

ON MESSAGE: NEWS MEDIA INFLUENCE ON MILITARY STRATEGY IN SOMALIA AND IRAQ

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Beginning with the Persian Gulf War of 1991, 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 the 1991 Gulf War, Somalia, and the Balkan conflicts, which has prompted increased study of a possible connection between US military strategy and the news media.³ Steven Livingston of George Washington University's assessment of this termed "CNN effect," which hypothesizes a causal link between media reporting and politico-military decisions, is typical of CNN effect's supporters who propose that the viewing of images on television "undeniably influences the evolution of events."⁴

However, proponents of the CNN effect have frequently failed to engage the important role of military strategy in modern conflict.⁵ Recent studies of media reporting have brought near exclusive focus on policy outcomes, instead of the strategic planning

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): p. 28.

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.

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

that occurs during the course of operations. This failing may be particularly evident in the cases of Somalia and the Iraq War. 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 consistent negative reporting.⁶ 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 Somalia and the Iraq War.

This paper will examine the following question: to what extent has news media reporting on US military operations in Somalia and the Iraq War influenced the course of American military strategy during these conflicts? In response to this question, it is first hypothesized that, despite extensive negative reporting on American military strategy in the Iraq War and Somalia, a high degree of consensus among American politico-military decision makers over the proper course of US military strategy has largely precluded the media from influencing the course of US strategy. Second, it is hypothesized that the relative success or failure of military operations flowing from a chosen strategy is the primary determinant of changes in the course of military strategy. To put it in more general terms, it is hypothesized that the news media has relatively little influence on the course of military strategy in conflicts where a general consensus exists among politico-military elites over the proper course of military strategy and that strategic realities are the primary drivers of strategic course corrections.

⁶ Robert S. Lichter and Linda S. Lichter, "George Bush's Postwar Blues: Tv News Coverage of President Bush since the Iraq War," *Media Monitor* 17, no. 4 (November/December 2003): p. 1.

Background and Key Concepts

CNN effect

In order to determine the impact of the “CNN effect” on US decision makers, it will need to be properly defined. The term was originally created to deal with the absorbing coverage of the CNN cable news channel during the 1991 Persian Gulf War.⁷ Advances in communications technology allowed the network to cover the conflict in real time, and its reports were used as a primary information resource by the major broadcast networks.⁸ In the current context, this term has come to signify the ability of real-time communications technology, in the form of the news media, to provoke major responses from political and military elites to national and international events.⁹

Senior officials in post-Gulf War conflicts have acknowledged the increasing presence of the international news media. Speaking on the power of the news media in world politics, former Secretary of State James Baker III wrote in 1995 that “In Iraq, Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, and Chechnya, among others, the real-time coverage by the electronic media has served to create a powerful new imperative for prompt action that was not present in less frenetic [times].”¹⁰ Similar statements have been made by international actors, including former United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who once remarked that, “CNN is the sixteenth member of the security council.”¹¹ These compelling observations of media power in modern conflict have led to

⁷ Robinson, p. 2.

⁸ Robinson, p. 2.

⁹ Robinson, p. 2.

¹⁰ Gilboa, p. 28.

¹¹ Larry Minear, Colin Scott, and Thomas G. Weiss, *The News Media, Civil War, and Humanitarian Action* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 1996), p.4.

an active debate between scholars and policy makers on the actual influence of the news on world affairs.

Traditionally the impact of media reporting on decision making has been attributed to humanitarian intervention scenarios including Somalia, Rwanda, Kosovo, East Timor, Sudan, and Bosnia.¹² Some humanitarian crises which received high amounts of media attention, like Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo also received a US military response. Similarly, some conflicts that allegedly did not receive media coverage, such as those in Sudan and Rwanda, did not receive a US military response. However, basing political and military action simply on levels of media reporting is only one small element that is required to explain why a state engages in military action.¹³ Many of these theories assume a causal connection that is never demonstrated. Politico-military elites must weigh important considerations before engaging in any military actions, and to assume that the media played an important role just because of their reporting, or lack of reporting, overstates their power. Indeed, in operations that did not receive the attention of decision makers, such as Rwanda, the CNN effect does not adequately explain the fact that this conflict received highly empathetic, though limited, coverage clearly outlining the extent of the ongoing genocide in 1994, but no US military action was taken to resolve the situation.¹⁴ Therefore, the use of the CNN effect to explain the power of news on decision makers remains hotly contested as an important agenda-setting device.

