Spinning a War

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spinning the war:
public relations in the iraq war

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Senior Honors Thesis
Professor John J. Michalczyk, Advisor

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in partial fulfillment
of the Honors Program in the
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Cover Images

*Background:* U.S., British, and Australian soldiers (www.army.mil)
*Upper left hand corner:* President Bush saluting after landing on the USS Abraham Lincoln (www.whitehouse.gov)
*Upper right hand corner:* President Bush pays a surprise visit to U.S. troops in Baghdad for Thanksgiving dinner (BIAP)
*Lower right hand corner:* Saddam Hussein after capture (www.cnn.com)
*Lower left hand corner:* The Ace of Spades depicting Saddam Hussein, from the card deck used by the U.S. military (www.defenseLINK.com)
To Mom and Dad:

...for providing me with a good education, guiding me through the tough times, knowing when I needed a shoulder to cry on or a laugh to share, and believing in me, even when I doubted myself. You have endowed me with strength and confidence to seize what life has to offer and I will be forever indebted to you for teaching me what it means to love unconditionally.
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INTRODUCTION

In October 1990, Congress’s Human Rights Caucus held a public hearing. There a Kuwaiti girl testified as a witness to the atrocity now touted as a huge impetus that drove Americans to support the Gulf War: Iraqi soldiers removing babies from their incubators and leaving them to die on a hospital floor. This eyewitness account of Iraqi brutality was showcased at a time of American uncertainty in the face of the invasion of Kuwait. United States citizens were unsure of how their country should respond to Saddam Hussein’s demonstration of military dominance in the Middle East, but the image of newborns suffering needlessly was not something they wanted on their conscience.

It is now known that the testimony given by Nayirah, the Kuwaiti teenager, was part of a multi-million dollar public relations (PR) campaign financed by Citizens for a Free Kuwait and executed by Hill and Knowlton. The PR firm sent its own camera crew to the hearing in October and produced a video news release, including footage of Nayirah’s statements, which was disseminated to hundreds of television stations across the nation. The personal account of such nightmarish cruelty tugged at the heartstrings of the American people and enraged them against the soldiers’ disregard for life. The story became a huge player in the government’s attempt to raise public support for America’s entry into the Gulf War.

Although later investigations discovered that the numbers of infants taken from incubators and left to die were few, and that Nayirah was not only a hospital worker but also the daughter of Kuwait’s ambassador to America, Hill and Knowlton’s campaign
had its impact at the most crucial time. The PR tactics utilized by the firm to move the
public toward sympathy for the Kuwaitis and anger toward the Iraqi military forces and
their leader were subtle enough to affect public opinion while dodging scrutiny and
criticism from the media as exaggerated or conveniently timed. The campaign planted
the right words and events in front of the right audience at the right time, integrating facts
with emotional persuasion to produce the desired response.¹

Public Relations: What Is It?

Public relations, according to Harold Burson, chairman of Burson-Marsteller, is
defined as “‘the advancement of information in the public forum for the purpose of
contributing to public opinion.’”² Practitioners of this art, or public relations
professionals, see it as the management of communications between an organization and
the various publics on whom its success or failure depends.³ It is a business that aims to
bridge the gap between an organization and the public. In facilitating communication
between their clients and the public, public relations practitioners create publicity for
their clients and, through that exposure, work to elicit a specific response to the company.
A specific response may be classified as formulating a positive view of the company,
excitement over a product or event, demonstrating confidence in a person or corporation
that has recently experienced a crisis, or subscribing to a particular opinion or viewpoint.

¹ Arthur E. Rowse, “How to Build Support for War,” in Columbia Journalism Review, (September/October
Public Relations and Propaganda

Propaganda is often viewed as public relations’ evil stepsister. While the public is willing to recognize that organizations need to communicate with their audiences and use public relations to open and maintain communication channels, people tend to classify propaganda as negative, exaggerated, and sometimes fabricated messages. While there are types of propaganda that fit this description, it is not possible to place all propaganda under these characteristics. In reality, propaganda is often the form taken by the information distributed through public relations. Its literal definition is “a form of communication that attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” or dispenser of the information.4

Just as supporters of a particular cause circulate information in an attempt to influence others’ opinions about the cause, public relations professionals communicate with the public, on behalf of their organization, to cultivate and maintain the existence of a positive relationship there. PR practitioners are essentially propagandists for their clients.

Many do not view public relations as a form of propaganda because of the negative connotations attached to the latter word. While public relations is associated with business in a capitalist society, propaganda is associated with embellished stories, over-the-top caricatures, and even lies disseminated by manipulative organizations or regimes. In the minds of the public, the means of circulating propagandistic materials are not always considered ethical or sophisticated enough for public relations initiatives.

Propaganda brings up memories of WWII posters depicting the Nazis as demons, whereas PR campaigns evoke thoughts of large gala events complete with press conferences and extensive media coverage. However, public relations and propaganda share a common goal: the spreading of a message to an audience to elicit a particular, chosen response.

Because this thesis explores information that has been distributed throughout the Iraq War campaign, and it can be argued that public relations practices are simply the spreading of propaganda, both words will be used interchangeably. Neither should be affixed with positive or negative connotations or believed to state the author’s opinion on a subject.

**Elements of Public Relations**

PR professionals utilize several different media and forms for communicating a message to their audience. The most well known public relations tool for gaining publicity is the sending of a press release. A press, or news, release is an informative written announcement concerning a particular person, event, product, or idea that is sent to various news sources in the hope of grabbing a journalist’s or newspaper’s attention. If the news conveyed through the release commands the attention of a reporter, it normally results in an article or news piece further broadcasting the information to the public. About 50% of the stories in a newspaper contain information taken from a news

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release. Therefore, the release is an opportunity for an organization to shape public opinion about itself through positive accounts of its activities. Public relations is a business that, unlike advertising, is able to create free publicity for its subject.

