 pounds, requiring two hours for set-up, and costing \$400,000 and more” (Hiebert 2003: 252).

While the Department of Defense required camera equipment aids in creating the “you are there” feel of reality television, this intense and specific perspective is also likely to comprise footage of combat action that is devoid of all context and meaning (Miskin *et al.* 2003: 16). Such coverage saturates the television landscape with a very misleading (and frame-friendly) account of the war as infotainment rather than dirty, bloody, and illegitimate. While the power of visual images is clear, live visuals are the ultimate. Thanks to the Embed’s reporting in *Operation: Iraqi Freedom* the world witnessed the first real-time video from the battlefield. However, according to media analyst Rachel Coen, live, real-time television coverage of *Operation: Iraqi Freedom* was “very much filtered through a military lens” (Hiebert 2003: 252). While the unprecedented images of combat action and tanks rolling through the desert were exciting and dramatic, this modernization did not help to encourage outside-the frame reporting.

Live coverage is extremely popular in broadcast news. Viewers enjoy the fast pace and raw emotion of the coverage, making ‘on the spot’ journalism a substantial ratings grabber and an advertiser’s dream. A Los Angeles Times poll indicated that during *Operation: Iraqi Freedom* “70% of Americans got most of their news from cable-TV. Nielsen data showed that the number of average daily viewers for MSNBC and CNN increased more than 300% during the war, Fox, more than 288%” (Ibid.).

The excitement of live coverage caused millions of Americans to tune in, proving that indeed, we “are all hostages of media intoxication... and confined to the simulacrum of war as though confined to quarters” (Baudrillard 1995: 25). However, the drawbacks of ‘going live’ are many, especially during the confusing time of war. ‘Live’ may make for stimulating and spectacular television, but it also means no editing and careless journalism (MacArthur 1992: 209). Exemplified by the groundbreaking reporting of NBC’s David Bloom, live television was brought to new, uncharted heights. In order to take full advantage of the embedding process, NBC modified a tank and shipped it to Iraq to facilitate reporting of the Third Infantry’s advance towards Baghdad – all of which would be captured live and in colour, by the late Bloom. “His “Bloom Mobile” came to symbolize the immediacy of embedded reporting” (Lehrer 2003b). While new

highs in war reporting were achieved through this brazen tactic, understanding, perspective, and critique were all brought to new lows.

As Bloom rolled through the desert, the audience at home learned of the soldiers' hometowns, wives, husbands, children, girlfriends, and dogs. Viewers were enraptured as these brave men and women described the pain of leaving their loved ones, the sweetness of home, the beauty and liberty of America. But the Bloom Mobile gave us no further understanding of the Iraqi men, women and children left dead on the streets or without the basic necessities of life. As Baudrillard (1995) has argued, "'real time' information loses itself in a completely unreal space, finally furnishing the images of pure, useless, instantaneous television where its primordial function erupts, namely that of filling a vacuum, blocking up the screen hole through which escapes the substance of events" (31).

Live embedded news such as this provided few pictures of the slaughter a mile away from US tanks, of bodies riddled with the bullets from American guns. Instead, audiences saw images of soldiers shaking Iraqi hands and feeding the Iraqi hungry – scenery which directly substantiated the 'Rescue' frame by highlighting the 'Humanitarian' and hiding the hurt.

The technology of embedding succeeded from a ratings perspective but failed miserably from a critical one. If the purpose of the press is to report the facts of war and point out the deceptions, then what a massive failure *Operation: Iraqi Freedom* has been for journalists and viewers alike. Live coverage is designed in such a way so as to lead viewers to believe what the journalist reports to be the absolute truth. The reporter is in the centre of the action, making it only natural to assume that they have the best perspective on the situation. Acting as a witness to war, the live reporter is quickly elevated to the stature of 'expert.' However, not even perfect technology can lead to perfect information. Live images can be very dangerous and misleading without the necessary context to back them up. In this respect, technology may seem to give us ever increasing options, yet the strategies of embedding enforced by the American military and government gives the media and the consumers of media ever-decreasing time and abilities to sort it all out (Sremac 1999: 17). While this may seem to be a natural, necessary and unavoidable consequence of any kind of war coverage, it is in fact a politically motivated strategy that allows the pre-constituted frames of 'Self-Defence,' 'Rescue,' and 'Hero' to gain momentum and legitimacy. This political agenda becomes clear when, post-combat and post-embedding, the boundaries of the frames are crossed and the stories of rescue, self-defence and heroism are finally challenged.

