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The mass media and terrorism

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ABSTRACT The mass media promotes terrorism by stressing fear and an uncertain future. Major changes in US foreign and domestic policy essentially went unreported and unchallenged by the dominant news organizations. Notwithstanding the long relationship in the United States between fear and crime, the role of the mass media in promoting fear has become more pronounced since the United States 'discovered' international terrorism on 11 September 2001. Extensive qualitative media analysis shows that political decision-makers quickly adjusted propaganda passages, prepared as part of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), to emphasize domestic support for the new US role in leading the world. These messages were folded into the previous crime-related discourse of fear, which may be defined as the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness, and expectation that danger and risk are a central feature of everyday life. Politicians marshaled critical symbols and icons joining terrorism with Iraq, the Muslim faith, and a vast number of non-western nations to strategically promote fear and use of audience beliefs and assumptions about danger, risk and fear in order to achieve certain goals, including expanding domestic social control.

KEY WORDS: *fear, mass media, propaganda, qualitative media analysis, social control*

The mass media and popular culture have altered how we learn about the world and how the world is run. This is becoming more apparent with foreign policy and international affairs (Adams, 1982; Campbell, 1998; Hess, 1996; Kellner, 2003; Wasburn, 2002). Mass media information provides a context of meanings and images that prepare audiences for political decisions about specific actions, including war. Citizens are, after all, audience members of various mass media, which, in the case of most media in the United States, are entertainment oriented in order to maximize profits. This article draws on extensive qualitative document

analysis of news reports from newspapers, television, and magazines (Altheide, 2002, 2006) to illustrate how mass media accounts about the 'war on terror' were grounded in a discourse of fear, which may be defined as the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness, and expectation that danger and risk are a central feature of everyday life. This was done by selectively framing discourse (Van Dijk, 1988) to proclaim the moral and social superiority of the United States. Moreover, the 'crisis' of the 9/11 attacks was artfully constructed through news accounts as the 'world has changed' and that future survival would depend on giving up many basic civil liberties, particularly 'privacy,' which could be set aside like a heavy coat in an Iraqi summer. Indeed, citizens concerned about violation of civil liberties – including the denial of *habeas corpus* – were cast as '*privacy advocates*,' as though they were lobbyists for special interests. These messages were folded into the crime-related discourse of fear which implied that caring and safety are expressed as more control, including surveillance.

News media and popular culture depictions of the US reaction to terror attacks reflects a culture and collective identities steeped in marketing, popular culture, consumerism, and fear. Elite news management and propaganda by the military-media complex produced terrorism scenarios that were reflected in national agendas and everyday life (Louw, 2003). Major news themes through the first four years of the Iraq War were molded in a moral framework that permitted the dehumanization of the enemy, redefined an action as 'torture' if the results rise to 'to the level of death, organ failure, or the permanent impairment of a significant body function' (Umansky, 2006), and also promoted more social control of citizens to keep them safe.

> War stories are told with the flourish of explicit moral discourse. Trade stories are told with the patient repetition of words suggesting, but not directly stating, that the rival nation is unreasonable and unfair. (Wasburn, 2002: 125)

The attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 were defined in the news media and popular culture as an assault on American culture, if not civilization itself (Altheide, 2004). These definitions were aligned with a broad context and a preexisting discourse of fear, along with symbolic images of 'Arabs' as the 'other,' or marginalized outsiders, who are threats to personal and national security (Adams, 1981; Altheide, 1981, 1982).

On 21 September 2001, President Bush said, 'Al Qaeda is to *terror* what the mafia is to *crime*.' Consistent with previous war propaganda, the enemy was immoral, while the US was above reproach, with good intentions, even if things sometimes went wrong. Indeed, the ultimate derogatory way of referring to the enemy is to discount an identity of any kind, except for moral epithets. They are not just against the US, these fighters are 'evil' and 'hateful.' Thus, in 2004, President Bush criticized media coverage of the Iraq War, by minimizing the threat to US forces and plans:

> 'What you're seeing on your TV screens,' the president said when minimizing the Iraq insurgency in May, are '*the desperate tactics of a hateful few.*' (http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/arts/17rich.html?ex=1098794787&ei=1&en=11955974621c8ee7, emphasis added)

Two years later, after former Secretary of State Colin Powell questioned whether the Iraq War was helpful to the moral reputation of the United States in September 2006, President Bush denied that the United States might lose the high ground in the eyes of world opinion, as former Secretary of State Colin Powell suggested on Thursday:

> 'It's unacceptable to think there's any kind of comparison between the behavior of the United States of America and the action of *Islamic extremists who kill innocent women and children to achieve an objective,*' said Bush, growing animated as he spoke. (http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14848798/, emphasis added)

The language of 'we do no wrong' is exemplified in how killings of civilians were presented.

Soldiers as gunmen

What we call assailants is a critical definition of the situation vis-à-vis a moral justification, intentions, as well as a cultural script of legitimacy and social control. US news reports referred to the Iraqi fighters, at first as criminals and thugs, later, as 'insurgents,' and throughout as 'gunmen.' Many journalists accepted military spokespersons' definitions of Iraqi fighters as 'criminals' and 'thugs' in the early part of the war by those who were promoting propaganda. One journalist found this to be quite strange:

> The US Army propaganda about who the insurgency was – that *they were dead-enders and it was over, a bunch of criminals* – was very effective, and that was essentially what was written for a long time. So I think that, in many ways, there was an enormous amount of *press self-censorship* early on, for about almost the first year of the invasion . . . They were very effective in *their propaganda for journalists and for Americans* who didn't know what was going on, but in Iraq it was a disaster. (Editors, *Columbia Journalism Review*, 2006: 30, emphasis added)

The self-censorship extended to treating death by the enemy as barbaric, while US related deaths were simply unavoidable. One account illustrates the 'barbarism' – beheading – attributed to Iraqi 'gunmen,' while the killing by US soldiers is described as simply 'killed.'

