

COHERENCE IN CRISIS: GROUPTHINK, THE NEWS MEDIA, AND THE IRAQ WAR

Dan Fitzsimmons, Ph.D Student, Department of Political Science, University of Calgary

From the outset of the American military intervention in Vietnam in 1964, the United States news media has had the capacity to report military engagements from around the world in real time.¹ Instantaneous and pervasive news coverage has helped to inform the American public and politicians of ongoing military operations, which has led to obvious questions about the possible influence of news on military strategy.² This assumption has only gained popularity following studies of news media influence in Vietnam, which has prompted further investigation of the possible links between US military strategy and the media.³ The proponents of this termed “CNN effect,” which hypothesizes a causal link between media reporting and politico-military decisions, include Steven Livingston of George Washington University who proposes that the viewing of images on television “undeniably influences the evolution of events.”⁴

However, proponents of the CNN effect have frequently failed to take into account the important role of strategic decision-making in setting the course of

¹ Margaret H. Belknap, *The CNN Effect: Strategic Enabler or Operational Risk?* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, 2001), p. 1.

² Ingrid A. Lehmann, "Exploring the Transatlantic Media Divide over Iraq: How and Why U.S. And German Media Differed in Reporting on U.N. Weapons Inspections in Iraq: 2002-2003," *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 10, no. 1 (2005), p. 3.

³ Eytan Gilboa, "The CNN Effect: The Search for a Communication Theory of International Relations," *Political Communication* 22, no. 1 (January-March 2005).

⁴ Steven Livingston, *Clarifying the CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention* (Cambridge, MA: Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, 1997), p. 14.

international conflicts.⁵ This failing may be particularly evident in the case of the 2003 Iraq War. Indeed, despite extensive negative media coverage of US military strategy since the onset of hostilities, negative media pressure seemingly has had little effect on US military strategy in the Iraq War.⁶ Indeed, despite extensive negative media coverage of US military strategy during these conflicts, the course of US strategy seemingly changed only in response to occasional variations in operational dynamics; rather, than consistently negative reporting. I propose to assess the explanatory failings of the CNN effect by illustrating the high degree of strategic certainty behind the US-led military operations in the Iraq War.

This paper, therefore, examines the following questions: how, and to what extent, does the degree of strategic certainty present among the core strategic decision-makers in the executive branch of the US government condition their receptiveness to outside criticism and alternative points of view on their preferred strategy? Moreover, to what extent has news media reporting of the Iraq War influenced the course of American military strategy during the conflict? In response, I hypothesized that, despite extensive negative reporting on American military strategy in Iraq, the high degree of strategic certainty among the US executive over the proper direction of US military strategy in the conflict has largely precluded the media from influencing the course of US strategy. Therefore, I hypothesized that while the news media can influence the course of military strategy in conflicts where a general consensus does not exist among the US executive over the proper course of military strategy but that its influence will be severely curtailed when strategic decision-makers are in general agreement over their preferred strategy.

⁵ Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention*. (London, UK: Routledge, 2002), p. 30.

⁶ Peter Braestrup, *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 470-471.

Strategy

A term often used in conflict analysis, strategy refers to the design and implementation of a plan for the coordination of the state's resources in the pursuit of achieving a set of objectives.⁷ This study will use Sir Basil Liddell Hart's definition of "military strategy," hereafter referred to as strategy, which he defines as "the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy."⁸ Put simply, this study will define strategy as a guidance plan to achieve particular ends.⁹ Conceived this way, strategy can be defined as being created by a complex decision-making process of ideas, expectations, and goals, which result in a plan for achieving stated goals through military action. Therefore, this definition should be appropriate for determining if critical media reports can influence the US executive branch's employment of strategy and their choices to change strategy at certain points during a conflict.

Theoretical Approach

This expands upon the policy media interaction model developed by Piers Robinson. Robinson suggests that, in situations of "policy certainty" among US officials, the news media has little influence on foreign policy, regardless of the level of media attention devoted to the crisis.¹⁰ The central tenet of this model is that, once a consensus has been reached among policy actors on a policy or course of action, the resolve to carry out objectives constitutes "policy certainty," wherein decision-makers

⁷ Franklin D. Margiotta, *Brassey's Encyclopedia of Land Forces and Warfare* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's Inc., 2000), pp. 1003-1004.

⁸ Dan Reiter and Curtis Meek, "Determinants of Military Strategy, 1903-1994: A Quantitative Empirical Test," *International Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (1999), p. 364.

⁹ David H. McIntyre, Statement of Dr. David H. McIntyre (COL, USA, Ret): February 3, 2004 House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations (cited November 17, 2005); available from <http://www.iwar.org.uk/homesec/resources/counterterrorism/McIntyre.pdf>, p. 2.

¹⁰ Robinson, 30.

are extremely resistant to contrary outside influences.¹¹ Conversely, a situation where no direct consensus exists among the US executive over the direction of policy constitutes “policy uncertainty.”¹²

In contrast to Robinson’s near exclusive focus on foreign policy decision-making by political elites, the Media-Strategy Interaction Model proposed here focuses on the direction of military strategy set by the executive branch of the US government. Robinson’s core concept of policy certainty is supplanted in this modified model by the concept of “strategic certainty;” however, the basic logic of the original concept remains. Therefore, the first core preposition of the Media-Strategy Interaction Model proposed here is that, in situations of “strategic certainty,” which is a consensus on the proper direction of military strategy among the executive, the news media will have little influence on the course of strategy, regardless of the level of media attention devoted to it.¹³

Many studies of the news media in international conflict lack a theoretical understanding of how core decision-makers come to decide on a particular course of action, which predisposes many studies to overemphasize the influence of external actors by default. This is a failing I redress through incorporating elements of the groupthink model, developed by Irving Janis, into the Media-Strategy Interaction Model. Groupthink refers to a set of decision-making problems that can afflict policy-makers during periods of crisis, which collectively deteriorate critical thinking, mental efficiency,

¹¹ Piers Robinson, “Theorizing the Influence of Media on World Politics: Models of Media Influence on Foreign Policy,” *European Journal of Communication* 16, no. 4 (December 2001), p. 534.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 535.

¹³ Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention*, p. 30.

reality testing, and moral judgment.¹⁴ Groupthink, an extremely rigid consensus, results when a group of decision-makers seek complete conformity and agreement on a policy solution, thereby avoiding alternative points of view that are critical of the consensus position.¹⁵ As a result, in situations where groupthink is present, majority consensus limits the potential influence that external actors, such as the news media, can impart on the core decision-making group.

The core logic of the groupthink theory is that cohesiveness will occur in groups where members put agreement ahead of rational decision-making. Four structural conditions play an important role in determining the presence of groupthink. First, the group will lack norms for requiring methodological procedures, a condition that occurs when a group refrains from searching for complete and reliable information.¹⁶ Second, groups should exhibit signs of insulation from outside sources of information and opinion that could challenge group beliefs. Third, the group will lack the tradition of impartial leadership, wherein a group leader uses their influence to control the group's agenda and restricts searches for alternate solutions. Finally, groups that show signs of groupthink often share similar backgrounds and ideology.¹⁷ Taken together, these conditions increase the potential that groupthink will result because they predispose members to ignore other potential solutions in favour of supporting the group. In addition to the structural conditions of groupthink, a provocative situational context can contribute to groupthink. High stress, although not required for groupthink to occur can

¹⁴ Greg Cashman, *What Causes War? An Introduction to Theories of International Conflict* (New York, NY: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1993), p. 112.

¹⁵ Irving Lester Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 1; Mark Schafer and Scott Crichtlow, "Antecedents of Groupthink: A Quantitative Study," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 40, no. 3 (September 1996), pp. 417-419.

¹⁶ Thomas R. Hensley and Glen W. Griffin, "Victims of Groupthink: The Kent State University Board of Trustees and the 1977 Gymnasium Controversy," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 30, no. 3 (1986), p. 509.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 508-510.

unify members and enhance group cohesiveness.¹⁸ Consequently, groups demonstrating some or all of these conditions should prove how the personality of individual members can be influenced by group norms.¹⁹

As the theory predicts, and as figure 1 explains, in a situation where the core decision-making group shows signs of groupthink, and media coverage of a conflict is negative, it is unlikely that any change to strategy will be made. In contrast, in a situation where group solidarity is weak and media coverage is negative, the core decision-making group would likely change its military strategy in response to rising criticism.

	GROUPTHINK STRONG	GROUPTHINK STRONG	GROUPTHINK WEAK	GROUPTHINK WEAK
	MEDIA POSITIVE	MEDIA NEGATIVE	MEDIA POSITIVE	MEDIA NEGATIVE
STRATEGY WORKING	No need for change	No need for change, and effect of pressure limited	No need for change	No need for change, but may be vulnerable
STRATEGY NOT WORKING	Pressure for change, but effect limited	Need for change, but effect of pressure limited	Need for change, but no direct pressure.	Need for change, pressure for it, vulnerable.

Figure 1

¹⁸ Janis, p. 427; Steve A. Yetiv, "Groupthink and the Gulf Crisis," *British Journal of Political Science* 33, no. 3 (2003), p. 250.

¹⁹ Yetiv, p. 421.

This is not to suggest that by simply avoiding these conditions that poor decisions can be avoided. Groupthink simply suggests that poor decision outcomes are more likely when its symptoms are present. As a result, the groupthink theory cannot predict every variable which could influence a bad decision in a group. Indeed, many factors can affect an outcome including a lack of necessary information, inadequate time for decision-making, poor judgment, pure luck, and unexpected actions by adversaries. With this in mind, some major failures of foreign policy decision-making cannot be explained by groupthink. The real value of the theory is that it is a concise and simply stated theory for explaining one factor that could lower the possibility of a successful outcome.