In a symbiotic relationship, just as PR professionals aid journalists by providing them with information for news pieces, journalists aid PR executives by creating feature stories surrounding a public relations pitch. Ideas for feature stories on a particular topic, person, or product are often pitched by PR people to journalists who, if interested, will follow by writing an article on the subject. Often found in the “lifestyles” sections of most newspapers, feature stories put a humanistic, social spin on certain events, activities, or people within a company. These are the stories that readers are said to “relate to.”

Other than news releases and pitching ideas for feature stories, those in the public relations business employ several other forms of communication. A press conference can disseminate information to a large number of people in a short time while enabling the public to form a relationship with the spokesperson for an organization. Video news releases, clips of video mixed with specific audio, are distributed to major broadcasting stations for use on their news segments, much like a press release for a newspaper or radio station. Finally, public service announcements help create audiovisual publicity for a non-profit client or government agency. All of the above allow an organization the chance to mold the minds of the public to perceive the company in a particular positive way.

While all of these tactics can be effective if used separately, they are usually used together in a public relations campaign. When setting out to create publicity for a client,
public relations professionals create a PR plan, a blueprint of events, contests, promotions, conferences, news releases, pitches, and other strategies, which will promote their patron. One of the major components of such a plan is the distribution of a press kit. This is a compilation of all major PR communications, including news releases, video news releases, audio clips, facts about the subject, and descriptions of special events that will be held, which is distributed to key opinion leaders of the audience the company wishes to target.

The purpose of these tactics, used both individually and collectively, is to facilitate communication between an organization and the public, and through those communication channels, to manipulate the audiences’ thoughts and opinions concerning the company.

The following is an in-depth exploration of public relations and propaganda strategies and devices utilized by the United States government leading up to, during, and after the second war in Iraq. First an explanation of public relations’ role in a military conflict will be given, followed by an analysis of how the government went about planning and executing a propaganda campaign during each of the three time periods. For the purposes of this thesis, the “beginning” of the war is considered to be 19 March 2003, when American military began bombing Iraq after President Bush’s 48-hour ultimatum was ignored by Saddam Hussein, and the “end” to be 1 May 2003, the day the President declared the “end of major combat.” We are still in the post-war period, however, for our purposes here, the author discusses this period up through October 2003. The author recognizes the war as a controversial topic, but has attempted to remain

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unbiased in her presentation of the facts of the Iraq War. In the conclusion of the study, the success of each of the government’s campaigns will be evaluated relative to their effectiveness in swaying public opinion one way or another.
The Need for Public Relations in Wartime

Figure 1. Boots, helmets, and weapons standing in memory of fallen soldiers of 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, 2 May 2003 (www.army.mil)
When a nation enters a war, the risks fall on its people, besides the combatants in the front lines. Wars are rarely fought by the few individuals who construct them; it is the men and women whom they govern who must fight, wave goodbye to loved ones, or possibly even live in fear of attack by the enemy. Whether it is the national leaders or a group of revolutionaries, a select number of people are involved in the decision to engage in combat. The burden of war falls on the citizens to maintain the effort. In order for the government to be confident in the nation’s ability to emerge from the conflict victorious, it must have the support of its citizens.

As Americans witnessed during Vietnam, dissension among civilian opinion regarding involvement in war creates a volatile political and social environment on the home front. Conflict between society and government powers breeds chaos requiring immediate attention, thereby usurping the energy and focus of those who should be concentrating on the affairs of war. Distress within a nation at war can only cause disorder on the battlefield. The decision-makers realize that to put forth a successful military effort, they must obtain the backing of a large portion of those whom they will ask to participate in the war.

The public must be convinced to support the war, guaranteeing a united front at home as well as on the battlefields. It is then evident that public relations is a necessary concern during wartime and is required to help maintain the government’s central interest of the moment: victory. The question becomes how the leaders of a nation go about gaining support for a situation that involves the risk of death…a situation that inevitably upsets people’s lives. They must persuade the public that the conflict is worth the

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sacrifices and changes that many will be called upon to make. The leaders must change the citizens’ mentality from peacetime complacency to wartime hopes of victory. To do this, the government turns to public relations specialists to create propaganda campaigns that will raise the nation’s awareness of the struggle and eventually garner encouragement and assistance from the citizens.

Relying predominantly on narratives, messages, and images targeted at the audiences’ emotions, propaganda suggests particular viewpoints to its audience. “Propaganda…frequently seeks to bypass the rational brain altogether and manipulate us on a more primitive level, appealing to emotional symbolism.”8 People respond instinctively to the messages, and then logically explain their reactions. By tapping into the emotional core of the audience, public relations specialists are looking for immediate, gut responses of anger, fear, pride, love, and so on. They hope people will respond intuitively and later attempt to process the information they have been provided.

Once they have gained the support of their own citizens, in order to ensure the safety of the armed forces they send to the conflict and head off any public conflict after the war, the government must attempt to gain the support of the citizens of the enemy regime. Public relations must be used to establish a communicative relationship between the citizens of enemy countries and the governments of those opposing them. Once a connection has been recognized, the channels are saturated with propaganda from the opposing government, meant to bombard the citizens with messages portraying their current situation that possesses a tragic flaw. The message must be one of caring and hope for new beginnings and a better life at the end of the war, with the overthrow of

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their leaders. All of the benefits of tolerance must be communicated so that the citizens will view the attacking soldiers as their heroes as opposed to their oppressors, liberators as contrasted with occupiers. Propaganda aimed at the enemy utilizes psychological warfare to eat away at the base of the enemy’s willingness to fight.