> BAGHDAD, Iraq – US forces . . . recovered the bodies of two American soldiers reported captured by insurgents last week. An Iraqi defense ministry official said the men were *tortured and 'killed in a barbaric way'* . . . Maj. Gen. Abdul-Aziz Mohammed, said the bodies showed signs of having been tortured. 'With great regret, they were *killed in a barbaric way,'* he said . . . Also, just hours before the two soldiers went missing Friday, a *US airstrike killed a key al-Qaida in Iraq leader described as the group's 'religious emir,' he said.*
>
> Mansour Suleiman Mansour Khalifi al-Mashhadani, or *Sheik Mansour, was killed* with two foreign fighters in the same area where the soldiers' bodies were found, the US spokesman said. The three were trying to flee in a vehicle.
>
> [S]even masked *gunmen,* one carrying a heavy machine gun, killed the driver and took the two other US soldiers captive. (Gamel, 2006, emphasis added)

Iraqi fighters were 'gunmen,' or 'insurgents,' rather than an army, soldiers, or even guerillas – largely because these terms provide a 'legitimate' anchorage in institutions, but also because the term 'guerillas' echoes the political and military failures of Vietnam. And this can most easily be accomplished by using simple terms to define the enemy (rather than the 'enemies'), for example, insurgents, terrorists, but not the terms that were used in unsuccessful wars, for example, opposition fighters were referred to as 'guerillas' in the Vietnam War. A sociologist, who was quoted in an article that explained how American soldiers could commit atrocities against civilians, provided one of the only references to Iraqi fighters as 'guerillas' (however, note that even this quote about a horrendous slaughter of a family, which one soldier described as 'the My Lai of this generation,' is preceded by the qualified 'allegedly'):

> Military sociologists who have studied soldiers in battle say incidents such as what *allegedly* happened at Haditha tend to increase as insurgencies go on. Charles Moskos, one of the nation's leading experts on military personnel, said the nature of the Iraqi insurgency, particularly as it enters its fourth year, makes it difficult for soldiers to distinguish friend from foe. 'There is a *guerrilla group* that is being supported by the local populace, and that makes the innocent civilians viewed as part of the bad guys. In these situations of *extreme stress*, one can lose one's moral balance,' says Moskos. (Duffy et al., 2006, emphasis added)

Controlling information about death in war is a basic propaganda task. While my focus here is on information about civilian deaths, the discourse of death in war is socially constructed for audience approval. Indeed, the control of information about death – including one's own soldiers – is very important. Note the euphemism for troops killed by comrades as '*friendly fire*.' My analysis of the news coverage of the 'friendly fire' death of Pat Tillman in Afghanistan, a professional football player, demonstrated the use of 'hero scripts' to cover up a careless shooting (Altheide, 2006). What we call our 'dead' is also critical. The US media quickly began to refer to dead soldiers as 'heroes' and '*fallen soldiers*,' a less-than-dead phrase that was quickly also applied to police officers, fire department personnel, and other uniformed workers. Such discourse joins a plethora of uniformed people with soldiers; all are 'fighting/serving' on our behalf. Another way to restrict information, quite simply, is to make it 'off limits.' Thus, news media were forbidden from photographing the *fallen* when they arrived in flag-draped caskets at Dover Air Force base, in order to 'respect the family privacy.'

The killing of civilians poses a moral, strategic, and public relations problem for any military force that disavows being labeled terrorists, who explicitly use civilian deaths as a strategy. Legitimate and 'civilized' states renounce intentionally killing civilians, and any deaths that do occur in 'military operations' must be treated as 'accidental,' or more commonly as '*collateral damage*.' However, a 'public relations problem' can be created if an audience perceives that there are too many accidental deaths (Louw, 2003). Two aspects of 'managing' the problem involve the frequency of news reports about civilian deaths as well as how these reports are framed, and whose 'voice' is heard or implied in such reports.

Military news sources deal with civilian death from a 'PR' standpoint by hiding it, minimizing it, or calling it something else (Editors, *Columbia Journalism*

Review, 2006). In many ways this is somewhat easier since citizens of 'one side' typically do not care a lot about the fate of those on the 'other side.' Still, authorities seek to minimize journalistic access to civilian killings.

A more common approach to limiting news reports about civilian deaths is to shape how reports are framed. Discursive framing can be illustrated with terms used to describe how brutal soldiers are portrayed. A common term used in coverage of Iraqi and other opposition fighters is 'gunmen.' This term is part of a cultural script that carries clear meanings about legitimate authority, brutality and the 'innocence' of victims for US audiences steeped in popular culture and decades of propaganda. Thus, legitimate police officers and military personnel are seldom cast as gunmen. US soldiers' killing of some 24 Iraqi civilians at Haditha on 19 November 2005, illustrates discourse manipulation. The distinctions drawn in the humanity of 'our side' but not 'their side' are also contained in different vocabulary of motives (Mills, 1940) attributed to the enemy – killing as '*barbaric acts*' – while US soldiers, who kill families, are permitted to provide an excuse of rage to avenge a 'family/teammate' member: consider a statement about the same Haditha killing:

> Could the death of an adored comrade have been enough to turn a few well-trained Marines into cold-blooded murderers? James Crossan, a Marine who was injured by the blast that killed Terrazas, told ABC News, '*I can understand because we are pretty much like one family, and when your teammates do get injured and killed, you are going to get pissed off and just rage*'. (emphasis added)

US military action was virtually never framed as acts of 'gunmen,' even though US reporters, military personnel, and Iraqi leaders (e.g. Prime minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki) have decried violence against Iraqi civilians by American troops as a 'regular occurrence.' The US military developed a routine procedure for paying the survivors of slain Iraqis up to $2500. Soldiers may fire too quickly when civilians are suspected in the bombing of vehicles and killing US soldiers, but even well documented cases of rage and revenge killings by US troops were not cast as 'gunmen.' But news reports are rare about this fairly common occurrence. An exceptional statement received very little news coverage, that is, it was 'picked up' by only a handful of news outlets:

> 'I hate the fact that American soldiers ride around killing civilians,' said Command Sgt Major Samuel Coston, 44, from North Carolina. 'All you got to say is "*I feel threatened,*" "*the car was driving aggressively,*" *and you shoot.* They have no remorse. They just keep on driving.' (Badkhen, 2005, emphasis added)

Yet, these 'shooters' are not referred to as gunmen.