Moreover, the groupthink model can be further refined to a series of symptoms one would expect to find in a highly cohesive group. These symptoms reflect the group's avoidance of alternative opinions that may affect its consensus. For the purposes of this study the eight symptoms will be refined into the three major types identified by Janis in his model: illusion of invulnerability (type 1), closed-mindedness (type 2), and pressures toward uniformity (type 3).

Incorporating elements of the groupthink model into this study goes a particularly long way toward explaining the direction of US strategy during the Iraq War given the high degree of strategic certainty evident in George W. Bush's administration.²⁰ With this in mind, this study makes a significant contribution to the literature on media-state relations by closely examining the internal workings of the US executive and

²⁰ Pamela Hess, "Iraqi Security Forces Developing – Slowly," *The Washington Times*, August 5 2004, p. A1; Donald Rumsfeld, "Secretary Rumsfeld's Speech at the National Press Club," (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), September 7 2004), p. 1.

determining how the degree of consensus among core decision-makers conditions the impact, if any, the news media can have on strategic decision-making.

Negative Tone of Media Coverage the Iraq War

As this study is chiefly concerned with a possible connection between negative media coverage on the US executive, this section will briefly outline what is implied by negative coverage in these two conflicts. Often media reporting of any given topic can be gauged as positive or negative coverage depending on the perception the media takes on events. In the Iraq War, the tone of coverage during major setbacks in military operations was directed in opposition to the actions of the US executive or the armed forces. Television and print media coverage that highlights the mistakes or failures of US forces would be considered to have a negative focus.²¹ Conversely, coverage that focused on the positive aspects of operations, such as military or political successes, and discussed the actions of the armed forces and US executive favourably would be considered positive coverage.²² In addition, coverage which simply reported the events of a military operation and did not impose any overtly subjective wording or images to present the story as positive or negative towards the US executive or armed forces could be considered neutral.

It should be noted that media coverage during the course of the war has been, at times, influenced by the US executive branch of government. For example, according to David Barstow of *The New York Times* many of the military analysts employed by major television networks, including CNN and Fox News Channel, had direct ties to the US

²¹ S. Aday, S. Livingston, and M. Hebert, "Embedding the Truth: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Objectivity and Television Coverage of the Iraq War," *Press/Politics* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2005), p. 10.

²² *Ibid.*

government because of previous work as lobbyists which gave them access to senior military leaders, in some cases had taken tours of Iraq, and even had briefed government officials about the conflict. Moreover, these analysts provided information directly to the US government to be used to counter negative media reporting and shape coverage of the conflict.²³ Despite this finding, positive news stories on television and print media appears to have been overshadowed by the prevalence of negative coverage. Moreover, as this paper suggests, positive news coverage of the conflict would only increase the cohesiveness of the core decision-making group, and therefore, would not have a discernable effect, positive or negative, on the course of military strategy in this conflict (Figure 1). With this said, media coverage during the conflict has been focused on largely negative presentations of US officials, which will be made clear in subsequent sections.

US Strategy in Iraq

In order to determine the impact of the news media on US strategy during the conflict, we must briefly outline the military strategy employed. From the outset of military operations in Iraq, the strategy for rebuilding post-Saddam Iraq was based on two primary goals. First, the US military was tasked with defeating the insurgency and terrorist threats against US and Iraqi forces.²⁴ Second, the US would train and build the Iraqi forces for eventual turnover of security to those forces.²⁵ Strategy certainty in this case has been further enhanced by the US executive groupthink mentality, relying on

²³ David Barstow, "Behind Tv Analysts, Pentagon's Hidden Hand," *The New York Times*, April 20, 2008, pp. 1-4.

²⁴ George W. Bush, President Bush Discusses Early Transfer of Iraqi Sovereignty: Remarks by President Bush and Prime Minister Blair on Transfer of Iraqi Sovereignty, Hilton Istanbul, Istanbul, Turkey, (cited November 20, 2005), available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/06/print/20040628-9.html>, p. 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

mutual support from members of the Bush cabinet in private and especially public statements since before the war began. Indeed, the US strategy for the stabilization and then rebuilding of Iraq has been reported since 2003, and has been repeated frequently by senior US officials to support the course of operations there. Perhaps the best example of the reinforcement of this strategy has come from recent statements by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who describes the strategy in Iraq using simple key words, "clear, hold, and build."²⁶ The use of simple terminology to describe US strategy has been part of the Bush Administration's plan to get its message to the public and media throughout the conflict.²⁷ Although simply stated, the strategy has been employed in the form of US-led security operations to clear former Iraqi military and insurgent forces, transferring authority of these sectors to a new Iraqi army. Similar wording and phrases have appeared throughout the Iraqi operation to describe the US strategy.²⁸ The reinforcement of basic tenets of the US strategy by officials during strategic operations constitutes strategic certainty in this case.²⁹

Efforts by US officials to reinforce the basic tenets of securing Iraq from the insurgent threat, to the building and transferring of authority to Iraqi Security Forces has, thus far, been frequently reinforced even following a major election defeat for the Republican Party in late-2006 that resulted in Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld being forced to resign. Yet, despite this event and the subsequent release of the "New Way Forward" strategy in January 2007, US strategy has continued to emphasize the

²⁶ Rice, Condoleezza. "Iraq and U.S. Policy: Secretary Condoleezza Rice, Opening Remarks before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee." United States Department of State, October 19, 2005, p. 1.

²⁷ Ben Fritz, Bryan Keefer, and Brendan Nyhan, *All the President's Spin* (New York, NY: Touchstone Books, 2004), pp. 152-153.

²⁸ Bush, President Addresses the Nation, p. 2.

²⁹ Bush, President Bush Discusses Early Transfer of Iraqi Sovereignty, p. 1.

building and transferring of authority to Iraqi Forces as its primary objective.³⁰ Moreover, despite critical reporting of the results of the US strategy to defeat the insurgency, the strategy has remained in place and been reinforced through briefings, statements, and speeches by senior US officials.

Applying the groupthink hypothesis

To determine the presence of groupthink in the Iraq War the Bush administration will have to be shown as highly cohesive, an important preceding condition for the structural faults of the organization and, in turn, groupthink to occur. Therefore, if proven to be cohesive, the US executive will be analyzed against the four structural conditions of the theory. Finally, if groupthink can be shown the symptoms of the theory will be evaluated to determine to what extent the administration has, and continues to be, isolated from outside criticism.

Group Cohesiveness

The Iraq War case provides a particularly good example of the structure of a cohesive group. The majority of Bush's cabinet was made up of either close-friends from the previous George H.W. Bush administration, or people who had been promoting an engagement in Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein during the Clinton administration. Indeed, Dick Cheney acted as Bush Sr's Secretary of Defense, and Colin Powell was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Persian Gulf War making them both keenly aware of issues relating to Iraq. Moreover, in the 1990s, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz formed a group to push the Clinton administration to promote regime

³⁰ George W. Bush, *Fact Sheet: The New Way Forward in Iraq* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, January 2007), p. 1.

change in Iraq, a policy they promoted strongly in a direct letter to the president in February 1998 that Iraq was “ripe for a broad-based insurrection,” and that “We must exploit this opportunity.”³¹ Furthermore, in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001, officials close to the president assert that he was determined to make Iraq the next target in the war on terror and requested that Rumsfeld re-evaluate plans for intervention in Iraq.³² This process continued unabated over the next two years. The group was so closely knit that a formal review of plans for Iraq, such as searching for additional intelligence to support the war aims, were ignored by the war-focused cabinet.³³ Even Colin Powell, who later left the group because of personal conflicts with other members of the Bush administration, felt confident in the intelligence data which formed the basis for going to war with Iraq.³⁴ As a result, he can be considered to have been influenced by groupthink during the planning for, and early stages of, the war. Therefore, when the Iraq war began in 2003, it was the product of research, experience, and a mutual goal to promote the end of Saddam Hussein’s regime.³⁵

Structural Faults of Groupthink

Lack of Norms Requiring Methodical Procedures

The Iraq War has lacked important procedures for evaluating alternatives before and during the war. Indeed, regime change in Iraq appeared as the only viable option to members of the Bush administration. According to one administration official, “there was

³¹ Michael J. Mazarr, “The Iraq War and Agenda Setting,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3, no. 1 (2007), p. 4.

³² Glenn Kessler, “U.S. Decision on Iraq Has Puzzling Past,” *The Washington Post*, January 12 2003, p. 1; Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2004), pp. 1-3.

³³ Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2006), 92-93; Woodward, p. 25.

³⁴ Karen DeYoung, *Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), p. 492.