To mollify the enemy’s spirit while trying to motivate the opposing audience to action, public relations professionals had to learn to employ different methods of “perception management” to influence public opinion about the conflict. They looked carefully at how perceptions are formed and the basis upon which they rest. They discovered many tactics that enabled them to impress their audiences with the information they wished them to have and influence their thinking in the direction they wished it to travel. One such tactic that has long been a part of war, but only recently has become a staple in any conflict is psychological warfare, also known as PSYOPS. These are strategies that “attempt to achieve political and military objectives by influencing the attitudes, emotions, and ultimately behavior of friends, enemies, and neutral parties with selected information.” Using this approach, war was no longer just a deadly physical battle or intense technological weapons conflict coupled with strategic troop movement. It was not simply an act that involved those experiencing it firsthand. Suddenly, an entire nation of people became key players in the conflict.

With the success of these public relations campaigns, the government can enter into war with a sufficient number of supporters and focus its attention on the conflict at hand. However, the longer the war continues, as in the last stages of WWII and more recently during the Vietnam conflict, the problem transforms into how to retain the nation’s belief in the necessity of the conflict as it continues. The longer the war persists,
It is during the war that public relations specialists must provide more emotional fodder while appealing also to the audience’s intellect. They are faced with the challenge of continually creating perceptions of the situation andconvincing the public of them. Here they rely on victorious images to reassure the people and raise their morale, convincing them that this war is necessary, but soon to be over and they will exit the victors. “Public opinion is ultimately gained by great victories.”10 In this way, leaders obtain and then maintain public support on the home front, enabling them to engage in the conflict wholly without attempting to juggle too many issues and tasks.

Public Relations Wartime Strategies

Various types of messages are disseminated to various target audiences to evoke various reactions in a time of war. Propaganda calls upon universal themes in the attempt to affect people’s emotions and mold their thoughts regarding a situation. Four pervasive themes that run throughout wartime public relations messages are the depiction of the enemy as an inherent evil force, “flag nation” allies, a terminological fog, and battle as a technological competition. These four concepts aim to exacerbate the audience’s anger and fear, give a sense of camaraderie and righteousness to the conflict, evoke strong emotional responses based on idealized concepts, and sterilize the war for the viewer, respectively. When used in conjunction with one another, they create a persuasive,

convincing public relations campaign that, unless one is looking for it, will be barely discernible as propaganda.

One of the most enduring conflicts throughout literature and history is the struggle between good and evil. It is a concept that every person is able to recognize and relate to. Propaganda capitalizes on this theme in its wartime messages. This dichotomous relationship introduces morality into the conflict, asking audience members to be on the “right” side of the engagement.

Public relations professionals craft a moral battle between good and evil, demonizing the opponent. This establishes one member of the conflict as the virtuous, pure, superior entity while the other (the enemy) is an immoral, corrupted, evil being. For example, stereotypical images of the Japanese as demonic beings, bespeckled and rodent-like, were presented in posters and films during WWII (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. WWII propaganda poster, 1943 (U.S. G.P.O. War Production Board)

Looking at the universal conflict of the two, if there is a demon present, there must alternately be a victim, such as the women and children of the Allied forces, whom needs rescuing or saving from such corruption. This exaggerated imagery electrifies citizens’ belief that they are fighting for good and exacting justice on the evil forces of the world.

The moral dilemma is constructed early, while the government and military are still in the planning stages of the conflict, so as to plant the seeds of indignity over injustices and the battle of right versus wrong in the minds of the public.

Once the public believes they are fighting for justice, their opinions must be reinforced by other audiences so they do not begin to question their position in the conflict. By pinpointing “flag nation” allies, other nations that support the propagandists’ view of the war, the audience has their beliefs strengthened. Suddenly one nation is joined by several others in the creation of a united front against evil, as in the Allies of WWII. The production of such a union generates a mob mentality amongst the citizens, making them more receptive to public relations messages. Gaining support from nations in the region of the conflict is also a necessary public relations move because if a government is able to gain the backing of the rogue nation’s neighbors and even allies, it works to further support the ideology of good versus evil.

Image consciousness, along with word choice become integral parts of propagandist activities during a war. As the American military learned during Vietnam, public opinion on the home front can affect the actual execution of a war. Those producing the nation’s propaganda work to galvanize the public behind the troops by distributing messages and images reinforcing the romantic ideals of war and the idealistic depiction of a fight between good and evil. The heroic American soldier emerging from the battlefield carrying a victim to safety or the torturous remnants of enemy atrocities are familiar images during war.

Words and phrases that emphasize the ugliness and violence of war are used only when referring to the enemy. Whereas words with positive connotations suggesting
moral action are chosen when referring to the public’s military forces, engendering support from audience members as opposed to a public horrified and traumatized by the images and phrases bombarding them. For example, “collateral damage” refers to “civilian deaths,” but by using a more neutral phrase the harsh reality of war becomes clouded before the audience. This word and image manipulation is known as creating a “terminological fog.”

Along with word choice, the new technological weapons advances allow for the easy creation of bloodless, sterile images that are characterized solely by target viewfinders, lasers, and infrared lights. These images evoke thoughts of a video game in which the player must hit all the targets to win. The pictures provided to the public work to desensitize and remove the individual from the war experience. While few conflicts ever escalate to direct hand-to-hand combat in this age, those watching at home do not often see the devastation of the “smart bombs” or other heavy artillery. Much different from the emotional response received by images of severed bodies, crying citizens, and injured soldiers, viewers find themselves glued to the television to stay updated on the continual bombings and firing exchanges because they are not in danger of viewing the human wreckage left behind. This “smart weapons” warfare makes the war coverage much more palatable and enables the military to keep up morale on the home front.

The Evolution of Wartime Public Relations Campaigns

“As communication technology improved and war correspondents made their entry on the battlefield, the views and moods of the on-lookers to the conflict became important...Governments consequently introduced censorship on the home front and used propaganda to weaken the enemy’s home front as well as to strengthen their own.”

With the advent of television news coverage, learning how to execute public relations during a war became a necessity for both governments involved in a conflict. Their military forces would need the support of the country for which they were sacrificing their lives and often “the immediacy of television left viewers with negative ‘impressions’ and ‘emotions.’” The war in Vietnam brought these facts to life when the United States government realized that such negative visuals of military action have the power to engender an anti-war consciousness which is capable of creating angst in society and producing political pressure to exit the war, therefore conceding to the enemy (Fig. 3).