¹² Peter Viggo Jakobsen, "Focus on the CNN Effect Misses the Point: The Real Media Impact on Conflict Management Is Invisible and Indirect," *Journal of Peace Research* 37, no. 2 (2000), p. 132.

¹³ Susan L. Carruthers, *The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 2000), p. 205.

¹⁴ Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 238-239.

Theoretical Framework

This research 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.¹⁵ 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 elites are extremely resistant to contrary outside influences.¹⁶ Conversely, a situation where no direct consensus among elites over the direction of policy exists constitutes “policy uncertainty.”¹⁷ With this said, in cases of high policy certainty, decision makers have the resolve to drive policy action despite the tone and intensity of media coverage.¹⁸ This model is used to illustrate both firm and weak policy networks and the relationship the news media has in determining policy action in wartime.

In contrast to Robinson’s near exclusive focus on foreign policy decision making by political elites in his model, the model proposed here focuses on the direction of military strategy set by political and military elites. 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. Put simply, the concept of strategy is defined as a guidance plan to achieve particular ends.¹⁹ Strategy is created by a complex decision-making process of ideas, expectations, and goals, which result in

¹⁵ Robinson, p.30.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Robinson, "Theorizing the Influence of Media on World Politics: Models of Media Influence on Foreign Policy," p. 535.

¹⁸ Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention.*, p. 30.

¹⁹ David H. McIntyre, "Strategies for a New Long War: Analysis and Evaluation," (Washington, DC: House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, February 3 2004), p. 2.

a plan for achieving these goals through military action. Thus, 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 politico-military elites, the news media will have little influence on the course of strategy, regardless of the level of media attention devoted to it.²⁰ The second core preposition of the Media-Strategy Interaction Model is that operational realities, meaning the relative success or failure of the military operations flowing from a chosen strategy, are the primary determinants of changes in the course of military strategy.

The research proposed here will address two major issues. First, it will address the applicability of the Media-Strategy Interaction Model to Somalia and the Iraq War. This will be crucial to demonstrating Somalia and the Iraq War as cases of strategic certainty among the American politico-military elite. Second, this research will examine the impact of media reporting on American military strategy during these conflicts. This paper will therefore assess the influence, or lack of influence, of media reporting on American politico-military elites tasked with deciding the course of American military strategy in both these conflicts.²¹

The Strategy for Rebuilding Iraq and the US Strategy in Somalia

In order to determine the impact of the news media on US strategy during the two conflicts, we must briefly outline the military strategies of both here. 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 is tasked with defeating the insurgency and

²⁰ Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention*, p. 30.

²¹ Livingston, p. 10.

terrorist threats against US and Iraqi forces.²² Second, the US will train and build the Iraqi forces for eventual turn over of security to their forces.²³ 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.”²⁴ 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.²⁵ Similar wording and phrases have appeared throughout the Iraqi operation to describe the US strategy.²⁶ 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 been frequently reinforced and carried out by senior US officials and the armed forces constituting strategy certainty in this case.²⁷

For Somalia, the strategy was originally outlined as a humanitarian operation, but as operational security was jeopardized the strategy was changed to take on a greater military role. Both the Bush and Clinton administrations maintained strategic certainty in this operation through the reinforcement of commitments to the security of the aid operation. During the initial stages, this operation was designed to secure humanitarian

²² George W. Bush, *President Addresses the Nation: Address of the President to the Nation, the Cabinet Room*. (cited November 7 2005); available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/09/print/2000907-1.html>, p. 1.

²³ Bush, p. 1.

²⁴ Condoleezza Rice, "Iraq and U.S. Policy: Secretary Condoleezza Rice, Opening Remarks before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee," (United States Department of State, October 19 2005).

²⁵ Ben Fritz, Bryan Keefer, and Brendan Nyhan, *All the President's Spin* (New York, NY: Touchstone Books, 2004), pp. 152-153.

²⁶ Bush, p. 1.