³⁵ Mazarr, p. 11.

absolutely no debate in the normal sense,” on the merits and evidence against Iraq.³⁶ Indeed, in an interview conducted with Bob Woodward for his book, *Plan of Attack*, Bush admits that he had never asked either Powell or Rumsfeld if they felt attacking Iraq was the right thing to do, as both members knew of Bush’s support for the plan and this only enhanced their confidence.³⁷

Moreover, George W. Bush, unlike his father, had little foreign policy experience before the war and this largely caused him to rely on his staff for advice.³⁸ While Powell was often critical of this process, this gave Condoleezza Rice, Rumsfeld, and especially Cheney more access to the president because of their preference for discussing their true feelings in private.³⁹ However, Powell goes on to note that “the president must be satisfied with the way the NSC and the White House were operating,” because the president has never used his authority to change the way information was given to him, or as plans progressed he did not seek out additional information to support his case for war.⁴⁰ Furthermore, members of the American bureaucracy were often excluded from the decision-making process. For example, the State Department’s “Future of Iraq” project, a group made up of experts on Iraq which had produced thirteen volumes of reports and recommendations since 2001 had sent their findings to Rumsfeld to advise him in post-war planning. Despite their collective experience, Rumsfeld was convinced that US forces would be met openly in Iraq and promptly rejected any outside advice.⁴¹

³⁶ James Fallows, “Bush’s Lost Year,” *Atlantic Monthly* 294, no. 3 (October 2004), p. 79.

³⁷ Woodward, pp. 251, 272, 416.

³⁸ John P. Burke, “The Contemporary Presidency: Condoleezza Rice as Nsc Advisor: A Case Study of the Honest Broker Role,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2005), p. 554; DeYoung, p. 478.

³⁹ Andrew Cockburn, *Rumsfeld: His Rise, Fall, and Catastrophic Legacy*, 1st Scribner hardcover ed. (New York, NY: Scribner, 2007), pp. 96-97.

⁴⁰ DeYoung, p. 478.

⁴¹ Patrick J. Haney, “Foreign-Policy Advising: Models and Mysteries from the Bush Administration,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (June 2005), p. 296.

Consequently, any member of this group was blocked from participating in the reconstruction effort and bureaucrats in Iraq were told to ignore the projects recommendations.⁴² This is supported by Bob Woodward who, in a series of interviews on Iraq, was told directly by Bush that: "I have no outside advice. Anybody who says they're an outside adviser of this administration on this particular matter is not telling the truth."⁴³ Thus, the flow of information in the White House deliberately limited debate and outside experts compiling information on a post-Saddam Iraq were routinely rejected due to the closed nature of the administration.

Group Insulation

The Bush administration was, to a large extent, isolated from the broader foreign policy community. Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Rice, and Powell would often discuss issues related to Iraq in closed door meetings, and when communicating with administration appointed officials outside the government, such as L. Paul Bremer, the Director of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance for post-war Iraq, meetings were rarely face-to-face and critical messages on US policy were often ignored.⁴⁴ For example, in a draft RAND report which criticized low US troop levels, Bremer summarized the study with his comments and sent it to Rumsfeld with the note: "I think you should consider this," however, he did not receive a response to this, or any of his requests for additional troops during his time in Iraq.⁴⁵ In addition, the group was also

⁴² Alexander Moens, *The Foreign Policy of George W. Bush: Values, Strategy and Vision* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), p.197; Woodward, pp. 283-284.

⁴³ Haney: p. 296.

⁴⁴ L. Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 10; DeYoung, p. 479.

⁴⁵ Bremer and McConnell, p. 10; DeYoung, p. 479.

insulated to avoid leaks to the press, an issue that concerned few of the members when they did occur, but it remained an annoyance for many, in particular Rumsfeld.⁴⁶ According to Michael Mazarr's analysis of the prewar period, "It is striking how little outside advice Bush sought, how few tough questions were asked of knowledgeable observers."⁴⁷ Moreover, Richard Clarke, a US government official, argues that Bush "doesn't reach out, typically, for a lot of experts. He has a very narrow, regulated, highly regimented set of channels to get advice."⁴⁸ Consequently, the system appears to have been responding to the collective push from Bush - and through the history of many of those around him - to engage Iraq at the earliest opportunity and that outside influences were shut out of the decision-making process as a result.

In addition, Bush's personal drive, and that of his closest advisers, to engage Iraq on their terms reduced the influence that public opinion and media criticism could have on the administration. Support for the president which soared following September 11, 2001, decreased quickly in January 2003 as France and Germany refused to commit to the planned invasion citing a lack of reliable intelligence data.⁴⁹ By March 2003, support for a non-UN backed Iraq invasion stood at 54 percent a bare majority, and if the Bush administration did not seek a final UN Security Council vote to authorize the war support dropped to 47 percent.⁵⁰ Despite this, Bush and his closest aides, Rumsfeld, Cheney, and Wolfowitz had long supported attacks on groups or nations that encouraged terrorist activity and intelligence reports pointed to Iraq as the most likely state capable

⁴⁶ Ricks, p. 121.

⁴⁷ Mazarr, p. 19.

⁴⁸ Nicholas Lemann, "Remember the Alamo: How George W. Bush Reinvented Himself," *The New Yorker*, October 18 2004, p. 148.

⁴⁹ DeYoung, pp. 434-435.

⁵⁰ Richard Benedetto, "Poll: Most back war, but want U.N. support," *USA Today*, March 17, 2003.

of attacking the United States. As a result, public opinion data while not significantly negative in the run up to the war pointed to a descending trend. However, this did not influence these strategically certain decision-makers to reconsider the conflict.

Impartial Leadership

Although Bush would often rely heavily on the experience of his advisers, he has been consistent on strategy in both phases of this war, and he would never refrain from making his views clear to his advisers. Indeed, as discussed above, Bush was a long-time supporter of regime change in Iraq which can be traced back to statements made in 2000 during his presidential campaign in which he argued that: "If I found in any way, shape or form that he was developing weapons of mass destruction" that "I'd take 'em out."⁵¹ Similar statements were repeated by members of his staff in meetings on Iraq and in public speeches in the run up to, and during, the war. Powell notes that this norm appeared to be solidified by 2003 arguing that Bush disliked "anything... that suggests any weakness in the [administration's] position," which often left Powell and his deputy Richard Armitage out of important policy meetings.⁵² Consequently, during his term as Secretary of State, Powell would often refrain from openly criticizing the president or his advisers and eventually accepted his outsider status in the administration, a factor which is wholly consistent with this structural condition of groupthink.

⁵¹ John Lancaster, "In Saddam's Future, a Harder U.S. Line," *The Washington Post*, June 3, 2000, p. 1.

⁵² DeYoung, p. 490.

Homogeneity of Members' Social Background and Ideology

The insulation of the Bush administration has been only enhanced by their common ideological views. Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Rice were able to work closely in large part because of their common view of Saddam Hussein as a major threat to international security. This is important to note as Rumsfeld and Bush's father were political enemies dating back to the 1970s; however, their common view on defense policy convinced them to work together in 2000 and was only enhanced after September 11th, 2001.⁵³ The War on Terror had a further affect on Bush who viewed an expansion of the conflict as a moral choice to, in his words, "rid the world of evil."⁵⁴ At the same time, Cheney expressed strong support for the use of military force in Iraq as a method for reshaping the Middle East, a view strongly supported by Bush and the political elites at the Pentagon.⁵⁵ Likewise, Wolfowitz a strong supporter of an assertive foreign policy after September 11th, had moved the group to consider regime change in Iraq. In his view this was an extension of Bush's emphasis on defeating regimes that support terrorism, a point he made very clear to the cabinet on 13 September 2001.⁵⁶ Moreover, even less vocal members of the administration, such as Rice, expressed similar views arguing in late 2002 that: "There wasn't a flash moment. There's no decision meeting. But Iraq had been on the radar screen that it was a danger and that it was something you were going to have to deal with eventually."⁵⁷ Therefore, in contrast to even often cited close relationships between Nixon and Kissinger, Bush has been

⁵³ Cockburn, pp. 96-97.

⁵⁴ Moens, p. 135.

⁵⁵ Spender Ackerman and Franklin Foer, "The Radical: What Dick Cheney Really Believes," *The New Republic*, December 1 and 8, 2003, p. 20.

⁵⁶ Moens, p. 137.

⁵⁷ Mazarr: p. 6.

able to work very closely with the majority of his staff and this only proved to reinforce US strategy in Iraq which has remained consistent despite criticism of his decisions by the news media.

Moreover, as noted above, the group members have a similar social background. Cheney acted as Secretary of Defense under the previous Bush administration. Rumsfeld had been Secretary of Defense and Chief of Staff to President Gerald Ford. Powell held the position of National Security Adviser to Ronald Reagan and in 1989 became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In addition, Rice, Wolfowitz, and Armitage were long-term Republicans who served in various branches of the federal government for decades before joining the Bush administration. As a result, this similar social background only served to reinforce the current US strategy as each member, both past and present, has been highly supportive of the basis for the US presence in Iraq.

Provocative Situational Context

It has been demonstrated that in the Iraq War, and in particular during the pre-war stage, the US executive has shown sufficient evidence for the presence of the structural conditions of groupthink. Based on this, an expansion should be made to examine the influence of high stress from external sources and the affect low self-esteem had on the decision-making process.

High Stress from External Sources

In the Iraq War, decision-makers were not under constant stress akin to the Vietnam War or even shorter crises such as the Cuban missile crisis.⁵⁸ Despite this, the group did experience stress in part from news media criticism of US and coalition casualties which mounted after the end of combat operations in May 2003. Members of the administration were concerned that, similar to Vietnam, the American public would only accept American casualties for a short period before the majority would become critical of the war and US strategy. Indeed, on September 7, 2004 the death of an American soldier in Sadr City brought the death toll to 1,000, a milestone that was reported and repeated in all major newspapers, television, and on the internet as a major turning point in the war. President Bush attempted to counter these negative reports in his brief statement that “we mourn every loss of life,” but that “we will honor their memories by completing the mission.”⁵⁹ As the war progressed, Rumsfeld and Bush have on separate occasions admitted to reviewing casualty figures in response to the rising deaths being reported in the news media. Despite these incidents, doubt over casualty figures has not entered the president’s public speeches or in many of his private conversations with political and military elites. Instead, he has shown resolve to end the war on American terms. Indeed, in a speech delivered on October 28, 2005, to a group of American troops, President Bush maintained that, regardless of the violence against American forces “we will never back down, never give in, and never accept

⁵⁸ Yetiv, p. 427.