Indeed, I found only one report in the Iraq War coverage where US soldiers were described as 'gunmen'. The specific incident was the Haditha killings by marines who gunned down 24 people, including an Iraqi family, after a fellow marine was killed by a roadside bomb.

> The baby's mother 'completely collapsed when they killed her husband in front of her,' she said. 'I ran away carrying Asia [the baby] outside the house, but when the Americans returned they killed Asma, the mother of the child.'

> Abdullah's 39-year-old husband also slipped out of the house and ran to warn his nearby cousins about the killings. But he crossed paths with the Americans on his way back home; he died of gunshot wounds in his shoulder and head, his wife said.

> Everybody was at home when *the gunmen* arrived. Except for one 12-year-old daughter, the family was wiped out. Four girls and one boy, ranging in age from 4 to 15, were shot dead by the Marines, neighbors and the surviving child said.

> Safa Younis Salim, the 12-year-old, said she lay on the ground, covered with her sister's blood, and pretended to be dead while her family died around her. Her sister's blood spurted fast; it was like a water tap, she said . . . 'I feel sorry. I was wishing to be alive,' Safa said. 'Now I wish I had died with them.' (Stack and Salman, 2006)

A key factor in propaganda is geared to not hearing the 'other's' voice, but rather, using language and discourse to negate the legitimacy – if not the relevance – of the other. This is easier to accomplish if the other is feared.

Terrorism and fear

The mass media promoted the war on terrorism – especially after the 9/11 attacks – by stressing fear and an uncertain future, although there was a several decade context of anti-Arab propaganda (Adams, 1981). One impact of this media barrage was to promote stereotypes and extreme ethnocentrism that is very close to the images that many westerners had of Vietnamese adversaries in an earlier war – 'Asians' who 'did not value life.' A blue-collar worker told me in 2005 that his niece came home from Europe 'when Muslims began exploding car bombs in France or Spain or somewhere. Those guys think that if they die *they'll see Allah or someone. They're crazy*' (emphasis added). He added that there are 24,000 terrorists in the United States waiting for instruction. What this man 'knows' was not contradicted by hundreds of news reports, and it is this 'knowledge' that enabled leaders to gain leverage over his perception, values, votes and tax dollars for various policies. Numerous reports about possible terrorist cells in the United States were part of the strident government efforts to increase government surveillance, and within a few months of 9/11, justify holding suspects without due process.

Major changes in US foreign and domestic policy essentially went unreported and unchallenged by the dominant news organizations (Armstrong, 2002). Notwithstanding the long relationship in the United States between fear and crime, the role of the mass media in promoting fear has become more pronounced since the United States 'discovered' international terrorism on 11 September 2001. This discourse was grounded in several decades of the 'fear of crime,' but it was also promoted by political action that sought a reorientation and redefinition of the role of the United States in world affairs.

This broad story about the Iraq War involved negative terms for the enemy, but it also included US retaliation, the hunt for Al Qaeda leaders (e.g. Osama bin Laden), and plans to attack countries and 'outlaw regimes' that supported or harbored terrorists. Implementing these programs involved invading Afghanistan and expanding the US military presence throughout the world. Other adjustments

were made in foreign policy, military budgets, domestic surveillance and attacks on civil liberties (Johnson, 2004; Kellner, 2003). But these were all contextualized by fresh metaphors that justified extraordinary acts against a very vile enemy. Threats to invade other countries – the 'axis of evil' – that included Iraq, were part of an effort to 'defend' the United States from future attacks. Terrorism became a very broad symbol that encompassed fear, consumption, and international intervention (Kellner, 2004). The meaning of terrorism expanded from a tactic to also mean an idea, a lifestyle, and ultimately, a condition of the world. News reports contributed to this broad definition of terrorism as a condition (Altheide, 2004). A key source for this news theme was the Project for a New American Century (PNAC).

Terrorism and the Project for the New American Century (PNAC)

The Iraq War was a foregone conclusion among key policy-makers. Bringing about a 'regime change' in Iraq was part of a plan for the United States to become a hegemon, including withdrawing from – if not negating – certain treaties (e.g. nuclear test ban), and becoming more independent of the United Nations. The US invasion of Iraq was justified, in the main, by claims that Saddam Hussein possessed 'weapons of mass destruction' (WMD), was in league with the terrorists who attacked the US, and that he was likely to place these weapons at the disposal of other terrorists. It took less than a year for the world to learn that none of these assertions were true, and indeed, there was strong evidence that members of the Bush administration were quite aware that such WMDs did not exist. On the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Vice President Dick Cheney, made it very clear that the Iraq War did not hinge mainly on the existence of WMDS. Cheney stated on the show *Meet the Press*:

> Vice President Dick Cheney said yesterday that the 'world is much better off . . .' 'It was the right thing to do, and if we had to do it over again, we'd do exactly the same thing,' Cheney said on NBC's 'Meet the Press.'