²⁷ 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. 1.

supplies from attack, and was not designed to engage in major military action.²⁸ Instead, commitments were made that the United States would lead the operation but would eventually pull out in a few months to make way for a multinational UN force. The United States committed to the use of force on November 25, 1992, with the first American troops arriving in early December.²⁹ However, the forces marked for deployment as part of the new UNOSOM II were slow in arriving and created increasing difficulties for US planners to protect the aid operation. The Clinton administration demonstrated strategic certainty in this phase of the operation by continuing to secure the delivery of aid, resolving to increase US forces in the region to combat direct attacks on the distribution of supplies.³⁰ The escalating attacks during June, 1993, on UN forces from General Aided's militia led to the deployment of US Special Forces in August, and an expanded strategic role for the US forces.³¹ Despite the increased force used by the United States, it was not intended to be a long term strategy. The limited reinforcements that the US received from allied nations, and the sharp decline in congressional support for the extended period of the mission, put in motion measures to withdraw.³²

The Effect of the News media on Strategic Operations in Somalia and Iraq

The US 1992-1994 Somalia intervention and the Iraq War from 2003 to present are employed as case studies to test hypotheses H1 and H2 because they are two of the most recent US military operations that received largely negative coverage. In

²⁸ Carruthers, p. 221.

²⁹ Wheeler, p. 181.

³⁰ Wheeler, p. 198.

³¹ Wheeler, pp. 198-199.

³² Jeffrey McMaster, "The United States and Humanitarian Intervention after the Cold War: Iraq-Kuwait, Somalia and Haiti," (Académie universitaire Louvain, 1996-1997), p. 56.

addition, the negative media coverage in the Somalia intervention is cited as a major supporting case for the CNN effect thesis, and was, therefore, chosen as a hard case to test hypotheses H1 and H2.³³ Several aspects of the US operations are examined, including the influence of reporting during the early stages of US military involvement in Somalia and Iraq and in the later stages of these operations, including major combat operations in Somalia and US counterinsurgency operations in Iraq. The results of this analysis suggest that highly negative coverage of strategic operations does not directly influence the course of US strategy, and that changes in US military strategy are made largely in response to changing operational realities.

Negative Media Reporting During the Early Stages of Somalia and Iraq

Humanitarian Operations in Somalia

The early stage of the US Operation Restore Hope in Somalia is a prime example of positive media coverage of a US military operation. Indeed, positive coverage by media organizations during the opening months of the operation helped to solidify support among the public for the use of American troops in assistance efforts.³⁴ These early media reports were consistent with the expectations of the US executive that positive coverage of the operation would serve to improve public perceptions about it. By taking the lead in a UN sanctioned operation, President Bush hoped to be remembered as a humanitarian at the end of his term.³⁵ As a humanitarian effort, the strategic course of the operation was clear: to secure aid deliveries from attack and

³³ Livingston, p. 4.

³⁴ Theresa. Bly, "Impact of Public Perception on Us National Policy: A Study of Media Influence in Military and Government Decision Making" (Masters, Naval Postgraduate School, 2002), p. 59.

³⁵ Carruthers, p. 220.

ensure that supplies reached those Somalis that needed them. Media reports during the first month of Operation Restore Hope reflected positively on the US strategy guiding the operation, which helped bolster public support for the operation in the United States.³⁶

However, after the first month of the humanitarian aid operation, a Somali militia took hostile action against US forces. Indeed, on January 26, 1993, one marine was killed and the media immediately turned negative.³⁷ For example, articles printed in *The Los Angeles Times* during this period questioned the presence of the United States in the region, why tax payers should pay for this aid operation, and began to describe Somalia as hostile territory.³⁸ Similar topics echoed across the print and televised media, with commentators questioning the escalating threat to the US lead humanitarian operation. Although several scholars cite the incident as a possible cause for a change in US strategy, the resulting negative media reporting did not appear to have an impact on the strategy guiding the aid operation. On the same day as the militia attack, the United Nations celebrated the United States led effort with United Task Force (UNITAF) for its contributions of men and equipment and timely delivery of aid to the suffering.³⁹ These direct congratulatory remarks from the United Nations prevented any negative coverage from impacting US planners in this stage. While the reaction to deaths of American soldiers by the media is not surprising, without direct links to politico-military elites, media criticism was not immediately noticed. With this said, when

³⁶ Bly, p. 59.

³⁷ Bly, p. 60.

³⁸ Bly, p. 60.

³⁹ Wheeler, p. 188.

the news media cannot gain attention from senior officials, this undermines the capacity of the news media to drive an operation through negative coverage.