⁵⁹ “Fierce Fighting in Fallujah as U.S. Toll Tops 1,000: Bush, Kerry Spar over Rising Number of Deaths,” *MSNBC News Services*, September 9, 2004, p. 1.

anything less than complete victory.”⁶⁰ As a result, the Bush administration was clearly aware of the negative pressure of the news media throughout the conflict, but he and his cabinet were seemingly able to handle the tough task of managing their message on the war.

Low Self-Esteem

For this case, there is little evidence that any member of the administration considered the operation to be a failure. Given that Operation Iraqi Freedom was highly successful in its goal of defeating the Iraqi army and overthrowing Saddam Hussein’s government, all group members, including later critics Colin Powell and Richard Armitage, considered the conflict a major political success. Moreover, as criticism of US force levels rose after the invasion, critiques of US strategy have been ignored even from US appointed advisers and close-friends of the administration.⁶¹ For example, during a direct meeting between Rumsfeld and Jay Garner who led the post-war reconstruction effort in 2003, Rumsfeld responded to his comments stating that “we are where we are, there’s no need to discuss it.”⁶² Furthermore, the consistency of the US strategy in holy cities such as Fallujah and Najaf after the invasion demonstrates that US decision-makers had little difficulty coming to its decisions. Finally, the group did not have any moral concerns over the decision to go to war, nor did they feel before or during the war that a choice was made that violated their sense of ethics as each member fully supported the mission.

⁶⁰ Michael Isikoff and David Corn, *Hubris: The inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, 2006), p. 395.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

⁶² Ricks, p. 167.

Evidence of Groupthink in Iraq

As the above evidence proves, the Iraq War is a prime case for examining if the news media can influence decision-makers showing signs of groupthink. In this case, the central members of the US administration have shown to be cohesive, shown structural errors in the decision process, and evidence supports the situational context being a potential factor in decision-making. Therefore, a brief examination will be made of the symptoms of groupthink that can lead to defective decision-making.

Overestimation and the Illusion of Invulnerability

While some differences in views existed, ample evidence exists that the members responsible for planning and execution of the conflict including Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Cheney, and Bush believed that the war plan would not fail. Indeed, as the initial invasion date approached the US plan which originally called for as many as 500,000 troops was recast six times, wherein the final version called for just 78,000.⁶³ Although the plan appeared to be successful as US forces were able to move quickly through the country using superior technology, a joint command structure, and close coordination from nearby Kuwait, the counter-insurgency phase was impacted by Rumsfeld and his deputy's refusal to provide additional troops to secure Iraq.⁶⁴ The two men believed the plan would be so successful in rapidly defeating Iraq's army, and that American forces would be viewed as liberators from the dictatorial regime of Hussein; that a small force could maintain the peace before being turned over to a new Iraqi

⁶³ Woodward, p. 287.

⁶⁴ Clayton Dennison, "Operation Iraqi Freedom: What Went Wrong? A Clausewitzian Analysis," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 9, no. 3 (Spring 2006/07), pp. 16-17.

army.⁶⁵ Sending major numbers of troops at any phase of the war, in Michael Isikoff's and David Corns' words would be, "an admission of error and miscalculation. And acknowledging mistakes wasn't part of the president's campaign."⁶⁶ As a result, the Bush administration has clearly shown signs of the illusion of invulnerability in both phases of the war and as Bush's public statements have noted, this is unlikely to change.

Closed-Mindedness

Following years of difficulty conducting weapons inspections in Iraq and Hussein's expulsion of UN weapon inspectors, the Bush administration did not consider negotiation as a possible resolution to the conflict. In addition, as there was no doubt within the group that Saddam possessed illegal weapons, the group shared a view that Hussein was evil and could not be dealt with peacefully.⁶⁷ Indeed, early drafts of the 2002 State of the Union address originally included only Iraq as a major threat to national security. Although this was later changed to include Iran and North Korea to prevent the appearance of a declaration of war, the decision to intervene had clearly been made in the previous few months.⁶⁸ Members of the administration not only refused to seek alternatives to the plan, but also attempted to build connections between Hussein and known terrorist supporting states and groups, while also refusing to negotiate a possible resolution to the conflict.⁶⁹ This collective view has only

⁶⁵ Cockburn, pp. 169-170.

⁶⁶ Isikoff and Corn, p. 358.

⁶⁷ DeYoung, pp. 448-449; Mann, p. 348.

⁶⁸ Burke: p. 561.

⁶⁹ Cockburn, p. 168; Ben Fritz, Bryan Keefer, and Brendan Nyhan, *All the President's Spin* (New York, NY: Touchstone Books, 2004), pp. 177-185; Bob Woodward, *State of Denial* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006), pp. 120-121.

continued as violence from the insurgency began to increase. Referring to the intelligence he was provided on the insurgency, Rumsfeld complained in one meeting that it was “failing to confirm what *he knew* to be true,” asserting that the insurgency did not exist and hostile acts against US forces were the result of small groups of Saddam loyalists.⁷⁰ Here, Rumsfeld’s statement confirmed too many in the military of the flaws in his personality, shared by many in the administration, that they were convinced of their position and contrary evidence could not influence them. In addition, Rumsfeld’s statement reflected the general policy of the Bush administration to reject claims of an insurgency, which continued for months, prior to the beginning of major counter-insurgency operations in 2004.⁷¹ Taking this into account, the members of the Bush administration appeared to stereotype outside groups and had collective rationalizations, both of which have strongly influenced US strategy in Iraq.

Pressures towards uniformity

Although many of the groups’ members continue to be supportive of US efforts in Iraq, following the initial invasion and the US difficulties in battles with the insurgency some members began to criticize US strategy and evidence suggests they were marginalized in the group as a result. For example, Powell was a major supporter of the war prior to the invasion, however, to counter rising difficulties in Iraq following the invasion he recommended using Mideast experts from the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, but all of his recommendations were rejected by Cheney and

⁷⁰ Cockburn, p. 193.

⁷¹ Alice Hills, "Fear and Loathing in Falluja," *Armed Forces & Society* 32, no. 4 (July 2006), p. 631.

Rumsfeld, and their own people were given these positions without consulting Powell.⁷² Moreover, prior to the invasion, DoD was given authority for determining the development stages of the operation, normally a matter for the Department of State, which seriously diminished Powell's position and his relationship with Rumsfeld.⁷³ As a result, Bush's preference to reduce friction and disagreement often left Powell out of important strategy sessions. Consequently, Rice was often used as an intermediary between Powell and the president to be both informed and to ensure that his opinion was expressed to Bush.⁷⁴ Therefore, direct pressure from members of the administration seriously affected the decision-making environment and the influence some members could have on US strategy.

Moreover, Powell's criticism of the functioning of the advisory system in the White House made his term in the Bush administration difficult.⁷⁵ As discussed above, meetings often occurred between small groups and the president, and as Powell observed the president was often influenced the most by "the last person to whisper in his ear," and that "that person was usually Cheney."⁷⁶ While not overtly planned, Bush's relationship with his vice-president is closer than in most US administrations. In part due to his limited foreign policy experience prior to the conflict, major decisions on the war have largely been made with Cheney present. As a result, Cheney was often used to prevent changes in US strategy from occurring as he remains the most adamant supporter of US strategy in the Iraq. In contrast, as a former military commander Powell

⁷² DeYoung, p. 462.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 417, 458, 518.

⁷⁴ Burke: pp. 561-562; Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp. 266-269, 149-250.

⁷⁵ George Gedda, "Colin Powell: Four Tumultuous Years," *Foreign Service Journal* 82, no. 2 (February 2005), p. 32.

⁷⁶ DeYoung, p. 478.

was far more sensitive to the military situation on the ground.⁷⁷ Consequently, after Bush was re-elected in 2004, Powell promptly left the administration feeling that many members refusal to admit to previous mistakes had led to errors being uncorrected and tense relations between State and Defense to continue unabated.

Similarly, difficulties have arisen between Rice and Rumsfeld over his recommendations for US troop levels and dismissal of recommendations from experts. However, unlike Powell, Rice has refused to damage the administration's cohesiveness over a personal clash, a factor wholly consistent with self-censorship in groupthink. According to an assessment by Thomas Ricks of Rice and Rumsfeld's relationship, he notes that "challenging Rumsfeld was outside her boundaries," due to his support from Cheney and Bush who repeatedly rejected requests to have him replaced following his handling of the insurgency.⁷⁸ Taking all this into account, the Bush administration has shown signs of all three pressures of uniformity, including direct pressure and the limited access given to Powell, and Rice's self-censorship. As a result, for many inside and outside the US executive, it has been very difficult for critical assessments of US strategy to affect the president due to his closed-minded attitude and similarly stubborn senior cabinet.

In sum, the evidence supports the central tenets of groupthink and its three major conditions that can develop into defective decision-making. Here, it is important to reiterate that while these symptoms can cause defective decision-making, the purpose of this research is to determine if decision-makers can be influenced by an outside

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 516.