**Figure 3.** Medics loading casualties, Vietnam, 1970 (www.ammeddmuseumfoundation.org)

The social and political upheaval caused by the Vietnam War awakened those in the government to the necessity and importance of practicing public relations and propaganda not simply in the homeland of the enemy, but at home as well. The first successful public relations campaign on the home front came in the early 1980’s during

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15 Schmid and de Graaf, p. 19.
16 Louw, p. 216.
the British expedition to recapture the Falklands. The British media was forced to travel with their military units across the ocean and were therefore completely dependent upon the forces for all of their information, their living conditions, and ultimately their safety. The military supplied the reporters with the “news” they believed was relevant to the current situation and this information was then disseminated in Britain. Effectively, the armed forces were given the ability to control what messages were distributed to the public. This all-encompassing power over the flow of information attracted the attention of many government officials and became a model for many wartime public relations campaigns in the future.

In the early 90’s, the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa was occurring and the information that reached the rest of the world through the mass media illustrated again how crucial information and image control within the media could be. People around the world became witnesses to innumerable atrocities as violent images spread from the conflict center. These visuals alerted foreign countries to the cruelty occurring oceans away and aroused not only sympathy, but immediate support and active opposition to apartheid. Here was a demonstration of how negative information and images could affect entire populations, again highlighting the necessity for information control and crisis management when such news is reported.

The United States tried its hand at wartime public relations campaigns on the home front during its conflict with Grenada. Utilizing what they learned through Vietnam and the conflicts they watched evolve earlier that decade, the military refused to allow the media on the island. This exclusion created a news blackout that could only be

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remedied with information provided to the media by military officials. In this manner they were able to choose what information they wished the American public to hear, allowing them to control the perceptions people had of the events taking place. They felt they were so successful in this endeavor, the government continued to use public relations and propaganda to create particular perceptions of all future conflicts, though with the introduction of better, faster, newer communication technologies they were no longer able to simply dismiss the media from conflict. Yet they learned how to subtly attempt to censor media stories with the particular information they conveyed and the words and images they carefully selected.

During the Gulf War journalists were segregated in groups away from the battlefront. They were again at the mercy of military officials to learn the direction the war was taking, the advances or setbacks the military had experienced, and general information of particular attacks. The interviews reporters conducted had to be in the presence of a military escort, while their reports and video were also examined before being sent home, to ensure that no covert military information was disclosed. The Gulf War was viewed as a success by the military and the American government. Not only was the region secured from enemy forces, but the military controlled the information which reached the American public, using the media as a propaganda tool to garner support for the forces overseas.

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18 Louw, p. 217.
Current Wartime PR

When a nation enters into conflict, public relations strategies and propaganda are utilized to influence public opinion about the nation’s actions. In the recent war against Iraq, the Bush administration, in conjunction with the Pentagon and various military officials, used numerous mediums to convey their wartime messages to the public in order to gain and maintain support for the American engagement in Iraq. The following is an exploration of the various propaganda and public relations tactics employed in this war.

Before, during, and following the war (the fall of Baghdad will be considered the end of the technical war, though it is acknowledged that the “war” continues to this day) the diverse elements of propaganda will be examined. Each period offers different characteristics, not only of the conflict, but of the public relations campaign itself, and will be discussed and considered individually because often different audiences and events were targeted during varying parts of the war. An analysis will then be given of the importance of the role public relations played in the war of today and what possible changes the public may expect in the future.

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20 Louw, p. 219.
Pre-War Propaganda:
The First Battle to be Won

Figure 4. WTC flag flies on USS T. Roosevelt, 17 Nov 2001 (AP)
The United States military and media have a tumultuous relationship dating back to the Civil War. During that time, Abraham Lincoln recognized the opportunity to use journalists to maintain public support for the war, but often found it difficult to utilize particular media avenues while dealing with those, such as the Copperhead Press, who criticized and opposed the war effort. The benefit gained by positive reports from the media soon became secondary to the negative effects of criticism thrown at the military by opponents in the press. With the enhancement of communication technology, such as motorized printing presses and the laying of the transatlantic cable, the government and military became nervous about the speed with which such disparagement could be spread across the nation. Therefore, the introduction of new technologies saw the greater restriction of information that was deemed acceptable for public knowledge and consumption.21

This period of restrictive communication during military conflict culminated in the Espionage and Sedition Acts during WWI. These government acts, developed due to the paranoia and fear surrounding opposition to the government within the country, created a censored, sterile news environment. The Espionage Act forbade publication of any material the government felt would aid the enemy, while the Sedition Act prohibited criticism of the United States government and military. This prompted an immediate outcry from the press and public who felt they were being barred from knowing the truth about the engagement.22

In response to the dissension felt throughout the country after the media restrictions of WWI, and due to the patriotism with which America entered WWII, the

21 Pritchard, p. 12
restrictions on “newsworthy” information were less vague and focused simply on information that, if widely known, could create a dangerous situation for the military units involved and potentially hurt the European campaign. Press camps were set up in the various theaters of operation, allowing the media to get hold of important news concerning the progress of military operations almost immediately.