Equally important, the news media's limited presence in Somalia during the initial stages of the operation reduced the influence negative media coverage could have on strategic planning of UNITAF. Supporters of the CNN effect thesis argue that coverage prior to major US force deployments in late 1992 were widespread and consisted of highly negative empathic coverage of the plight of starving Somalis that was intended to influence American strategic planners to take action.⁴⁰ However, CBS News only devoted three minutes of airtime on the Somali situation during the 21 day period prior to the announcement of the US strategy in Somalia. Similarly, the print media, including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, produced only two front page articles during the same period.⁴¹ According to one US official familiar with the media reporting during this period, he "did not recall news pressure being a big issue in any policy meeting."⁴² Thus, the news media coverage did not greatly influence strategic planning and certainly did not conform to the predictions of the CNN effect thesis. Only *after* the United States committed to sending a humanitarian aid force to the region in November, 1992, and the arrival of these forces in December, 1992, did coverage of the Somali crisis dramatically increase.⁴³

⁴⁰ Terrence Lyons and Ahmed I. Samatar, *Somalia, State Collapse, Multilateral Intervention and Strategies for Political Reconstruction* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1995), pp. 219-220.

⁴¹ Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention*, p. 57.

⁴² Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention*, p. 58.

⁴³ Carruthers, p. 220.

Major Combat Operations in Iraq

Similarly, coverage of the Iraq War during its initial stages shifted from a positive outlook of US military strategy to negative coverage after a week of fighting. The process of 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 negative coverage of 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.⁴⁴ 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.”⁴⁵ Embedded reports 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.⁴⁶ According to an assessment of the progress by a senior Marine

⁴⁴ 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.

⁴⁵ These and other headlines included: Vernon Loeb and Thomas E. Ricks, 2003, Questions Raised About Invasion Force: Some Ex-Gulf War Commanders Say U.S. Needs More Troops, Another Armored Division, *Washington Post*, March 25, sec. A.; Barbara Slavin and Vivienne Walt, 2003, Allies' Pre-War Assumptions Fall Short As Iraqi Resistance Stiffens, *USA Today*, March 25, sec A; Ellen Knickmeyer, 2003, Sandstorm Brings Forces to Grinding Halt, *Washington Times*, March 25, sec. A; Ronald Brownstein, 2003, Iraq Forcing Longer, Conventional War, *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, sec. A; Richard T. Cooper and Paul Richter, 2003, Former Commanders Question U.S. Strategy, *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, sec. A; and Thomas E. Ricks, 2003, War Could Last Months, Officers Say, *Washington Post*, March 27, sec. A.

⁴⁶ John Keegan, *The Iraq War* (London, UK: Hutchinson, 2004), p. 155.

commander, "its regiments needed and expected no pause."⁴⁷ Indeed, as the force was designed to operate lightly and to keep pressing the enemy and, as a result, it was able to continue its operations despite distancing itself from the slow moving logistics vehicles.⁴⁸ Thus, some of units were preparing to assault cities along the Tigris River before ordered to pause by commanders of the 3rd Infantry Division.⁴⁹ Moreover, many units had progressed so quickly in the sandstorm they were forced to backtrack 23 miles to meet the rest of the division.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹ 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.⁵² 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

⁴⁷ 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.

⁴⁸ Michael DeLong and Noah Lukeman, *Inside Centcom : The Unvarnished Truth About the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2004), 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.

⁴⁹ Reynolds, p. 90.

⁵⁰ Keegan, p. 156.

⁵¹ 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.

⁵² Murray Williamson and Robert H. Scales, *The Iraq War* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 195-208.

and equipment leading to speculation that the war could last for months.⁵³ 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 1991 the on paper strength of the Iraqi regular army was over 40 divisions, by 2003 the army reported 17 divisions, and it had less than half the equipment it operated in 1991 including just 2,000 largely obsolete tanks.⁵⁴ Lacking 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.⁵⁵

Moreover, as the sandstorm lifted, US forces resumed their original strategy of bypassing major cities in southern Iraq to hit Baghdad directly.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ Indeed, despite the slowdown of US forces the operation went more smoothly than US planners could have anticipated. Taking

⁵³ West and Smith, p. 82.

⁵⁴ Keegan, pp. 128-129.

⁵⁵ Karen DeYoung, *Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 457, Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2006), p. 121.

⁵⁶ 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.

⁵⁷ 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.