⁷⁸ Woodward, *State of Denial*, p. 303.

group, the news media, and is not intended to be an in-depth analysis of Iraq as a potential fiasco.

The News Media in Iraq

Major Combat Operations in Iraq, 2003

The invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003 following months of build up in the Middle East and years of planning from the Bush administration received mixed coverage during the opening week of the war. US and UK reporters were embedded into combat units in an attempt to both give the coalition's perspective on the war and as a method for the Bush administration to shape American reporting. Therefore, reporters could file stories on US military action nearly instantly, using television, print, and the internet. Moreover, following the lack of control the US imposed on the news media in Vietnam, and the censorship imposed on newscasters in Grenada and Panama, the embedded system used in Iraq received relatively little criticism from media organizations.⁷⁹ Given that many of the stories produced were often less biased than originally anticipated and according to one report "embedded reporters had among the highest percentage of neutral stories (91 percent) of any type of reporter," early critical views of the system were largely baseless and only appeared to provide much needed access to US political and military elites.⁸⁰ With this in mind, the embedded system proved to follow common patterns of reporters using mainly official sources of information to compile their stories.

Despite the early success of positive or neutral coverage, reporting on US military strategy turned negative after only a week of fighting. The process of

⁷⁹ Shannon E. Martin, "Us Media Pools and Military Interventions in the 1980s and 1990s," *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 5 (2006), p. 608.

⁸⁰ Aday et al: p. 15.

embedding reporters with infantry and armoured units gave reporters the unique ability to develop stories from the perspective of the US military. It also presented the media with an unprecedented opportunity to report negatively on the implementation of US military strategy on the front lines, which largely began to appear during the second week of military operations. For example, several stories referring to “two week jitters” appeared across major US media outlets when a major sandstorm slowed the advance of US forces toward Baghdad.⁸¹ Some of the resulting headlines included “Questions Raised About Invasion Force: Some Ex-Gulf War Commanders Say U.S. Needs More Troops, Another Armored Division,” “Allies’ Pre-War Assumptions Fall Short As Iraqi Resistance Stiffens,” and “Sandstorm Brings Forces to Grinding Halt.”⁸² Embedded reporters expressed to domestic audiences that US forces had been completely stopped by the bad weather, a result of poor planning in a desert environment. However, media reports of major difficulties proved to be unfounded as US forces continued to move on Iraqi roads towards Karbala and the outskirts of Baghdad.⁸³ According to an assessment of the progress by a senior Marine commander, “its regiments needed and expected no pause.”⁸⁴ Indeed, as the force was designed to operate lightly and to keep pressing the enemy it was able to continue its operations

⁸¹ Douglas Kellner, “Media Propaganda and Spectacle in the War on Iraq: A Critique of U.S. Broadcasting Networks,” *Cultural Studies/Critical Methodologies* 4, no. 3 (August 2004), p. 332.

⁸² These and other headlines included: Vernon Loeb and Thomas E. Ricks, “Questions Raised About Invasion Force: Some Ex-Gulf War Commanders Say U.S. Needs More Troops, Another Armored Division,” *Washington Post*, March 25, 2003, Barbara Slavin and Vivienne Walt, “Allies’ Pre-War Assumptions Fall Short As Iraqi Resistance Stiffens,” *USA Today*, March 25, 2003, Ellen Knickmeyer, “Sandstorm Brings Forces to Grinding Halt,” *Washington Times*, March 25, 2003, Ronald Brownstein, “Iraq Forcing Longer, Conventional War,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 2003, Richard T. Cooper and Paul Richter, “Former Commanders Question U.S. Strategy,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 2003, and Thomas E. Ricks, “War Could Last Months, Officers Say,” *Washington Post*, March 27, 2003.

⁸³ John Keegan, *The Iraq War* (London, UK: Hutchinson, 2004), p. 155.

⁸⁴ Francis J. West and Ray L. Smith, *The March Up: Taking Baghdad with the 1st Marine Division* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2003), p. 83.

despite distancing itself from the slow moving logistics vehicles.⁸⁵ Thus, some units were preparing to assault cities along the Tigris river before ordered to pause by commanders of the 3rd Infantry Division.⁸⁶ Moreover, many units had progressed so quickly in the sandstorm they were forced to backtrack 23 miles to meet the rest of the division.⁸⁷ As a result, many embedded units received little or no coverage because operations were progressing far more quickly than could have been anticipated.

In addition, embedded press during this period expressed concern that US planning was inadequate, particularly with respect to troop and equipment levels, and commented that US strategy was overly ambitious and unworkable.⁸⁸ US strategic planners had predicted that a strong strike through southern Iraq toward Baghdad would eliminate Baathist strongholds and undermine the resolve of the Iraqi forces defending Baghdad.⁸⁹ Early press reports reflected commentary by former US military officers including Wesley Clark and Desert Storm division commander Thomas Rhome. Both made frequent appearances on television during this period to criticize US force levels and equipment leading to speculation that the war could last for months.⁹⁰ Despite the collective experience of these commanders, their criticism in the media did not appear to have an observable effect on strategy. Indeed, although US planners had a limited timeline and far fewer forces than were deployed in 1991, the Iraqi Army's personnel and equipment had never fully recovered from Operation Desert Storm. For example, in

⁸⁵ Michael DeLong and Noah Lukeman, *Inside Centcom: The Unvarnished Truth About the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2004), pp. 102-103, Nicholas E. Reynolds, *Basrah, Baghdad, and Beyond: The U.S. Marine Corps in the Second Iraq War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2005), West and Smith, p.83.

⁸⁶ Reynolds, p. 90.

⁸⁷ Keegan, p. 156.

⁸⁸ Christopher Paul and James J. Kim, "Reporters on the Battlefield: The Embedded Press System in Historical Context," (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2004), pp. 55-56.

⁸⁹ Murray Williamson and Robert H. Scales, *The Iraq War* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 195-208.

⁹⁰ West and Smith, p. 82.

1991 the on paper strength of the Iraqi regular army was over forty divisions, by 2003 the army reported seventeen divisions, and it had less than half the equipment it operated in 1991 including just 2,000 largely obsolete tanks.⁹¹ As Iraq lacked a large and well-equipped army, US forces relied on a strategy of speed and tactical superiority to reach Baghdad which showed to be quite effective during the initial stages of the war. Moreover, the continued progress of US forces following the sandstorm largely negated calls to deploy the 4th Infantry Division which was originally slated to enter through Turkey, or call up additional heavy armor divisions behind held in reserve.⁹²

Moreover, as the sandstorm lifted, US forces resumed their original strategy of bypassing major cities in southern Iraq to hit Baghdad directly.⁹³ Statements by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld emphasized the progress made by US ground forces during the opening weeks of the campaign and pointed out that, at the time of heightened media criticism over alleged slow progress and despite the weather, US forces were within 50 miles of Baghdad.⁹⁴ Indeed, despite the slowdown of US forces the operation went more smoothly than US planners could have anticipated. Taking these examples into account, these events not only demonstrate that a tangible phenomena, the sand storm, could and did have a temporary effect on the speed of prosecution of US strategy, but also that media coverage of the problems created by this phenomenon had no discernable effect on the course of US strategy during this period of the Iraq War.

⁹¹ Keegan, pp. 128-129.

⁹² Richard B. Andres, Craig Wills, and Thomas E. Griffith Jr., "Winning with Allies: The Strategic Value of the Afghan Model " *International Security* 30, no. 3 (Winter 2005/06), p. 141.

⁹³ Romesh Ratnesar, *Sticking to His Guns* (cited November 21, 2005); available from <http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/03/31/timep.guns.tm/index.html>, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Donald Rumsfeld and General Frank Myers, "Dod News Briefing - Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers," (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), March 28, 2003), p. 1.

The news media was further isolated from senior officials during this conflict by the level of certainty demonstrated by US officials, even to criticism from senior military advisers. Prior to the invasion, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended 250,000 to 300,000 troops be used to secure Iraq, but these numbers were later revised by Rumsfeld and his staff in the weeks before the war to 140,000.⁹⁵ The force plan developed by the Joint Chiefs was designed to be used as a guide for the number of troops that would be needed in the occupation phase of the war. However, Under Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz had a dramatically different view of US troop levels, arguing that he did not see, “why it would take more troops to occupy the country than to take down the regime.”⁹⁶ Any increase in troop requests had to be approved after careful scrutiny by Rumsfeld and his deputy, resulting in many conservative estimates for occupation force levels being significantly reduced.⁹⁷ This further contributed to strain among Pentagon staff and CENTCOM commanders in Iraq as numbers had to be reviewed frequently before approval severely increasing opportunity costs of the mission.⁹⁸ Consequently, this is particularly important because the level of resolve of the US executive to reject troop recommendations from senior military advisers demonstrates the limited influence the news media could have despite the frequency and accuracy of their reports.

The Joint Chiefs displayed similar problems influencing decision-making in the months leading up the conflict. In early 2003, former Joint Chiefs Chairman General

⁹⁵ Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p. 287.

⁹⁶ Ricks, p. 123.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁹⁸ Seymour M. Hersh, *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2004), 251-253; Gregory Hooker, *Shaping the Plan for Operation Iraqi Freedom: The Role of Military Intelligence Assessments* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2005), p. 22 ; Ricks, p. 122.