During the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the military and media were still attempting to establish guidelines for their relationship. While it had greatly improved during WWII, it seems the media began to feel its own power during these two foreign campaigns. Reports of defeats and grim perspectives on the outlook of the American battle front led to the erosion of the American public’s faith in their armed forces. They began to oppose the war efforts altogether, generating a public outcry for removal of US troops and resistance to invasive involvement in foreign affairs. Realizing the negative reporting of the media had spurred the public backlash against the war efforts, the American military and government responded by refusing to grant media access to the conflict in Grenada.23

This decision created such an uproar not only in the press but from the American citizens, who felt this media restriction was aimed at keeping the nation in the dark about foreign conflict, that a committee was developed to investigate how to cure the problem of military/media relations. They were faced with deciding how to best disseminate information to the public in a way that would allow for different media perspectives while not placing US forces in danger. The committee published the Sidle report, a briefing which hoped to “ensure news media coverage of military operations to the

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23 Louw, pp. 216-7.
maximum degree possible consistent with mission security and the safety of US forces."^{24}

The Pentagon began serious public affairs efforts with the media beginning in the Gulf War, but as it became clear the United States would be entering into war with Iraq in early 2003, they were determined that their public affairs would be better the second time around. The Bush administration recognized that they would have to convince the American people that this conflict was necessary and they knew to do this well they would need the aid of the press.

The subject had come to the forefront of the government during the Clinton administration. As weapons inspectors were continually thwarted in their inspection of chemical laboratories in Iraq, the White House felt tension building as the media and public wondered whether Saddam Hussein was flaunting his power to the world by defying their request or if the country truly was a chemical weapons haven, giving Hussein the ability to generate a war of epic proportions at any time he wished. Both Republicans and Democrats alike were angered, the former wanting to remove Hussein from power before he became a serious international threat, the latter hoping to disentangle the nation from this foreign affair and steer clear of a military conflict with the despot.

At the time, the Clinton administration tended toward neutrality. In order to get rid of Saddam, the government would have to enter into military conflict, yet without definite evidence that Hussein was plotting an attack against the United States it would be difficult to persuade the public to support such a military endeavor. They also recognized that Hussein’s refusal to comply with the weapons’ inspectors was inhibiting their

^{24} Pritchard, p. 12
knowledge of his military operations, giving Iraq control of the situation. The type of bland rhetoric emitted by the government in the mid-1990’s did not demonstrate the decisive force the American public looks for in such potentially dangerous situations.25

President Bush and the Pentagon recognized the problem the Clinton administration had presented with their irresolute policy toward Iraq. The public had become fragmented in their opinion of how the conflict should be handled and had lacked a leader willing to take a stand on the issue. 11 September 2001 changed all of that. The American public was outraged by the violence exhibited against them by a foe of whom they had little-to-no knowledge. This horrific attack against the United States on its own soil galvanized the public to support a counterattack against any nation or group posing a threat to the security of American life.

Soon after the 9-11 attacks, the Bush administration, along with the Pentagon, developed public relations strategies to raise public support for any military engagement deemed necessary to protect the nation from further threats. It was noted that while President Clinton had been rather unconvincing and soft in his rhetoric dealing with Iraq and its Ba’ath party leaders, President Bush took a definite stand against any aggression toward the United States. His no-tolerance policy post-September 11th gave the public confidence that the nation would be free from fear of another attack on its own soil.

The government, in order to convince the nation that military action should be taken, had to raise the importance of perceived benefits resulting from such operations. In the case of the Iraq War, the American public was told time and again that with military force Saddam Hussein, a cruel dictator who posed a threat to the rest of the world by harboring weapons of mass destruction, could be removed from power to

eliminate the threat of attack. A public relations offensive was launched by the administration to explain to the public the necessity of this war. By defining the national interests that were at stake for American citizens, the President stressed security and safety. At the same time, he showed the military forces as the carriers of justice and democracy to an impoverished, terrorized country.

Recognizing the need for public support, the government began utilizing propaganda, “any form of communication in support of national objectives designed to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes, or behavior of any group in order to benefit the sponsor, either directly or indirectly,” to convince its citizens.26 Witnessing the use of media as a propaganda tool in the 9-11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the massive, lasting effect those images have had since that day, the United States government knew they would need the media on their side.

With this realization, they hired State Department Under Secretary Charlotte Beers, a former advertising executive, to begin a public relations campaign against international violence and terrorism utilizing media outlets. She was to define an American brand for the nation abroad.27 She saw that the American voice needed to be heard in Iraq and arranged for many high-profile government officials to be interviewed about American intentions toward the country on Iraqi television stations, especially their CNN-type station Al-Jazeera (Fig. 5). She also began a website geared toward the Muslim population, wrote leaflets disseminating information about Muslim life in the United States, and sat on a committee overseeing foreign language broadcasts on Voice

of America radio stations. She wished to create a different standard image of America reaching out to younger audiences before they were affected by their own country’s anti-American propaganda. The coverage in the United States of her work abroad began media dialogue surrounding America’s image and its role in international affairs, the first step in the government’s public relations campaign.

Figure 5. Condoleezza Rice interview on Al-Jazeera Nov. 2001 (AFP)

For propaganda to be successful the most influential group within a population must be determined and then a message targeting that specific group must be shaped. In the case of the United States before the war, the Pentagon along with the Bush administration targeted the media, followed by the American public, with war propaganda to convince them that military action was necessary. “The gap between who we are and how we wish to be seen, and how we are in fact seen, is frighteningly wide.” Beers recognized that PR was also needed abroad to change long-standing views, calm hostility, and gain support for incoming troops.

**American Pre-war Propaganda Hits**

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30 Joachim, p. 38.
The state of the military’s relationship with the media, coupled with the knowledge that the public had largely been against any military action in Iraq under the previous administration, posed a problem to the Pentagon and Bush administration when facing the conflict. Once it became clear that Saddam Hussein was not going to cooperate through diplomacy, the United States government decided military force would be necessary. The officials in the White House and the Pentagon recognized the enormity of their task of building public support for the overseas military campaign. They constructed a thorough, masterful public relations campaign plan that would begin before the engagement, carry on through the war and into post-war activities that were bound to be necessary.