> 'The people obviously are frustrated because of the difficulty, because of the cost and the casualties,' Cheney said. 'You cannot look at Iraq in isolation. You have to look at it within the context of the broader global war on terror.' Any retreat by the United States would indicate to the terrorists that the 'US has lost its will' in the war against terrorism and would damage US credibility, Cheney said. (*Newsday*, 11 September 2006, http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601170&sid=aMuFuSmq5zn A&refer=special_report)

Cheney knew that Iraq was a prime target because he was part of a group that drew up a blueprint for US world domination in 1992. The plan and the people associated with it were called the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), but US audiences learned very little about this from their news media (Altheide and Grimes, 2005). Many members of the PNAC joined the Bush administration and became credible claims-makers, who constructed the frames

for shaping subsequent news reports. Among the members who signed many of the proclamations laying the foundation for a new American empire (Bacevich, 2002; Kagan, 2003; Kagan and Kristol, 2000) were former and current governmental officials, including: Elliot Abrams, William Bennet, Jeb Bush, Dick Cheney, Steve Forbes, Donald Kagan, Norman Podhoretz, Dan Quayle, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz.

The PNAC was very influential in changing US foreign policy as well as promoting the major news frames and favorable news coverage about going to war with Iraq following the attacks of 9/11 (http://www.newamericancentury.org). The Iraq War narrative was framed by these efforts and the resulting propaganda campaign to convince the American people that attacking Iraq was tantamount to attacking 'terrorists' and others who threatened the United States (Armstrong, 2002). The majority of the US news media did little to describe the narrative and the organization behind it. That this is a key aspect of what news organizations should do is suggested by veteran journalist, Alissa Rubin of the *Los Angeles Times*, who reflected on nearly four years of news coverage:

> Well, I always personally found [US government briefings] valuable. I know many other people didn't because if you looked at them in terms of objective truth, they weren't very useful. But in terms of how the *US government wanted us to see things*, they were quite useful. *And it's important to know what the government's narrative is.* Because in any conflict there are *competing narratives*, and our job, from my point of view, is to sort through them and provide a reality check on all of them. (Editors, *Columbia Journalism Review*, 2006: 28, emphasis added)

The PNAC emphasized changing American foreign policy to become a hegemon and police its international interests as a new kind of benevolent American empire (Bacevich, 2002; Barber, 2003; Johnson, 2004; Kaplan, 2003; Mann, 2003). This would include expanding the military, withdrawing from major treaties as well as engaging in preemptive strikes against those who would threaten US interests. When the plan was leaked to the press, it went through several changes, with new drafts suggesting that the US would act in concert with allies, when possible. The First Gulf War (1991) came and went, President George Bush was not re-elected, and many of the co-authors and supporters of the plan left office for think tanks, businesses and various publications. The PNAC plan, with revisions, was promoted repeatedly during the next decade, even though some members were out of office for eight years, and was in full swing one month before the infamous 9/11 attacks. The most detailed coverage of the history of the PNAC and its role in shaping US foreign policy was David Armstrong's essay in *Harper's* in October 2002:

> The plan is for the United States to rule the world. The overt theme is unliateralism, but it is ultimately a story of domination. It calls for the United States to maintain its overwhelming military superiority and prevent new rivals from rising up to challenge it on the world stage. It calls for dominion over friends and enemies alike. It says not that the United States must be more powerful, or most powerful, but that it must be absolutely powerful. (Armstrong, 2002: 76)

Making a pitch for a threatened military budget in 1992, Colin Powell told the House Armed Services Committee, the United States,

> required 'sufficient power' to 'deter any challenger from ever dreaming of challenging us on the world stage.' To emphasize the point, he cast the United States in the role of street thug. '*I want to be the bully on the block,*' he said, implanting in the mind of potential opponents that 'there is no future in trying to challenge the armed forces of the United States'. (Armstrong, 2002: 78, emphasis added)

As the above statement by Colin Powell makes clear, the US was not to be challenged by anyone, nor should the US take direction from or world regulatory bodies, including the United Nations, because the aim was 'to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival' (Armstrong, 2002: 78).

The election of George W. Bush provided new invitations to join the government and work out the plan. The plan was carried forth by the group as the PNAC. Ultimately, the plan was oriented to freeing the US from several alliances and treaties that limited military and weapons planning and testing, including the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty, several nuclear non-proliferation treaties (Perkovich, 2003). Other global and environmental agreements were also avoided or broken, including those designed to protect the environment and limit pollution, for example, the UN's Kyoto Protocol, ratified or signed by 209 countries.

Most of the Gulf war coverage originated from the White House and the federal government. A veteran producer for a major network TV news program indicated that the story was about the preparation for war. In his words, things were set in motion for over a year and the 'rock was rolling downhill,' that's where the story was (interview notes).

Network news shows were quite consistent with guests who supported the war. An analysis by FAIR of network news interviewees one week before and one week after Secretary of State Colin Powell addressed the United Nations about Iraq's alleged possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction, found that two-thirds of the guests were from the United States, with 75 percent of these being current or former government or military officials, while only one – Senator Kennedy – expressed skepticism or opposition to the impending war with Iraq (FAIR, 2003).

The PNAC members, who were now part of the Bush administration, promoted false claims (e.g. WMD, and that Hussein supported the 9/11 attackers) to justify the war with Iraq. They also required access to the news media for their claims, as well as assurances that there would be no systematic and widely publicized opposing points of view. According to Pilger (2002), several advisors in the administration – including those who were associated with Project for a New American Century (PNAC) – had been seeking a catastrophic event, a new 'Pearl Harbor,' that could be used as a catalyst to adopt a more aggressive foreign policy: the attacks of 11 September 2001 provided the 'new Pearl Harbor,' described as 'the opportunity of ages.' The next 18 months were spent preparing public opinion for the invasion of Iraq on 20 March 2003. This preparation included the freedom to define and use terrorism in a very broad and general way.