Hugh Shelton stated publicly at a Pentagon meeting that he felt troops levels were insufficient to conduct the full scale invasion requested by DoD.⁹⁹ His concerns were echoed by other senior members of the US Army including General Eric Shinseki, who reporting his concerns directly to Congress and, consequently, he was later dismissed by DoD.¹⁰⁰ Senior military commanders were especially critical of plans to remove two heavy tank divisions from the invasion force, a measure reportedly to increase efficiency by using rapidly mobile forces rather than slower-moving heavy units. In addition, requests to have the force numbers reviewed were rejected many times by senior DoD officials, straining relations between the two sides.¹⁰¹ Despite the apparent need for additional troops, Rumsfeld's earlier commitment in 2000 to reform and shrink the US military by using small mobile forces and technology overrode, to him, the collective experience of senior military staff. According to a senior general close to the process, "the running argument was eroding relations with Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz and so needed to be brought to an end."¹⁰²

Although orders to deploy the 1st Armored Division were eventually accepted, it was the result of months of immense pressure and internal criticism from the Joint Chiefs that one of the two units needed to be put into service to accomplish the goals of the US administration.¹⁰³ In this way, by presenting the use of heavy armor as being essential to accomplishing US strategic goals in Iraq, which required crippling Iraqi

⁹⁹ John P. Burke, "The Contemporary Presidency: Condoleezza Rice as NSC Adviser: A Case Study of the Honest Broker Role," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2005), p. 568.

¹⁰⁰ James Fallows, "Blind into Baghdad," *Atlantic Monthly* 293, no. 1 (2004): pp. 64-65, 73, Michael R. Gordon, "The Strategy to Secure Iraq Did Not Foresee a 2nd War," *The New York Times*, October 19, 2004.

¹⁰¹ Ricks, *Fiasco*, p. 119.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

forces and occupying territory, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz reluctantly accepted.¹⁰⁴ Many of the generals opposing the US administrations plan including Shinseki were later forced into retirement following this and other battles over troop support levels. Moreover, where Rumsfeld did agree with the US Army staff, including Richard Myers, Peter Pace, and Tommy Franks, who collaborated with the Bush administration on the invasion and occupation strategy in 2002, were selected because of their reluctance to be critical of their superiors and their ability to “play politics.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, while some senior personnel were critical of the invasion plan, these men were often forced to retire and those willing to work with the Bush administration on the invasion and restructuring plan were promoted into senior military positions. Taking this into account, the example set by the major combat phase of Iraq is highly supportive of hypotheses H1 and H2 and the central tenets of groupthink.

The Iraq Insurgency

The First Major Battle, Fallujah 2004

The Iraqi insurgency, which has been active since 2003, has seriously delayed the efforts of US forces to establish peaceful conditions in Iraq. Compounding this difficulty, reporting on the effectiveness of the US counterinsurgency strategy has been largely negative. For example, an article that appeared in *The Los Angeles Times* during the US operations in Fallujah in November, 2004, the largest single operation in the counter-insurgency campaign, commented that, “Iraqi insurgents based in Fallujah presented U.S. military forces with two choices, one bad and the other worse. Marines

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 120, 127.

¹⁰⁵ Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra li: The inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2006).

opted for the bad one Monday, assaulting the city with the understanding that civilians as well as fighters would be killed and Arab passions would be inflamed far outside Fallujah and Iraq.”¹⁰⁶ The coverage of the application of American military strategy in Fallujah was symptomatic of a general trend in coverage of the US counterinsurgency operation in Iraq, wherein the news media emphasized US casualties, successful insurgent attacks on Iraqi civilians, and has largely downplayed the success of the strategy in stabilizing most of the country. During Operation Phantom Fury in Fallujah, US and Iraqi forces managed to strike against major insurgent bases in Fallujah, clearing house to house of enemy combatants.¹⁰⁷ The combined ground and air operation is credited with eliminating thousands of insurgents in the city during the month of November. However, again, articles published by news organizations like *The Associated Press* argued that the US-led military actions turned Fallujah into a safe haven for insurgents, and alleged that military operations concentrated against civilian targets.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, despite consistently negative coverage of the application of US strategy in Fallujah, the United States resisted changing the course of its strategy.

Moreover, support for the Iraqi Security Forces has also been crucial to US operations to counter enemy tactics of using religious sites as fortifications in an effort to limit US attacks. Indeed, similar tactics were used in Vietnam by the North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces, wherein they used the cover of small villages, such as Cam Ne, to attack US forces, which in the presence of the news media caused alarm that US forces were causing reckless civilian casualties. Therefore, US decision-makers, supporting

¹⁰⁶ David Walsh, *Us Media Applauds Destruction of Fallujah* (cited November 17, 2005); available from <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2004/nov2004/fall-n17.shtml>, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Christopher M. Ford, "Speak No Evil: Targeting a Population's Neutrality to Defeat an Insurgency," *Parameters*, no. 35 (Summer 2005), p. 60.

¹⁰⁸ Robert H. Reid, "Analysis: A Fine Balance," *The Associated Press*, November 10, 2004.

the “clear, hold, and build” strategy, have increasingly transferred responsibility for clearing civilian and in particular religious buildings to the ISF. For example, when attacking a mosque in Fallujah that was used as a barracks for insurgent forces, the ISF invaded the building clearing room to room, a tactic US commanders felt was better suited to an Arab force.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, Iraqi forces were more successful than US units in clearing the city of civilians, and using the remaining residents to help them find hidden weapons caches used by insurgents.¹¹⁰ The promotion of Iraqi forces in the battle for state-wide security is consistent with the strategy established by US decision-makers as this battle ended the first of many in the volatile al Anbar province. Promoting the ISF was supported by Bush who saw this battle as critical to securing Iraq from insurgent forces, and as a result went ahead with the attack, despite initial criticism from Prime Minister Iyad Allawi who aimed to find a peaceful solution to the crisis.¹¹¹ The media, in turn, was not effective in changing the focus of US strategy in Fallujah.

In addition, when the news media reported the difficulties faced by US planners due to low numbers of Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) participating in during the initial stages of the Fallujah assault, this did not directly impact the US strategy of progressively turning over security responsibilities to Iraqi soldiers. For example, during Operation Phantom Fury, the ISF fought and secured the neighbourhood of Jolan, and on November 11, 2004, was given responsibility for its security.¹¹² In addition, under the leadership of the US 2nd Marine Division, the ISF deployed 4,200 soldiers to secure the al Anbar province, which includes Fallujah, and has been progressively delegated

¹⁰⁹ Ron E. Hassner, “Fighting Insurgency on Sacred Ground,” *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (Spring 2006), p. 156.

¹¹⁰ Ricks, p. 406.

¹¹¹ Woodward, *State of Denial*, p. 359.

¹¹² John Pike, *Operation Al-Fajr. (Dawn) Operation Phantom Fury* (cited November 22, 2005); available from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/oif-phantom-fury-fallujah.htm>, p. 1.

greater responsibility for patrols of the Syrian border.¹¹³ The ISF displayed the ability to protect these areas and maintain secure traffic between the borders of the two states with limited US oversight. These operations are consistent with the strategy set out by the US executive during 2003, wherein US forces would secure territories for eventual transfer to the ISF.¹¹⁴ Indeed, a statement made by a senior US General in October 2005, noted that, “we have right now 18 battalions of Iraqi security forces – Iraqi army forces currently working with our folks in this area. I estimate that by November about half of those will be at a level where they will be able to take the lead in such things as planning, coordinating and actually executing operations.”¹¹⁵

Equally important, the difficulty faced by Iraqi Security Forces in securing major violent uprisings by insurgent groups in Fallujah has not been a major concern of administration officials. For example, on November 12, 2004, during the battle of Fallujah former Secretary of State Colin Powell supported increasing US troop levels in response to his belief that US, British, and Iraqi troop levels were too low to provide security and capture and hold terrain.¹¹⁶ Moreover, he recommended replacing Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense due to his miscalculation of the insurgency and reluctance to change US strategy.¹¹⁷ However, this strong opposition to US strategy resulted in the resignation of Powell and the appointment of Rice who, like Bush, strongly opposed disrupting the war effort and the overall momentum achieved in these

¹¹³ US Department of State, "Report on Iraq Relief and Reconstruction," (United States Department of State, Section 2207, April 6, 2005), p. 7.

¹¹⁴ Hess, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ Stephen T. Johnson, "Briefing with Major General Stephen T. Johnson," ed. Department of Defense (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), 2005), p. 1.

¹¹⁶ Ricks, p. 407.

¹¹⁷ Woodward, *State of Denial*, p. 361.

battles.¹¹⁸ Therefore, even internal government pressure could not influence US strategy because of opposition within the administration to any changes that would be perceived as admitting past mistakes, and thus the news media could not be influential in this political environment.

Najaf

The United States received similarly negative reporting during its counterinsurgency operation in Najaf. During the month of August 2004, attempts by US Marines and the ISF to attack the forces of Muqtata al Sadr were met with critical reporting of damages to holy buildings in the city.¹¹⁹ According to Kenneth Payne's analysis of the media reports of this operation, "media reporting of hardships in the town and of considerable damage to urban environments... [led to] political pressure to limit the assault quickly."¹²⁰ However, as Donald Rumsfeld countered, the military had the capacity to defeat Sadr's militia, but decided instead to make a negotiated settlement to end the operation.¹²¹ As al Sadr's militia's base of operations was in the city's major mosque, the US did not want to inflict further damage on a building of religious significance to the population. Instead, the negotiated settlement represented another method for achieving the same end for the operation and ensured that the city could be secured for rebuilding, and be transferred to the ISF. Rumsfeld went on to argue that coalition forces "would have successfully retaken the city. It turned out they didn't have to. The fact that it was clear to Sadr and his crowd, the militia, that they did have the

¹¹⁸ Hills: 631; Woodward, *State of Denial*, p. 361.