As early as August 2002, a briefing was held at the Pentagon to discuss the threats posed not only by nations President Bush had labeled the “Axis of Evil” (Iran, Iraq, and North Korea), but also other nations United States’ intelligence suspected may be harboring terrorists or join forces with such nations in the future. Many political and communication specialists were brought in to begin a broader dialogue on how to approach the public on these issues. The administration, along with the military, wished to gain and sustain public support for a military campaign against Iraq and the already in progress “war on terror.” The meeting, “aimed at soliciting expert input on how to shape public opinion regarding Iraq and other so-called rogue states,” illustrates the beginnings of the far-reaching propaganda campaign that was about to begin in the United States.³¹

Several such briefings were to be held later in the week. This demonstrated that the White House and the military knew they must gain public support for the war effort.

before engaging in any military operations. However, the meetings were also the product of Defense Secretary Rumsfeld’s irritation at the media’s coverage of the debate on possible war with Iraq, highlighting the need for the military and the media to start this engagement on the same page.\footnote{Hitt and Jaffe, p. A6.} It would be impossible for the administration to influence public opinion without the media, and yet the media seemed to be posing the largest threat to the military at the moment.

The White House set out to make the war with Iraq the most important topic on the minds of the American public before the conflict. In order to make this issue one of immediacy, they first relied on targeting the emotions of their audience. With 11 September 2001 still in people’s minds, the government’s public relations campaign strove to not only make the public recall the feelings they experienced during that horrific event, but to strengthen them in the hopes of hitting a nerve and eliciting an immediate emotional response to the military operation.

The media became flooded with pro-war propaganda as White House and Pentagon officials began giving interviews and press conferences publicizing the fact that there was United States intelligence suggesting Saddam Hussein had “weapons of mass destruction” within his possession. The words themselves evoke fear, describing arms that could possible annihilate vast populations. Yet the term itself is very vague. That was exactly what was needed in order to raise fright to the level necessary for the public to respond solely on instinct. “Psychologists know that nonspecific threats can be far more anxiety-provoking than specific ones…The propagandists knew they had to raise
anxiety to the point where it would easily trigger the instinct we retain from childhood nightmares, to lash out with fury at the monster in the dark.”

This was the exact next response the administration and the Pentagon were hoping their media frenzy would compel the audience to feel: fury. After the horror of 9-11, there was a violent backlash against Al Qaeda, the militant, radical Muslim group behind the terrorism. By recalling these events and rousing fear in the American public, the Pentagon and the White House could then step forward and call on citizens to be angry that they were allowing themselves to essentially be beaten by these enemy forces. President Bush, the leader of the free world who had brought America through the tragedy, now called upon the United States to recognize that action must be taken against rogue regimes that were unwilling to cooperate through diplomacy, especially in matters involving quantities of damaging armory.

Unlike President Clinton, President Bush showed a firm resolve when discussing impending military action in Iraq. He positioned the United States as a world power that would not succumb to the evil efforts of its enemies and would “not permit the world’s most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world’s most destructive weapons.”

The message became clear. After fearing what could happen to the nation by allowing Saddam to possibly continue harboring such weapons, the public should be angry that there were leaders in the world who wished the American people to remain silent, out of world affairs, because they feared the result. Such reminders of threats were meant to evoke fear followed shortly by anger at the fact that the United States believed it _had_ something to fear.

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This anger should also be targeted at the state of Iraq and its people under Saddam Hussein’s rule. The people of Iraq were suffering at the hands of their merciless leader who proved in the Gulf War that he was not opposed to even using them as human shields around his weapon storage. Saddam Hussein was a simple target for the stereotypical propaganda ideology of “good” versus “evil.” By discussing the state of Iraq with Saddam as its leader, and calling the Iraqi people victims of his regime, the military and the administration were able to not only generate anger against Hussein and his government officials, but place the United States in a position to be the liberator, U.S. soldiers the heroes of the captive Iraqi people. With the enemy demonized and the victims available for rescuing, the American public responds to the universal theme of good versus evil, imagining the United States as the knight in shining armor saving the Iraqi people from the wicked oppressor. “Essentially, mobilizing ‘victimhood’ discourses that are already ‘trendy’ in journalistic circles, means that psy-ops stories, promoted by military PR personnel, tend to receive no critical scrutiny from journalists. Propaganda is easily ‘placed’ in the media if it confirms existing journalistic bias and/or fits their news ‘frame.’”

This train of thought was bolstered by the continuous formation of the “US brand.” Until the terrorist attacks upon American soil, the public had been woefully unaware of how the United States is viewed internationally. It became apparent after these events that America needed to market itself to the world in a different light. Charlotte Beers, State Department Under Secretary, was hired to redefine the “US brand”

abroad and “win minds and hearts on the ‘Arab street’” (Fig. 6).\textsuperscript{37} Not only was this propaganda necessary overseas, but it was a vital portion of the public relations campaign in the United States. The American people needed to recognize themselves as strong, patriotic, caring individuals who would be willing to sacrifice in a war effort so as to secure their nation and save others from a cruel fate at the hands of a brutal dictator.

\textbf{Figure 6.} U.S. soldier meeting an Iraqi boy (www.army.mil)

Finally, the most important pre-war propaganda choice that was made by the military and the Bush administration was the decision to embed reporters within the military units in Iraq. Recognizing the shaky relations between the military and the media and knowing how they would not only need the media to drum up support for the war before it was actually executed, but also while it was occurring and in the aftermath, Pentagon officials, led by Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Torie Clarke, convinced the Bush administration to embed journalists. Military commanders supported the policy as long as the reporters completed a one-week crash course on military equipment and operations. In this decision to embed, they saw their opportunity to form a lasting relationship with the media. These journalists would be living within their ranks and would be given an inside view of the hardship the military men experience every day. Not only did this allow the media immediate access to breaking news, reporting news in

\textsuperscript{36} Louw, p. 218.
\textsuperscript{37} Joachim, p. 38.
“real time” as it occurred before their eyes, but uncensored by the military. The media belived they would finally have an unbiased opinion, while the military believed this would finally strengthen their relationship with the media and, because of the stressful circumstances, promote positive reports of military action back in the United States.  