The PNAC received very little news media coverage prior to the invasion of Iraq even though it was part of the 'public record' in government documents, and had

been briefly mentioned in several newspaper and radio reports in the late 1990s (see Table 1). (Two exemplary documentaries were aired on a Public Broadcasting System [PBS] documentary program, *Frontline*, 8 November 2001; 18 March 2003, about the history and context of US involvement in Iraq, including the role of the PNAC in promoting the Iraq War.) Only a few newspaper articles dealt with PNAC six months before the United States attacked Iraq on 20 March. No reports appeared on the major TV networks regular evening newscast during this time, although *Nightline* did examine the 'conspiracy claims' and interview William Kristol on 5 March, two weeks before the US invasion of Iraq. Reporter Ted Koppel dismissed the conspiratorial charges by several foreign newspapers. He framed it in terms of what could be called 'it depends on how you look at it.'

> They did what former government officials and politicians frequently do when they're out of power, they began formulating a strategy, in this case, a foreign policy strategy, that might bring influence to bear on the Administration then in power, headed by President Clinton. Or failing that, on a new Administration that might someday come to power. They were pushing for the elimination of Saddam Hussein. And proposing the establishment of a strong US military presence in the Persian Gulf, linked to a willingness to use force to protect vital American interests in the Gulf. (*Nightline*, 2003)

After all, the US had already fought the First Gulf War with Hussein, and that effort was fueled by a massive propaganda campaign headed by the US public relations firm, Hill and Knowlton, which promoted the lie that Saddam's troops had killed babies in a hospital in Kuwait (Stauber and Rampton, 1995). This report was broadcast just a few days prior to a congressional vote authorizing that war. Thus, there was a clear sense of urgency to intervene in the First Gulf War.

News organizations implicitly editorialize through their use of news sources for certain issues (Baer and Chambliss, 1997; Bailey and Hale, 1998; Chermak, 1995; Epstein, 1973; Ericson et al., 1987, 1991; Glasgow University Media Group, 1976; Philo and Glasgow University Media Group, 1982; Surette, 1998; Westfeldt and Wicker, 1998). The major news agencies in the United States, and particularly the TV networks, limited their coverage of the role the PNAC played in shaping the Iraq War. These propaganda efforts occurred as the various PNAC members served as routine news sources, primarily in TV network news accounts oriented to infotainment.

The selection of news sources is of paramount importance, particularly when those sources are able to set the discourse, to provide the vocabulary and meanings of activities, and to set the parameters for discussion. The PNAC was not just another lobbying group, as Ted Koppel suggested. Their members were centrally involved in the shaping and operation of US domestic and foreign policy over a period of several decades.

Analysis of news sources shows that pro-PNAC sources were used 72 times before 9/11 and 133 times within six months after 9/11, an increase of 85 percent. Only five references appear for the 'anti'-PNAC sources (four refer to Joseph Nye), and eight appear after 9/11 (seven refer to Joseph Nye). The PNAC sources were used quite often by the NYT prior to 9/11. This is particularly noteworthy for

FIGURE 1.   *A partial chronology of news reports about the Project for a New American Century and plans to invade Iraq*

Chronology of Press Reports about the PNAC

26 January 1998	NPR, *All Things Considered*
4 August 2001	NPR, *Weekend Edition* Saturday
11 August 2001	*NYT*, (Jane Perlez) Bombing Iraq and mission change
21 August 2001	*WPOST*, (Thomas Ricks) Empire or Not: A Quiet Debate Over US Role
10 September 2001	NPR, *Talk of the Nation*
23 September 2001	NBC, *Meet the Press* (Powell) PNAC letter to President mentioned
3 December 2001	*NYT*, excerpts from 1998 PNAC letter to Clinton
9 December 2001	*NYT*, article about PNAC position
10 September 2002	NPR, *Talk of the Nation*
October 2002	*Harper*'s magazine, David Armstrong, 'Dick Cheney's Song of America'
12 January 2003	*LA Times*, Chalmers Johnson, about Rumsfeld and urge to attack Iraq
1 February 2003	*NYT*, Todd Purdum, the 'brains' behind Bush's foreign policy (on same day Bush says that he no longer supports containment)
4 March 2003	*Soviet Journalist*, monitored by BBC
5 March 2003	ABC Nightline
11 March 2003	*NYT*, David Carr, article about PNAC and Kristol's *Weekly Standard* influence on Bush and foreign policy
16 March 2003	CBS Sunday Morning
16 March 2003	*Guardian* Newspaper (others, Toronto)
20 MARCH 2003	WAR WITH IRAQ BEGINS
23 March 2003	NBC, Meet the Press (Rumsfeld)
23 March 2003	*LA Times*, Gary Schmidt (PNAC) writes article
23 March 2003	*NYT*, Steven R. Weisman, article about history of PNAC influence
6 April 2003	*Chicago Sun Times* (Lynn Sweet) refers to Wolfowitz denial (see Senate meeting)
21 April 2003	NPR, *Talk of the Nation*
9 May 2003	NPR, *All Things Considered*
5 June 2003	NPR, *All Things Considered*

Relevant Dates and Events about some publicity of PNAC

27 March 2003	Wolfowitz denial to Senator Durbin about his authorship of pre-PNAC 1992document and preemptive bombing

William Kristol ($N = 42$), former chief of staff for Vice President Dan Quayle and publisher of the very conservative *The Weekly Standard*, and Richard Perle ($N = 21$), former Assistant Secretary of Defense and member of the Defense Policy Board that advises Donald Rumsfeld. These are prominent Washington sources that are called upon to discuss a range of foreign and domestic policy issues. The circulation of Kristol's publication is small but the media play that he gets from his numerous references extends his influence (Carr, 2003).

The role of the PNAC in shaping news discourse can be illustrated by an overview of how the term 'empire' was used by proponents and critics. Due to the relatively little attention paid by the mainstream media to the ambitions of PNAC and its founders, the following analysis is limited to a small number of news articles and programs.