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.

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 advisors. 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 145,000.⁵⁸ The force plan developed by the Joint Chief's 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."⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ Consequently, this is particular important because the level of resolve of the US executive to reject troop recommendations from senior military advisors

⁵⁸ Ricks, p. 117.

⁵⁹ Ricks, p. 123.

⁶⁰ Ricks, p. 124.

⁶¹ Ricks, p. 122.

demonstrate 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 Hugh Shelton stated publicly at a Pentagon meeting that he felt troops levels were insufficient to conduct the full scale invasion requested by DoD.⁶² His concerns were echoed by other senior members of the US Army including General Eric Shinseki, who reporting his concerns directly to Congress.⁶³ 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 officials straining relations between the two sides.⁶⁴ 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."⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶ In this way, by presenting the use of heavy armor as being essential to accomplishing US strategic goals in Iraq, which required crippling Iraqi forces and

⁶² 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. 568.

⁶³ 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.

⁶⁴ Ricks, p. 119.

⁶⁵ Ricks, p. 121.

⁶⁶ Ricks, p. 120.

occupying territory, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz reluctantly accepted.⁶⁷ Taking this into account, the example set by the major combat phase of Iraq is highly supportive of hypotheses H1 and H2.

Negative Media Reporting During the Later Stages of Somalia and Iraq

Major Combat Operations in Somalia

Compounding the problem of negative reporting during the early stages of the Somali humanitarian effort, the deployment of major military forces in August, 1993, further increased the volume of critical coverage of US strategy.⁶⁸ Following the deployment of Task Force Ranger, the US military presence shifted from a humanitarian operation to a security operation to defeat the Somali militia headed by General Aided. This contributed to high amounts of negative coverage during August, including articles questioning the shift in operations, rising deaths of UN peacekeepers, and the rationale behind continued US presence.⁶⁹ These criticisms were particularly important because the United States did shift its military strategy, which ultimately led to questions from the congressional leaders about the direction of the overall mission.⁷⁰

During this phase of the operation, US troops had begun to observe direct attacks by General Aided's militia on supplies, complicating the aid operation to the point that a strategic shift needed to be made to secure their delivery.⁷¹ The deployment of Task Force Ranger in August, 1993, was made in direct response to the attacks on supplies and to increase operational security. The news media became critical of the

⁶⁷ Ricks, pp. 120, 127.

⁶⁸ Bly, pp. 60-61.

⁶⁹ Bly, p. 60.

⁷⁰ Livingston, p. 15; Wheeler, pp. 198-199.

⁷¹ Wheeler, pp. 194-195.

use of US Special Forces troops after their arrival in the country, and the incident served to increase calls from media organizations to end the progressively force oriented operation.⁷² However, the growth in US force commitments was made in response to limited reinforcement of UNOSOM II and the delayed turnover of command to the UN. For example, the limited reinforcement of the operation by committed nations Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and India reduced the ability of the United States to properly maintain order in Somalia.⁷³ In addition, the decline in support from Western powers Germany and Italy, which were reviewing their troop commitments to UNOSOM II, further reduced the ability of the United States to complete their original commitments.⁷⁴ The United States was forced to expand their commitments to two fundamentally different operations, which required a greater commitment of forces than they could receive from the United Nations. Taking this into account, the US operations expansion into a security role was driven by circumstance, and that the shifts in strategic direction were mitigated by changes in UN commitments to the mission. Given the choice between ending the operation and risking further attacks on UN forces, the United States decided to extend their mission beyond its original timeline.

Supporters of the CNN effect thesis consider the loss of 18 American soldiers in a single firefight in October, 1993, to have been crucial to President Clinton's decision to end the operation. This position is supported by the images printed in *The New York Times* and seen on television of the dead soldiers being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. Referring to these images, one commentator noted that "the American public was right to want to scuttle the Somalia expedition as soon as American corpses

⁷² Bly, p. 60.

⁷³ McMaster, p. 56.