Stepping Beyond the Boundaries of the 'Self Defence,' 'Rescue' and 'Hero' Frames

This reality of government-controlled news becomes more obvious when the mainstream media steps outside of its often-subservient role and breaks a negative story about US military operations. In the case of *Operation: Iraqi Freedom*, this occurred not long after major combat initiatives ended and embedded reporters were no longer present on the battlefield. It appeared that at this stage, the US administration assumed that it was no longer necessary to put as much energy and preservation into maintaining the framework.

Yet, on 30 April 2004, photos depicting abuse of Iraqis being held in Abu Ghraib prison were shown around the world after being first broadcast by CBS' *60 Minutes II*. Among the images was a hooded and wired prisoner being threatened with electrocution, two soldiers posing over a pyramid of naked detainees, a female soldier pointing to naked prisoners, and the body of a dead Iraqi packed in ice. The photos also accompanied an article in the New Yorker by Seymour Hersh providing details of an internal army report by Major General Antonio Taguba, citing "sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses," at Abu Ghraib Prison (Lehrer 2004). As quickly as the scandal broke, Republicans and Democrats began to assign blame and alongside the soldiers, the media too was criticized for its "crimes."

An onslaught of attention was quickly diverted away from the scandal and instead, focused on the media who brought it to the public's attention. Rushing to re-instate the frame, Republican politicians, pundits and average citizens jumped on CBS for their 'unpatriotic' and 'partisan' reporting. While referring to the media's coverage of the prisoner abuse on his nationally syndicated radio talk show, Rush Limbaugh stated: "I'm not going to sit here and obsess and join the rest of the media with this and turn this into a campaign issue, try to convince as many people that George Bush is incompetent and needs to be thrown out of office – because that's all this is. But in the process, what all that does is weaken the resolve of the people of this country" (Meyer 2004).

Limbaugh's words did not fall on deaf ears. After airing the photos, CBS's website was inundated with e-mails expressing impassioned alarm over the abhorrent torture display, some praising the network for exposing the scandal, and many more condemning it:

Everyone in this country is hanging on for dear life to support the troops, and you have taken all our faith in goodness away... We are losing our fight with other countries to support us, and now you have just sealed it. ... We've just lost the goal of helping anyone over there because of this show, and God help us. You are no better than those who did these horrible acts. Your reports are bringing down this country.

- Betsy Berra (CBS News)

...*60 Minutes II* has the audacity to violate their character by showing the disgusting actions of "several" of their comrades to foreign prisoners. Not only do you "report" the incident, you distastefully show the pictures that only serve to brand all our loved ones in uniform. You leave little doubt, both past and present, of your liberal agenda and desire to taint this military action.

- Raymond E. O'Neill (Ibid.)

As Catherine Belsey (2002) has argued, institutions like the mainstream US media "have the effect of securing our conscious or unconscious consent to the way things are, by making them appear at best in our interests and at worst inevitable. Above all, they seem *obvious*" (34). What it means to support this war has, in Belsey's words, become obvious. For millions of Americans who consumed the government-issued frames, it became common knowledge that patriotism and taking pride in "our troops" demands celebration and tribute, not critique. The US government has built this intimidating system of control and obligatory

patriotism that shape representations of war. The public, after its experience receiving filtered, live, and action-oriented information from embedded reporters during war time, would come to expect and enjoy a certain degree of modesty and reproach from its television news on *Operation: Iraqi Freedom*. They would come to expect the ‘Self Defence,’ the ‘Rescue,’ and the ‘Hero’ narratives. However, since the Abu Ghraib story was first broken not by reporters embedded in Iraq, but instead by regular journalists far from the battlefield and immune to most military control, the American public will have to adjust to what will most likely mark an increase in the amount of negative stories regarding US actions in war. Once the haze of the frames made legitimate through embedding have been lifted, so too is the fog of war.