Only 11 articles or news programs specifically address the apparent shift in American foreign policy since the beginning of the current Bush Administration towards that of embracing the advancement of a new American empire bent on global domination. Of these reports, four are critical or cautionary, five are descriptive, and two are supportive of PNAC policy recommendations. Discourse surrounding the use of the word 'empire' as part of the current US foreign policy agenda involves primarily a two-fold debate: first, debate regarding whether the United States is indeed acting in a manner as if to pursue imperialistic pursuits; second, whether the debate is simply one of semantics and whether the United States as a world leader should be utilizing the extant power at its hands to disseminate American values to the rest of the world. The former argument rests mainly with activists and others critical of the United States' actions, while current and former members of PNAC primarily represented the latter group. For example, in a July 2003 article in *In These Times* titled 'Seize the Time,' Arundhati Roy, who clearly opposed the US emerging empire, states:

> But when a country ceases to be merely a country and becomes an *empire*, then the scale of operations changes dramatically. So may I clarify that I speak as a subject of the *American Empire*? I speak as a *slave* who presumes to criticize her king . . . I don't care what the facts are. What a perfect maxim for the New American Empire. Perhaps a slight variation on the theme would be more appropriate: The facts can be whatever we want them to be . . . So here we are, the people of the world, confronted with an *empire* armed with a mandate from heaven (and, as added insurance, the most formidable arsenal of weapons of mass destruction in history) . . . Here we are, confronted with an *empire that has conferred upon itself the right to go to war at will*, and the right to deliver people from corrupting ideologies, from religious fundamentalists, dictators, sexism, and poverty *by the age-old, tried-and-tested practice of extermination*. (Roy, 2003, emphasis added)

One of PNAC's fundamental criticisms of those who challenge their ideology is that they/supporters of a more aggressive foreign policy agenda do not hold territorial ambitions, therefore creating a distinction between the US and previous historical examples of world empires. Note how the definition and meaning of empire is defused by arguing that it is really a matter of semantics, that the US has already been an 'empire,' or rather, is seen as such, so whatever steps that it takes now are simply adjusting to 'reality.' Two of the articles critical of PNAC and its political ambitions were released within months of the beginning of the US war against Iraq, while the other two critiques were published just days before the US invasion. The discourse of liberation and humanity is used to justify US expansionism around the globe, a kind of benevolent outreach. Both articles supporting the US's role as an empire cite Thomas Donnelly, a senior fellow at the Project. According to Donnelly, who denies an implicit agenda to transform US foreign policy into one with imperialistic ambitions, *'. . . the United States is an empire of*

democracy or liberty' (Ricks, 2001). In a separate article, Donnelly states '. . . *our new manifest destiny is to disseminate our values*' (Baker, 2001).

The attacks of 9/11 were interpreted and promoted by the PNAC as requiring action not only again Afghanistan, but also Iraq. The major news media presented virtually no strong disclaimers to this scenario, partly because the military worked very closely with them, even to the point of letting reporters become 'embedded' with the troops. The grateful news organizations became even closer to military sources.

Terrorism and consumerism and national identity

Terrorism became a perspective, orientation, and a discourse for 'our time,' the 'way things are today,' and 'how the world has changed.' The subsequent campaign to integrate fear into everyday life routines was consequential for public life, domestic policy, and foreign affairs (Kellner, 2003). The tragic loss of lives and property fueled patriotic slogans, thousands of commercial advertisements, public contributions of more than $2 billion, major domestic and foreign policy changes, and the largest increase in the military budget in 35 years. Stores sold out of flags, businesses linked advertising to patriotic slogans (e.g. General Motors' 'Keep America Rolling'), baseball fans sang 'God Bless America' instead of 'Take Me Out to the Ball Game,' and children helped raise money for the Afghan kids who were 'starving.' Analysis of news reports and advertisements suggests that popular culture and mass media depictions of fear, patriotism, consumption, and victimization contributed to the emergence of a 'national identity' and collective action that was fostered by elite decision-makers' propaganda.

Terrorism discourse was not limited to a specific situation, but referred to a general worldview. Domestic life became oriented to celebrating/commemorating past terrorist acts, waiting for and anticipating the next terrorist act and taking steps to prevent it. Terrorism defined reality and became an incorrigible proposition that could not be questioned, challenged or falsified, and was 'compatible with any and every conceivable state of affairs' (Mehan and Wood, 1975: 52). Terrorism, as a matter of discourse, became an institutionalized disclaimer (e.g. 'We all know how the world has changed since 9/11'), a term or phrase that documents a general (rather than a specific) situation and conveys a widely shared meaning (Hewitt and Stokes, 1975).

International order and conduct was consistent with the domestic definition of a 'terrorism world,' as well as an expansive claim that evil terrorists rather than political gamesmanship governed the 'new world'. Good and evil turned on terrorism. International borders, treaties and even US constitutional rights were mere symbols that could detract from the single greatest threat to civilization and 'good.' Such evil was to be feared and constantly attacked. To be against terrorism and all that it entailed was a mark of legitimacy and membership that would be demonstrated in various ways. Using similar symbols and expressing opposition to terrorism promoted communalism by putting the good of the citizenry over any group or individual (Cerulo, 2002).

Audience familiarity with terrorism traded on decades of news and popular culture depictions of crime myths about the 'crime problem,' crime victims, and the drug war (Kappeler et al., 1999). On the one hand, strong action was needed, including getting armed, and buying guns. *The Beretta gun company* promoted its '"*United We Stand*" – a nine-millimeter pistol bearing a *laser-etched American flag*. The company sold 2000 of them to wholesalers in one day in October' (Baker, 2001).