⁷⁴ Wheeler, p. 197.

appeared on the television screen.”⁷⁵ Following the incident both public opinion and media reporting turned against the operation. Reports described the firefight in Mogadishu as an operational failure and suggested that the US public wanted their troops home.⁷⁶ According to an assessment of 16 polls conducted following news reports of the 18 dead soldiers, concluded that “sixty percent of the public lobbied for immediate withdrawal,” and that “the majority did not feel that waiting for either the humanitarian crisis to be solved, a political solution to be reached or Aided to be captured were significant enough to risk further incidents.”⁷⁷

Although these images had an irrefutable impact on public opinion, the event did not modify the direction of existing military strategy. Faced with the prospect of declining UN support, rising military costs, and the stretched timeline for the mission, President Clinton had begun to put in motion plans to withdraw months before the incident in Mogadishu occurred.⁷⁸ US operations had been extended beyond the strategy’s original objectives, but American planners did not want to implement an exit strategy that could jeopardize the stability of the state. Plans for disengagement from the operation began in midsummer 1993, made in response to growing concern over the lack of UN support for operations in Somalia and US commitments to UNPROFOR, the administration decided to scale back previously stated support for multilateral peace operations.⁷⁹ This inevitably weakened US support for the United Nations and effectively ended Madeline

⁷⁵ Cori E. Dauber, "The Shots Seen 'Round the World: Impact of the Images Seen around the World," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 4, no. 4 (2001): p. 667.

⁷⁶ Bly, p. 72.

⁷⁷ Bly, p. 68.

⁷⁸ Wheeler, p. 198.

⁷⁹ Warren P. Strobel, *Late-Breaking Foreign Policy: The News Media's Influence on Peace Operations* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), p. 180.

Albright's "assertive multilateralism."⁸⁰ As a result, as Clinton made his decision to send Task Force Ranger in August it intended as a temporary measure to provide increased security to the area while the cabinet attempted to find a political solution to the crisis.

Moreover, the expanded mandate of the Clinton administration to provide security for Somalia with limited international support increased from the president's senior advisors and the US Senate for a resolution to the operation. Warren Strobel notes that, "officials were concerned that there was too much emphasis on the 'military track' and wanted to reenergize the search for a political solution."⁸¹ Acknowledging this problem, in September, 1993, Clinton met with former president Jimmy Carter who had recently returned from talks with Aided to discuss a diplomatic solution to the conflict. The meeting resulted in a plan to turn over responsibility for the mission to the UN and to attempt to enlist the help of Somalia's neighbors, Eretria and Ethiopia, in coming to a diplomatic solution.⁸² Likewise, Clinton met with a bipartisan group of senators that advised the President to begin implementing a plan to remove American troops immediately.⁸³ This move came as senior politicians began to comment that the extended operation should be ended as it had gone beyond its original mandate to provide aid in lieu of a greater UN force.⁸⁴ Consequently, in September members of the Senate moved to support Robert Byrd's motion for a nonbinding resolution directing the president to report to Congress on the operations' progress by October 15.⁸⁵ The resolution was introduced and passed on September 9. Likewise, Congress passed the

⁸⁰ Ivo H. Daalder, *Knowing When to Say No: The Development of Us Policy for Peacekeeping*, ed. William Durch, *Un Peacekeeping, American Policy, and the Uncivil Wars of the 1990s* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1996), p. 50; Strobel, p. 179.

⁸¹ Strobel, p. 179.

⁸² Strobel, p. 180.

⁸³ Wheeler, p. 198.

⁸⁴ Wheeler, p. 199.

⁸⁵ Strobel, p. 179.

resolution on September 28 requiring congressional authorization for continuing the operation after November 15.⁸⁶ Both these resolutions were approved nearly a month before the events of October 3-4. Thus, internal government pressures, driven in turn by the well recognized reality that US military operations in Somalia had by the summer of 1993 become inconsistent with the objectives of the original US strategy, drove the change in US strategy to one of a managed withdrawal from Somalia.⁸⁷

Consequently, as Clinton was advised to end the operation by a former president and senior congressional leaders, Clinton's Secretary of State Warren Christopher presenting a revised US policy to Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali on September 20 informing the UN that the US would withdraw from Somalia. According to US officials the new policy "contained elements of what Clinton eventually would announce to the nation on October 7."⁸⁸ In sum, the public and media criticisms of the US strategy in Somalia were noticed by the US executive, but they did not have any measurable impact on the US exit strategy for it had been set in motion months before the sharp rise in negative media coverage.

Counter-Insurgency Operations in Iraq

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

⁸⁶ Strobel, p. 179.

⁸⁷ Carruthers, p. 224.

⁸⁸ Strobel, p. 180.