The public’s reactions to the Abu Ghraib prison story highlights just how crucial the Embeds were to the creation of the ‘Rescue’ frame. Once major combat initiatives ended and the embedded journalists were able to leave the protective wing and controlling eye of the military, the carefully constructed frame started to fall apart. What was once framed as a mission of ‘Self Defence,’ humanitarian ‘Rescue’ mission and ‘Heroic’ struggle began instead to resemble a story of tortured and humiliated Iraqis. Only now that the Embeds, the lynchpins of the modern framing process, have been able to step out of the box they were put into during major combat operations, is the frame starting to crumble. This swift and shockingly visual dose of uncharted criticism has caused earthquakes in both the carefully laid foundation of governmental imposed suppression and in the psyches of an audience so used to watching a ‘just’ war fought by small town ‘heroes’ and sanctioned by ‘honest’ politicians.

Too Many Televisions, Too Little Blood

In theory, the media recognize the responsibility they have to provide objective information to the public. In wartime, objectivity should entail ensuring that the public receives a perspective independent of the military or political view of the war campaign in order for them “to make an informed choice as to whether or not to support the conflict” (Miskin *et al.* 2003: 5). In the current atmosphere hostile towards Vietnam-style reporting, there is little room for making independently informed choices. We react not to the act of war itself, but to its structure, a powerful frame driven by “common sense” and entirely constructed by the US military and government where “what we believe is no longer purely personal, but a conviction that culture permits” (Besley 2002: 73).

The Future Looks Black and White

As Dick Cheney has said in regards to war, “there will be a next time. There always is” (Campbell 1993: 14). For as long as it holds the majority of power, the US will promote and provoke war. It therefore goes without saying that the techniques of framing will continue to be part of every war in the near future. As a consequence, the mainstream American broadcast media, no matter how deeply they may embed the next time, will likely contribute increasingly uncritical accounts of US military actions.

According to David Mutimer, life is framed in terms of particular images. Only in terms of these images can policy makers or embedded reporters know an international policy problem such as war and

“therefore only in terms of this image can action be taken” (Mutimer 2000: 26). This is why it is so crucial to expose the frames and images that are passed on to us by the pooled and embedded journalists blinded by the fog of war. Embeds play the crucially supportive role in frame maintenance and dispersal. Without the Rathers, the Jennings or the Courics standing in the sand holding it up, the frame would crumble down. No matter how many mainstream American journalists it chooses to embed or how many cameras it allows to roam the enemy territory, the US government and military will have absolute control over the frame the war takes on and the representation of the violence that the public receives. In a perfect world the goal of journalism would be to allow us to know more than what is contained within the powerful boundaries of frames. In this utopia of perfect information, perfect reporting, and perfect politicians, we would all be able to access “journalism that would set us free from the imperative to unify social meanings, making us better able to listen to the multitude of voices that such unity quells today” (Durham 2001: 134-5).

While Hiebert (2003) suggests that “only an independent, alert, and responsible press, together with a concerned citizenry, can force the government to be more honest and forthright” (254), due the high prices that responsible members of the mainstream US press have already had to pay for stepping outside the boundaries of the popular frame, the evolution towards a more honest representation of war is most unlikely. As Besley has argued, “if meaning is a matter of social convention, it concerns and involves all of us” (Ibid.: 88). Unfortunately for all of us who watch American mainstream broadcast journalism, the blood will never be very red on the colour television screen.

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