The emphasis of the coverage of 9/11 was on the commonality of the victims rather than the cause or the rationale for the attacks. The popular refrain was that all Americans were victimized by the attacks, and like the 'potential victims' of crime featured in a decade of news reports about the crime problem, all citizens should support efforts to attack the source of fear (Garland, 2001). The news media were pressured to toe the line. With network and local nightly newscasts draped in flag colors, lapel flags, and patriotic slogans reporting events primarily through the viewpoint of the United States (e.g. 'us' and 'we'), news organizations presented content and form that was interpreted by the publisher of *Harper's Magazine* as sending: '. . . signals to the viewers to some extent that *the media are acting as an arm of the government*, as opposed to an independent, objective purveyor of information, which is what we're supposed to be' (Rutenberg and Carter, 2001, emphasis added). Dan Rather, CBS anchorman, acknowledged the pressure to comply with propaganda and that many of the tough questions were not being asked. Rather told a British journalist:

> 'It is an obscene comparison . . . but you know there was a time in South Africa that people would put flaming tyres around people's necks if they dissented. And in some ways the fear is that you will be necklaced here, you will have a flaming tyre of lack of patriotism put around your neck,' he said. '*Now it is that fear that keeps journalists from asking the toughest of the tough questions* . . .' (Engel, 2002: 4, emphasis added)

Anyone was denounced who suggested that the 'cause' of the attacks was more complex and that the United States had angered many political groups by previous actions (e.g. support for Israel). Talk show host, Bill Maher, who argued that the terrorists were not really cowards, was among those pilloried and lost his job; Clear Channel, a radio consortium, put out a blacklist of 150 songs with critical themes (e.g. Simon and Garfunkel's 'Bridge Over Troubled Waters') that should not be played (Kellner, 2003).

Identity and commensuration were presented to audiences through various messages in the mass media. Mass media support of the emerging national identity was commensurate with moral character and a discourse of salvation or 'seeing the light' to guide our way through the new terrorism world. The 'younger generation' was implored to meet the new challenge; this was, after all, their war, and the mass media carried youthful testimonies of new found loyalty and awakening that would have made a tent-meeting evangelist proud. For example, *Newsweek* magazine, published statements by young people, one 'confessing' her naiveté about the 'real world,' and another by a former university student who criticized 'antimilitary culture' with a call to arms:

> Before the attack, all I could think of was how to write a good rap . . . *I am not eager to say this*, but we do not live in an ideal world . . . I've come to accept the idea of a focused war on terrorists as the best way to ensure our country's safety. (Newman, 2001: 9: note the disclaimer, emphasis added)

The discourse of patriotism turned on being supportive and not critical. Nearly three weeks later university campuses were chastised in a 'My Turn' column from a Marine Corps officer. Note how critical thinking, especially about racism, and being different from the majority views, was joined with anti-Americanism:

> As anyone who has attended a top college in the past three decades knows, patriotism in the eyes of many professors is synonymous with a lack of sophistication at best, racism at worst . . .

> Yet, it is clear to me that the antimilitary culture that exists on many campuses is remarkably out of step with the views of the vast majority of Americans . . .

> Now is the time for America's brightest young adults to enlist in this good fight against global terrorism – to join organizations like the military's Special Forces, the FBI and the CIA, whose members risk their lives on the front lines of this battle. It is also *time for America's universities to support and encourage* – not undermine – this call to service. (Sullivan, 2001, emphasis added)

Such pronouncements would be used by elites in the weeks after the attacks to not only claim a national consensus for a massive infusion of social control and military intervention, but to push for the reinstatement of ROTC at Harvard and other campuses.

Academics and other critics were targeted for their critical comments, even though they were not well publicized. One non-profit group, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (one founding member is Lynn Cheney, wife of Vice President Cheney) posted a web page accusing dozens of scholars, students, and a university president of unpatriotic behavior, accusing them of being 'the weak link in America's response to the attack' and for invoking '*tolerance and diversity as antidotes to evil*' (*The Arizona Republic*, 24 November 2001, p. A11). (This association also issued a report: 'Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done About It', emphasis added.)

Sacramento Bee president and publisher, Janis Besler Heaphy, was booed off the stage during a commencement address at California State University, Sacramento, after she suggested that the national response to terrorism could erode press freedoms and individual liberties. One professor in attendance stated: 'For the first time in my life, I can see how something like the Japanese internment camps could happen in our country' (*New York Times*, 21 December 2001, p. B1). Attorney General Ashcroft made it clear that anyone concerned with the civil rights of the suspicious was also suspect. Ashcroft told members of Senate committee that *critics* 'aid terrorists' and undermine national unity: '*They give ammunition to America's enemies, and pause to America's friends*' (*Star Tribune*, 9 December 2001, p. 30A, emphasis added).

Advertising and the market economy joined with giving and 'self-less' assistance to others. The US advertising industry sprang into action (Jackall and Hirota, 2000). For example, the Ad Council (Advertising Research Foundation) adopted a

strong coalition stand against terrorism, noting in an online communication that 'it was originally founded as the War Advertising Council during World War II in the aftermath of the bombings of Pearl Harbor.' Following an 'all advertising industry meeting,' a strategy was adopted on 18 September 2001 to 'inform, involve and inspire Americans to participate in activities that will help win the war on terrorism' (Foundation, 2001; Shales, 2001: G2).

Terrorism and social control

The discourse of fear was joined with the politics of fear that enabled decision-makers to couch control efforts as being in the best interests of citizens in order to protect them (Altheide, 2006). The mass media images and themes about risk and safety were central. These control efforts included fundamental violations of international law, custom and the Geneva Accords: 'torture' programs and policies, operation of secret prisons, denial of *habeas corpus* to detainees – which can be applied to all who threaten national security (Stolberg, 2006) – kidnapping and illegal international transport, and domestic and international surveillance of telephone and computer communication. As noted above, US journalism was very supportive of US actions against Iraq and any group placed under the broad umbrella of 'terrorism.' Only a handful of American news media carried reports about German and Italian arrest warrants for CIA agents who kidnapped German and Italian citizens, respectively, and shipped them to other countries to be tortured and questioned because they were thought to be terrorists (Wilkinson, 2005; Williamson, 2006).