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 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."⁸⁹ The coverage of the application of American military strategy in Fallujah is symptomatic of a general trend in coverage of the US counterinsurgency operation in Iraq, wherein the news media has 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.⁹⁰ 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.⁹¹ Nevertheless, despite consistently negative coverage of the application of US strategy in Fallujah, the United States resisted changing the course of its strategy.

In addition, when the news media reported the difficulties faced by US planners due to low numbers of Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) participating 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

⁸⁹ 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.

⁹⁰ Christopher M. Ford, "Speak No Evil: Targeting a Population's Neutrality to Defeat an Insurgency," *Parameters*, no. 35 (Summer 2005): p. 60.

⁹¹ Robert H. Reid, "Analysis: A Fine Balance," *The Associated Press*, November 10 2004.

Phantom Fury, the ISF fought and secured the neighborhood of Jolan, and on November 11, 2004, was given responsibility for its security.⁹² 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 greater responsibility for patrols of the Syrian border.⁹³ The ISF has 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.⁹⁴ Indeed, a statement made by a senior US General in October, 2005, notes 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.”⁹⁵

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.⁹⁶ 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... [lead to] political pressure to limit

⁹² 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.

⁹³ US Department of State, “Report on Iraq Relief and Reconstruction,” (United States Department of State, Section 2207, April 6 2005), p. 7.

⁹⁴ Pamela Hess, “Iraqi Security Forces Developing – Slowly,” *The Washington Times*, August 5 2004, p. 1.

⁹⁵ 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.

⁹⁶ 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.

the assault quickly."⁹⁷ However, as Donald Rumsfeld counters, the military had the capacity to defeat Sadr's militia, but decided instead to make a negotiated settlement to end the operation.⁹⁸ 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 goes 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 ability to do that is what without question led Sadr to encourage his militia to get out of town."⁹⁹ 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.¹⁰⁰ 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, 2005.¹⁰¹

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

⁹⁷ Kenneth Payne, "The Media as an Instrument of War," *Parameters*, no. 35 (Spring 2005): pp. 88-89.

⁹⁸ 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.

⁹⁹ Rumsfeld, "Secretary Rumsfeld's Speech at the National Press Club," p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ 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, p.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.

¹⁰¹ *Iraqi Army Takes Control of Najaf; U.S. Soldier Killed by Ied* (cited), *Iraqi Security Forces Take Control of Najaf Province*, p. 1.

administration to set an end date for operations there.¹⁰² However, repeated statements from members of the US executive suggest that, at least for the present time, a state of strategic certainty exists in the Bush administration's resolve to reaffirm a long term commitment to the existing counterinsurgency strategy. Furthermore, no end date has been publicly identified for this strategy. 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."¹⁰³ Likewise, Army Chief of Staff Peter Schoomaker stated that the US will prepare for four years in Iraq, departing after President Bush leaves office.¹⁰⁴ Although the numbers provided in these statements differ, they all maintain a multiyear commitment to the existing US strategy. 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."¹⁰⁵ As these statements 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 reporting of the news media.

¹⁰² Charles Babington, "Hawkish Democrat Joins Call for Pullout. GOP Assails Murtha's Demand to Leave Iraq," *The Washington Post*, November 18 2005.

¹⁰³ *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.

¹⁰⁴ 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.

¹⁰⁵ 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.

Conclusion

This paper addressed an important question: to what extent has news media reporting of Somalia and the Iraq War influenced the course of American military strategy during these conflicts? In response to this question, it was first hypothesized that despite extensive negative reporting of American military strategy in the Iraq War and Somalia, a high degree of consensus among American politico-military decision makers over the proper course of US military strategy in these conflicts largely precluded the media from influencing the course of US strategy. Second, it was hypothesized that the relative success or failure of the military operations flowing from a chosen strategy was the primary determinant of changes in the course of military strategy.

Testing these hypotheses involved two case studies: the US intervention in Somalia from 1992 to 1994 and the Iraq War from 2003 to present. The results of this analysis lend support for these hypotheses and suggest that, in conflicts where strategic certainty exists, the news media should not have significant influence on the course of strategy. Moreover, the results of this analysis suggest that shifts in the dynamics of operations may precipitate shifts in military strategy that were not perceived during pre-planning stages. Taken together, these results suggest that a reevaluation of the CNN effect thesis may be in order.

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