American Pre-war Propaganda Abroad

While the White House and the Pentagon were attempting to raise morale and gain support on the home front for an impending military campaign, the government’s pre-war public relations plan was also alive and well overseas. Recognizing the negative views many foreign people held of American culture and politics and nodding to the propaganda being spread by other national leaders against U.S. policies, the State Department knew that just as Charlotte Beers had spearheaded a new public relations campaign post 9-11, she would be a key player in composing the massive propaganda campaign that would be necessary in Iraq. Anti-American propaganda was rampant throughout Iraq, and to not only ensure the safety of military forces there but also to aid in the post-war period of reconstructing an Iraqi government, the Pentagon saw the need to counteract these negative images with the “U.S. brand” and the image of liberators of the Muslim people. “We’re talking about perceptions that have taken decades to develop, that are based not only on rhetoric but on policy, and you’re not going to be able to change that by making statements. They don’t trust the United States, and if you don’t trust the messenger you’re not going to trust the message, certainly in the middle of a

38 Pritchard, p. 4.
crisis.”39 The government acknowledged this hurdle and began propaganda abroad before the war in an attempt to slowly erode many of the destructive images surrounding the nation.

Beers, Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, “stressed the need not only to target appropriately, but also to meet the targets on their terms and in their channels of distribution.”40 A public relations campaign had been launched during the war on terrorism, and when the Iraqi conflict became an issue, these efforts were focused more on regions of the Middle East that would suffer the most from the military operations. Various high-level government officials gave interviews dealing American policy on Al-Jazeera, a news station akin to CNN, which is broadcast throughout the Middle East. Beers oversaw the construction of a website targeting the Muslim population which detailed life for Muslims in America and explained that the United States was not waging war on the Muslim world, but rather terrorism and international miscreants.41

The United States joined forces with Iraqi refugees then harbored in other countries to wage a propaganda war in Iraq. Using Ahmad Chalabi and others who were respected by many high-profile citizens, America hoped to disseminate the message that the military would be rescuing the Iraqi people from the dangers posed by their leader and would return the country to their hands, allowing them to rejuvenate their businesses and personal lives without living in fear of governmental punishment.42 By utilizing high-profile Iraqi refugees, America helped legitimize its message to the Muslim people.

41 Foer, p. 25.
Some of their own respected citizens had joined forces with the United States which proved the credibility of America’s claims for “a prosperous and free Iraq.”

Along with raising its credibility by touting relationships with Iraqi refugees, the U.S. propaganda campaign employed psychological operations (psy-ops) to “convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals. The purpose of psychological operations is to induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behavior favorable to the originator’s objectives.” Ultimately, the United States needed to again set up the “good” versus “bad” ideology, which would prove a much harder task in Iraq because the message must work counter to the Iraqi government propaganda the citizens were exposed to every day.

The interviews, radio broadcasts, websites, and videos sent to media in the Middle East all portrayed America as heroes; the military would free the people from their evil dictator giving them the freedom and wealth they deserved. The propaganda campaign worked to raise the anger of Iraqi citizens, reminding them of the hardships they had faced under Saddam Hussein and the fear he had evoked within them. Disseminating messages through Iraqi refugees allowed current citizens to relate to them and view their messages as reliable. Coupled together, these tactics would lead the Iraqi people to imagine the United States military as their savior. The pre-war propaganda campaign waged by the U.S. government in Iraq was developed on the public relations principle

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43 Joachim, p. 38.
44 Mateer, p. 3.
that “it is necessary to determine the individuals or groups necessary for meeting the
campaign goals, as well as those who can sabotage the quest.”

The conflict with Iraq was the product of diplomatic breakdowns and aggressive
threats and international safety concerns, but was not the product of a definitive military
strike against the United States. Therefore, the government needed to launch a public
relations campaign to sway public opinion both on the home front and abroad that there
were urgent, crucial reasons for military action. In America, the Pentagon and Bush
administration developed a message targeting the emotions of citizens to enact an
immediate dynamic response to the crisis abroad. This emotional reaction was garnered
through propagandistic word choice, image distribution, and universal themes of good
versus evil flooding all media channels. Americans became addicted to patriotism and
heroism overnight.

Utilizing the press to disseminate these messages to the American public made
them appear unbiased and informative as opposed to propagandistic. Seeing the results
of their propaganda campaign on the home front, the government decided to extend its
use of the media to disseminate messages by embedding journalists within military units.
The public could continue their patriotic addiction even once the troops were abroad,
watching the heroics in real-time. This would also improve media/military relations
while alternately sustaining support for the troops from those at home.

Looking toward a conflict with Iraq, the government realized the need to create a
new image of America abroad to counter enemy propaganda that was distributed to
foreign populations. The government partnered with Iraqi refugees to build U.S.
credibility, suggest the nation’s willingness to rescue those in danger, and finally to strive

45 Okigbo, p. 34.
to aid humanity. Seeing the bond between exiled citizens who were in need of aid and the government of the United States would legitimize America’s brand abroad while rallying Iraqi citizens to rise up against their country’s illegitimate regime. They too could walk amongst the heroes of the American military and bring justice to their families by fighting the evil dictator. These public relations/propaganda messages inundated media around the world and with repetition many began to believe the honesty and integrity of them. The right message was sent to the right audience at the right time to elicit a particular response: support for the approaching military conflict with Iraq, both home and abroad.
America’s Wartime Propaganda:
Heroes versus Villains

After a 48 hour ultimatum, issued by the United States government to Saddam Hussein to leave Iraq, had passed unanswered, the American military began strategic bombings on 19 March 2003 marking the beginning of the second Iraq war in the last 15 years. The Pentagon and Bush administration were not unprepared for the conflict. In fact they had been preparing for this moment months in advance. A strategic public relations campaign had been developed and begun long before the first bombs were dropped.