¹¹⁹ Patrick J. McDonnell, "Iraqi City Lies in Ruins," *The Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 2004, Kirk Vick, "Iraqi Holy City Left Broken by Urban Warfare," *The Washington Post* August 27, 2004.

¹²⁰ Kenneth Payne, "The Media as an Instrument of War," *Parameters*, no. 35 (Spring 2005), pp. 88-89.

¹²¹ Rumsfeld, "Secretary Rumsfeld's Speech at the National Press Club," p. 1.

ability to do that is what without question led Sadr to encourage his militia to get out of town."¹²² Moreover, the United States began transferring authority for provincial security of Najaf to the ISF in November, 2004, which allowed Iraqi forces to conduct their own planning and operations outside of the authority of the US Marines.¹²³ This is, once again, consistent with the US strategy in Iraq to transition responsibility for Iraqi security to the ISF. This transition was completed in Najaf by September, 2005.¹²⁴

While some argue that the frequency of news reporting on Iraq fell during the spring and summer of 2004, the death of the 1,000th US soldier in the short war only increased calls to change US strategy. For example, reports in newspapers and on television highlighted that of the 1,000 deaths, 647 had occurred since May 1, 2003, when major combat operations were declared over.¹²⁵ Following the resolution of US operations in Najaf, portions of the Mehdi Army moved to the Baghdad suburb of Sadr city and rejoined the battle against American forces, which began to be covered extensively as US casualties reached the important milestone.¹²⁶ However, these reports did not appear to influence US strategy. For example, in early September 2004, close members of the administration Rice and Dan Bartlett, the White House communications director, approached the president about improving the White House's message on Iraq, but the request was ignored by the president who, once again,

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ American Forces Press Service, *Iraqi Army Takes Control of Najaf; U.S. Soldier Killed by IED* (cited November 22, 2005); available from http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Sep2005/20050907_2632.html, 1, American Forces Press Service, *Iraqi Security Forces Take Control of Najaf Province* (cited November 22, 2005); available from http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Nov2004/n11302004_2004113003.html, p. 1.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Isikoff and Corn, p. 371.

¹²⁶ Tom Bowman and Gail Gibson, "U.S. Military Deaths Climb Beyond 1,000: Grim Milestone May Spur Turning Point, Analysts Say," *Baltimore Sun*, September 8 2004, p. 1.

refused to discuss mistakes or reconsider his strategy even to his closest aides.¹²⁷ Moreover, during October 2004, Bush felt that there was little reason to change US strategy as coalition and Iraqi forces fought pitched battles against al Sadr's forces in the Haifa street area of Sadr City, and from October 7 and 9, insurgent forces agreed to a truce and many surrendered their weapons. Although still a volatile area of the city, US forces transitioned parts of Sadr City to Iraqi control in March 2005 and the remainder of these areas to the ISF in 2007 as Iraqi forces took the lead in planning and conducting counter-insurgency operations in parts of Baghdad.¹²⁸ Therefore, despite constantly negative coverage of US casualties and progress in the ISF, the news media could not influence US strategy or decision-makers who have shown to be resistant to criticism despite the frequency and support of these reports inside the US executive branch of government.

The War in 2005 and 2006

The generally negative tone of media reporting, coming from the majority of the American print and televised media, has brought into question the US strategy to remain in post-Saddam Iraq. A study commissioned by Pew Research concluded that the steady stream of largely negative reporting is "significantly undermining support for U.S. military operations there."¹²⁹ Despite this, US political and military decision-makers did not change the direction of military strategy to counter rising criticism. Instead, the

¹²⁷ Woodward, *State of Denial*, p. 332.

¹²⁸ Anthony H. Cordesman and Patrick Baetjer, *Iraqi Security Forces: A Strategy for Success* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2005), pp. 200-201; United States, "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," (Department of Defense, June 2007), p. 31.

¹²⁹ Andrew Kohut and Jodie Allen, *Guantanamo Prisoner Mistreatment Seen as Isolated Incidents, Iraq News Increases Calls for Troop Withdrawal* (The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press), p. 2.

US administration demonstrated resolve in maintaining the Iraq strategy outlined above, which includes destruction of the insurgency operation mounted against US forces. For example, in statements made in 2004 and in the 2005 State of the Union Address, President Bush maintained that, despite the increased violence against American forces, troops would remain to defeat the insurgency.¹³⁰ Furthermore, in statements made to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in October, 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice argued clearly that, “our strategy – the key – is to clear, hold, and build: clear areas from insurgent control, hold them securely, and build durable, national Iraqi institutions.”¹³¹ These expressions of the Bush administration’s resolve to maintain effectively the same strategy in Iraq that it has followed since the end of major combat operations suggests that, despite the high level of media criticism of the US military strategy in Iraq, the news media has had little influence on the course of American strategy in this conflict.

Media criticism over the direction of military strategy has continued into late 2005. Statements by US Congressman John Murtha in November, 2005, unleashed a new wave of media criticism of US strategy in Iraq and have added pressure to the US administration to set an end date for operations there.¹³² However, repeated statements from members of the US executive suggest that a state of strategic certainty exists in the Bush administration’s resolve to reaffirm the long term commitment to the counterinsurgency strategy. Furthermore, no end date has been publicly identified for

¹³⁰ George W. Bush and Iyal Allawi, Bush, Allawi Affirm Commitment to Overcome Insurgency, (cited November 5, 2005); available from <http://japan.usembassy.gov/e/p/tp-20040927-38.html>, p. 1, and George W. Bush, State of the Union Address 2005, (The White House, cited November 5, 2005); available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/02/20050202-11.html>, p. 7.

¹³¹ Rice, p. 1.

¹³² Charles Babington, "Hawkish Democrat Joins Call for Pullout. GOP Assails Murtha's Demand to Leave Iraq," *The Washington Post*, November 18, 2005.

the strategy despite growing concern in the news media for the mission to end. For example, Donald Rumsfeld speaking in July, argued that: "Insurgencies tend to go on five, six, eight, 10, 12 years," and that; "We're going to create an environment that the Iraqi people and the Iraqi security forces can win against that insurgency."¹³³ Likewise, Army Chief of Staff Peter Schoomaker stated that the US will prepare for four years in Iraq, departing after President Bush leaves office.¹³⁴ Although the numbers provided in these statements differ, they all maintain a multiyear commitment to the existing US strategy of transition to the ISF which is anticipated to be completed in 2008.¹³⁵ Moreover, on November 29, 2005, President Bush made statements reinforcing the administration's commitments to its counterinsurgency strategy by stating that US forces will not leave the state "without having achieved victory."¹³⁶

In addition, as the counter-insurgency operations have shifted away from major battles to basic security and anti-terrorist operations the strategy has moved into the phases of holding, and rebuilding Iraq, a plan being conducted increasingly under the supervision of Iraqi forces. At the same time reporters increasingly focused on a potential civil war developing in Iraq and criticized US decision-makers for ignoring growing unrest in some areas of Iraq.¹³⁷ Despite these frequent negative reports and its coverage on television, in newspapers, and on the internet members of the US administration have refused to acknowledge problems in Iraq. For example, in his public

¹³³ The Associated Press, *Rumsfeld Braces for More Violence in Iraq: Says Insurgency Could Endure for Any Number of Years, Perhaps until 2017* (Associated Press, cited November 14, 2005); available from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8366705/>, p. 1.

¹³⁴ The Associated Press, "Army Planning for Four More Years in Iraq: Top General Says U.S. Military Prepared for 'Worst Case'," *The Associated Press*, August 20, 2005.

¹³⁵ Bush, "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," (June 2007), p. 1.

¹³⁶ CNN, *Bush: No Iraq Pullout without Victory: Democratic Senator Urges President to Give 'Unvarnished' Picture*. (Cited November 29, 2005); available from <http://www.cnn.com/2005/POLITICS/11/29/us.iraq/index.html>, p. 1.

¹³⁷ Wolf Blitzer, "Iraq on the Brink; Port Delay Deal," in *The Situation Room* (CNN, February 24 2006), 1; Editorial Desk; SECTA, "Iraq on the Brink," *The New York Times*, March 1 2006, p. 1; Michael Paul Williams, "Numbers Alone Can't Measure Casualties from War in Iraq," *The Richmond Times-Dispatch*, March 31 2006, p. 1.

radio address on March 2006, Bush once again reiterated his belief in the success of the strategy, noting that “in the past three years, Iraqis have gone from living under a brutal tyrant to liberation, sovereignty, free elections, a constitutional referendum, and last December, elections of a fully constitutional government.”¹³⁸ Likewise in private conversations between Rice and Cheney in 2005, Cheney reiterated that the US would do whatever is necessary to win in Iraq and, once again, refused renewed calls to replace Rumsfeld from former top army generals and staff.¹³⁹ Even calls from former Bush Sr. administration official Brent Scowcroft who wanted the president to consider replacing Rumsfeld were met with scorn from Bush who argued forcefully that, “I’m sick and tired of getting papers from Brent Scowcroft telling me what to do, and I never want to see another one again.”¹⁴⁰ In addition, the US administration has repeatedly noted recent successes in stabilizing former strong insurgent areas by Iraqi forces. Indeed, according to an analysis by Anthony Cordesman, Iraqi forces have “now deployed in the Mosul area, active in the greater Baghdad area, operating in Fallujah and Ar Ramadi, deployed at An Numaniyah and Scania, and beginning to deploy in the west in al Anbar.”¹⁴¹ Consequently, as these units take on an increasingly large security role they have taken the lead in preparing and coordinating operations and, in some cases, now outnumber US forces in major anti-insurgent operations.