The power of discourse can be illustrated by comparing the relative emphasis of language and details provided in several different accounts of the Italian case. Particularly noteworthy in US news reports is the use of qualifying terms to defuse the significant international charges (e.g. '*purported*' CIA agents, '*allegedly*' kidnapped, and '*supposedly*' tortured).

The seriousness of the German and Italian charges, along with widespread revulsion throughout the European Community, can be illustrated by the Bush Administration's efforts to have Congress pass legislation that would grant immunity to key officials – including President Bush – and CIA agents who carried out their superior's orders. Torturing suspects was distinguished according to 'degree' and not the act of torture itself. According to one report:

> Congress has eased the worries of CIA interrogators and senior administration officials by *granting them immunity from US criminal prosecutions for all but 'grave' abuses of terrorism detainees* . . .

> 'The obstacles to these prosecutions are not legal, they're political,' said William Schabas, director of the Irish Center for Human Rights at the National University of Ireland in Galway. (Gordon and Taylor, 2006, emphasis added)

US news audiences, who learned about the most grotesque abuses at the Abu Ghraib prison, were also told that things were not that bad, that we were 'at war,' and this shouldn't be forgotten. Conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh opined that the treatment of Iraqi prisoners wasn't really that bad after all, but was

like fraternity fun, even if it got a little carried away. Indeed, he suggested that the activity could not have been serious since it was carried out by women!

> LIMBAUGH: And these American prisoners of war – have you people noticed who the torturers are? *Women! The babes! The babes are meting out the torture.*

Limbaugh observed that the American troops who mistreated Iraqi prisoners of war were 'babes' and that the pictures of the alleged abuse were no worse than '*anything you'd see Madonna, or Britney Spears do on stage*' (http://mediamatters. org/items/200405050003, emphasis added).

In response to a caller on his 4 May 2004 show, he replied:

> This is no different than what happens at the *Skull and Bones initiation* and we're going to ruin people's lives over it and we're going to hamper our military effort, and then we are going to really hammer them *because they had a good time*. You know, these people are being fired at every day. I'm talking about people having a *good time*, these people, *you ever heard of emotional release? You ever heard of need to blow some steam off?* (emphasis added)

During the critical 18-month period between the 9/11 attacks and the US invasion of Iraq, the American news media essentially repeated administration claims about terrorism and Iraq's impending nuclear capacity (MacArthur, 2003).

> Rarely has television functioned so poorly in an era of crisis, generating more heat than light; more sound, fury, and spectacle than understanding; and more blatantly grotesque partisanship for the Bush administration than genuinely democratic debate over what options the country and the world faced in the confrontation with terrorism. (Kellner, 2003: 69)

The drug war and ongoing concerns with crime contributed to the expansion of fear with terrorism. Messages demonizing Osama bin Laden, his Taliban supporters, and 'Islamic extremists' linked these suspects with the destructive clout of illegal drugs and especially drug lords. News reports and advertisements joined drug use with terrorism and helped shift 'drugs' from criminal activity to unpatriotic action. A $10 million ad campaign promoted the message from President Bush, 'If you quit drugs, you join the fight against terror in America.'

Conclusion

Terrorism discourse was part of a general context involving the discourse of fear, which was mainly associated with crime, as well as nearly three decades of negative reporting and imagery about the Middle East, and Iraq in particular. Those experiences contributed to the dehumanization of the enemy, as well as civilians killed by US troops. The enemy was portrayed as barbaric 'gunmen,' who warranted torture to discover their evil plans, while US atrocities often were cast as rage or revenge or even as 'letting off steam.'

The politics of fear was joined with this discourse. Citizens became accustomed to 'safety rhetoric' by police officials, which often required them to permit police searches, condone 'overaggressive' police action, as well as join in myriad crime-prevention efforts, many of which involved more human as well as electronic

surveillance of work places, neighborhoods, stores, and even our 'bodies,' in the form of expansive drug screening. The discourse of fear promotes the politics of fear, and numerous surveillance practices and rationale to keep us safe (Monahan, 2006). By the mid-1990s, many high school students had 'peed in a bottle' as a condition of participating in athletics, applying for a job, and in some cases, applying for student loans and scholarships. Several legal challenges to this scrutiny were turned down, as the courts (with a few exceptions) began to uphold the cliché that was echoed by local TV newscasters and others: 'why worry if you have nothing to hide?' In short, US citizens had been socialized into the garrison state, no longer being offended by surveillance, and indeed, two-thirds of parents choose to use the rapidly expanding – and inexpensive – technology to monitor their own children, including testing them for drugs. Safety, caring, and control are wrapped in the discourse of fear:

> 'It is our responsibility as parents to do everything in our power to *protect our children* from *the perils of drug abuse*, and we believe that fostering greater communication between parents and their children coupled with utilization of a home drug test are the keys to *preventing drug abuse and addiction*,' said Debbie Moak, co-founder of notMYkid. (Spratling, 2006, emphasis added)

The 9/11 attacks and the coalescing of the discourse of fear with terrorism meant that more of our lives would be subject to closer scrutiny, particularly air travel. A new federal organization was invented, the Department of Homeland Security, and with its multi-million dollar budget was a requirement to establish an army of federal airport security personnel, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). Rituals of control were embodied in physical screening and inspection of travelers, including demands that they publicly sacrifice personal items in line with the 'terror threat'. Notwithstanding numerous 'experiments' which continue to demonstrate that conscientious 'smugglers' can bring an array of weapons and explosives on board, the discourse of terrorism continued to promote the claim that our screening was keeping us all safe, and that it should continue, because, after all, the world changed after 9/11.

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