¹³⁸ George W. Bush, *President's Radio Address* (Washington, DC: March 18 2006).

¹³⁹ Woodward, *State of Denial*, p. 456.

¹⁴⁰ Cockburn, p. 219.

¹⁴¹ Cordesman and Baetjer, p. 210.

The 2006 Congressional Election and “The New Way Forward”

The gradual decline in supportive news coverage in the run up to the 2006 Congressional election, including reports of increases in bombings and their destructive aftermath during the summer, appears to have influenced US public opinion. The loss of the majority in the US Congress and Senate to the Democratic Party had an inevitable effect on the Bush administration, which resulted in the immediate dismissal of Rumsfeld and the appointment of a new Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates. This appointment resulted in a surge of US forces being deployed to Iraq to help secure important zones, primarily Baghdad, as a major component of the new six point strategy titled “the New Way Forward in Iraq.”¹⁴² Therefore, the news media appears to have been influential on decision-makers, if indirect, and the administrations groupthink was perhaps broken due to the firing of Rumsfeld and the change in US strategy that appeared in early 2007.

Despite these important events, the news media does not appear to have influenced US strategy or the strategic certainty in the Bush administration. During the summer of 2006, critical coverage of escalating violence in many parts of Iraq, supported by reports of insurgent attacks increasing to 900 in May 2006, news reporters, once again, attempted to increase pressure on the Bush administration to change their military strategy.¹⁴³ Instead of having the intended effect, those close to the administration note that Bush and Rumsfeld scored US and coalition casualties against insurgents killed and by these numbers interpreted these recent skirmishes as victories for US forces. According to one official, Bush once remarked referring to the

¹⁴² George W. Bush, "Initial Benchmark Assessment Report," (Washington, D.C.: The White House, July 12, 2007), p. 2.

¹⁴³ Woodward, *State of Denial*, p. 480.

tally sheets after a battle with insurgent forces that “they killed three of ours. How many did we kill of them?”¹⁴⁴ Efforts to convince Bush of the importance of casualty aversion to the US public and media was ineffective as he interpreted coalition success on raw data instead of tangible results. Moreover, Rumsfeld appeared more distant to the violence in Iraq and coverage of it during the months leading up to the election. One of Rumsfeld’s top aides, Torie Clarke, had brought in issues of *Newsweek* and *Time* for Rumsfeld to get an idea of what the US public was reading; however, by summer 2006 this process had stopped as Rumsfeld no longer appeared concerned with press reports despite rising casualties, and growing domestic unrest, and no one on his staff dared to contradict him.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, Bush and members of his administration were not concerned about escalating violence so long as it showed that insurgent forces were being killed in higher numbers, a condition consistent with the illusion of invulnerability and direct pressure symptoms of groupthink.

In addition, following the US congressional election in 2006, the Bush administration decided to fire Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense as a measure to calm public criticism of the war. Although Bush and Cheney remained supportive of Rumsfeld assertive policies in Iraq, they had little choice but to replace Rumsfeld as the Republican Party was reeling from the election. Despite this and the appointment of Secretary Gates, a member of the Iraq Study Group, the US strategy did not change.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, the New Way Forward Strategy announced on January 10, 2007, merely has a new name as the central goals of the “clear, hold, and build” security strategy conceived

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 482.

¹⁴⁵ Cockburn, pp. 217-218.

¹⁴⁶ Michael A. Fletcher and Peter Baker, “Bush Ousts Embattled Rumsfeld: Democrats near Control of Senate: Ex-CIA Chief Robert Gates Nominated to Lead Pentagon,” *The Washington Post*, p. 2.

in 2003 remain. For example, in the summary report of the strategy released by the White House, the security side of the strategy keeps Iraqi forces in the lead to isolate extremists and protect the population, and emphasizing, above all, that the US should “accelerate transition to Iraqi responsibility and increase Iraqi ownership.”¹⁴⁷ Furthermore in Bush’s statements unveiling the newly titled US strategy in January 2007, he maintains that “our troops have a well-defined mission: to help Iraqis *clear* and *secure* neighbourhoods, to help them protect the local population, and to help ensure that the Iraqi forces left behind are capable of provided the security that Baghdad needs.”¹⁴⁸ Bush’s resolve to continue essentially the same strategy, which has only changed the word “hold” to “secure” and given a more tangible goal of building security and Iraqi forces in major populated areas, suggests that the news media has not influenced the Bush administration despite the firing of Rumsfeld as a result of the congressional election.

Moreover, the strategy did not change due in large part to Gates holding a similar ideological and social background to members of the Bush administration. In statements made in November 1997 and in the days before the 2003 invasion he argued that the use of force was the only method US decision-makers had available in regards to dealing with Hussein. Although he may have found the mission more difficult than Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz did in 2003, he admitted at the time that an invasion was “a manageable task.”¹⁴⁹ Moreover, like Cheney, Gates had worked closely with the administration of Bush Sr. as Deputy National Security adviser and held many of the

¹⁴⁷ Bush, *Fact Sheet: The New Way Forward in Iraq*, p. 1.

¹⁴⁸ Lorry M. Fenner, *Stand up and Be Counted: The Continuing Challenge of Building the Iraqi Security Forces* (U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations, 2007), p. 23.

¹⁴⁹ Wolf Blitzer, *The Situation Room: Can Republicans, Democrats Work Together?* (CNN).

same views on Iraq, and Saddam in particular, as difficult to deal with. He admitted, like much of the intelligence community, to have supported US war aims in 2003.¹⁵⁰ As a matter of personality, Gates appears to share many of traits with the current administration and this has been reflected in the limited changes to US strategy in 2007 despite low public support for the war and increasing negative coverage from all forms of media.

For example, the report *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, released in June 2007, incorporates the new strategy to provide additional security as part of the US surge to Baghdad, but the report continues to emphasize the growth of Iraqi Security Forces and the transition of authority of these units.¹⁵¹ Similar statements and data on the transfer of provincial authority to the Iraqi government have appeared in previous reports in 2006 and early 2007, and in public statements made by members of the Bush administration over more than a year.¹⁵² US forces were intended to be increased as a temporary measure, as part of the Iraqi led Baghdad Security Plan, which has been described by Gates as being considered to last months rather than years.¹⁵³ Although the surge has lasted longer than initially anticipated, US forces continue to shift to more demanding combat zones and transition provincial authority to the ISF, a goal consistent with the November 2005 *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* and subsequent

¹⁵⁰ The Wall Street Journal, "Robert Gates: In His Own Words," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 8 2006, p. 1.

¹⁵¹ Bush, *Fact Sheet: The New Way Forward in Iraq*.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 1; George W. Bush, *Initial Benchmark Assessment Report* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, June 12 2007), p. 1; George W. Bush, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, June 2007), p. 1; George W. Bush, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, August 2006), p. 1; George W. Bush, *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, November 2005), p. 1.

¹⁵³ Robert Gates and Peter Pace, "DoD News Briefing with Secretary Gates and Gen. Pace from Pentagon," (Department of Defense, February 2 2007), p. 2.

reports.¹⁵⁴ This is further supported by the July 2007 assessment of progress in Iraq, which argues that “our overarching strategy continues to emphasize a transition to the Iraqi Government and its security forces,” and that the New Way Forward Strategy was only a response to an upsurge in violence by insurgents in the summer and fall of 2006.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, as four of eighteen provinces have been fully transferred to Iraqi control, three more will transition within the next few months, and all provinces are scheduled to transfer to Iraqi authority by March 2008, US decision-makers have only reinforced their cohesive view of US strategy as successful in the face of mounting media criticism.¹⁵⁶ As these points make clear, the US executive remains deeply committed to its existing strategy and have resisted all external pressure to change course, including those generated by the American news media.

Conclusion

This analysis of decision-making in the Iraq War has shown that the groupthink tendency of the Bush administration prevented any outside information from influencing the US executive. The Bush cabinet has shown significant rivalry among some of its key members, in particular Powell against like-minded members Rumsfeld and Cheney. The inability of Powell to change US strategy, due in large part to his limited access to the President, is wholly consistent with the central tenets of the groupthink theory. In addition, the minor changes to the “clear, hold, and build” strategy in 2007 cannot be

¹⁵⁴ Bush, *Fact Sheet: The New Way Forward in Iraq*, p. 1; Bush, *Initial Benchmark Assessment Report*, p. 1; Bush, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, p. 1; Bush, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq*, p. 1; Bush, *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ Bush, *Initial Benchmark Assessment Report*, p. 2.

¹⁵⁶ States, p. 29.

attributed directly to media pressure or to the 2006 election.¹⁵⁷ The US cabinet, moreover, has displayed strategic certainty in the main objectives of their strategy, which has made media influence in this case very difficult to determine. Ultimately, while the news media is an important and influential group in some conflicts, in cases where decision-makers demonstrate groupthink, and are strategically certain of their goals, the news media cannot be influential despite the frequency and intensity of coverage.

¹⁵⁷ Woodward, *State of Denial*, p. 480, David McKeeby, "Baghdad Security Plan Progressing, Says Coalition Spokesman: Iraqis securing capital, assuming military command, pursuing reconciliation," (US Department of State, August 28 2006).

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