The pre-war propaganda had laid the groundwork for American support of troop deployment and had even been distributed to the Muslim world in the hopes of garnering support for the mission and lessening the dangers and threats facing the military. While public opinion was in favor of invading Iraq and showed a high approval rating for President Bush’s handling of the situation, the propaganda efforts were just beginning.
Now that public support had been gained, it became the task of the day to maintain and continually bolster it.

The Pentagon, military forces, and the Bush administration all worked together daily to disseminate the same message to the public: this was the right decision and America is going to emerge victorious, having freed a captive people and ensured the safety of the rest of the world. Television coverage, embedded reporters, specific terminology, constant press conferences and contact with media outlets, military and government spokespeople, and reoccurring war stories and images were all tools the United States government utilized to maintain public support for the war, taking one more important step towards victory abroad.

Today’s television news coverage is formatted to coincide with the American lifestyle; it is fast-paced, visually stimulating, and technologically advanced. Media coverage of the Iraq War was not precluded from this phenomenon but rather defines the modern age of television reporting. Fox News planted a logo on their war coverage, a waving American flag, and completed the image with a slogan, “Operation Iraqi Freedom.” 46 Most news channels had a scrolling footer on the screen consistently updated with new information from the war effort abroad (Fig. 8). Viewers were able to tune in and get the condensed version of the war operations with this bullet-point news reporting. All of these features cater to the hi-speed life of today’s society.

This type of news coverage coincided with the government’s propaganda campaign because the media, in an effort to get news in front of their audience as fast as possible in the most concise form as possible, was less likely to change wording used in press conferences or question specific military tactics being taken overseas. In fact, it was more likely for the reporters, in the interest of time, to pass along the messages communicated to them from the Pentagon, the White House, or CentCom (Central Command). This allowed the government’s public relations machine to spread its message in less time with significantly less effort. “Perhaps not a direct result of embedded correspondence as much as a shift in cultural expectations, another aspect of our national ‘fast-forward’ thinking is the concept of ‘victory on fast forward.’ The euphoria over the liberation of Baghdad lasted eight hours-literally a standard nine-to-five workday. Instant technology and instant reporting bring an expectation of instant gratification.”47

**Embedded Reporters**

A public relations move which enhanced this type of quick-stop war coverage and news gathering was the government’s decision to embed over 600 correspondents with
military units throughout Iraq. Suddenly the public did not have to wait hours for a military briefing to know the latest news from the frontlines. American viewers could turn on their televisions and receive live reports from journalists riding through the Iraqi desert in the back of a military vehicle with dust flying at the camera and the sounds of the motor in the background. This was “real-time” reporting. Touted as “the ultimate reality show,” television coverage of the Iraq war brought American civilians to the current battle lines for the first time in history.48

With correspondents reporting live en-route through the Iraqi desert, experiencing skirmishes and enemy fire first-hand, and watching the United States military execute their jobs under pressure in often hostile territory, the public was given a view of war they had never before been able to access (Fig. 9). These journalists who experienced the war side by side with the United States Army and Marines were able to present an “up-close-and-personal view of America’s fighting men and women” and through these reports, “the credibility of the individual soldier, sailor, airman, Marine, and Coast Guardsman has dramatically improved.”49 This coverage added a personal perspective to the war abroad. No longer were Americans receiving statistical reports of military numbers or strategic battle plans, they were watching the war unfold before their eyes and experiencing it along with the soldiers who were there fighting it.

For the American government’s public relations campaign, the “embedding” of reporters helped solidify civilians’ support for the military. “It served the Bush administration by providing more sympathetic coverage, by being understanding of the

47 Pritchard, p. 12.
48 Ibid, p. 12.
soldiers and therefore of that slice of war that each reporter saw,” claimed a veteran news correspondent for CBS.  

Figure 9. Former NBC correspondent David Bloom, who died in Iraq of a pulmonary embolism, reporting from the front lines (www.tvrundown.com)

Besides working to maintain public support for the war effort, embedded reporters unwittingly improved the formerly rocky relationship between the military and the media. During previous conflicts, reporters who were removed from the frontlines were forced to rely upon military reports coming from the field and briefings they received from military officials. These reports and briefings were usually hours old and if unwilling to wait, correspondents took to interviewing eyewitnesses and sending home questionable reports which would then have to be refuted at the official press briefing. By embedding journalists, “Ms. Clarke and the Pentagon hope(d) to better portray their side of the story and get broader coverage of the military’s achievements.” According to a professor interviewed at the College of Communications and Media Sciences at the Zayed University:

…the embedding process actually made the coverage better, made the stories of war a lot more real, made the heroes a lot more heroic, made the villains a lot more villainous,

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and yes, made it a lot easier for the reporters to write positively about their team and their achievements. That was the kind of war it was.52

Overall, embedded reporters became public relations’ tools for the United States government. Their reporting was viewed as uncensored because it was live coverage from the units; it was the reality television experience the American public is currently addicted to. First-hand accounts of the soldiers’ hardships and war experiences put a personal perspective on the war and with satellite feed of enemy fire and surrender, the “war hero” versus “evil enemy” ideology was enhanced. All of these elements brought the war closer to the American viewer and made it a personal affair as opposed to a distant, unemotional battle. People were intellectually intrigued and emotionally captivated by the images beaming into their living rooms from the Iraqi desert. Pro-American propaganda was streaming into U.S. homes in the form of news coverage and the public was devouring it.

**Press Conferences and Briefings**

When Americans were not glued to their television sets tuned to live news coverage from Iraq, they were listening to press conferences and briefings by officials from the Pentagon, the White House, the military, or all three. Beginning before the war and extending into it, the United States government knew it must present a common message to the American audience in order to first convince them of the necessity of

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military action and then maintain that support throughout the actual conflict. If different messages were being disseminated to the public, the government would lose its credibility and in turn, the public relations campaign. As in WWII, presenting a unified message creates the image of a decisive, determined government which will accomplish its goals and move its nation to victory without floundering or faltering and does not give the audience the opportunity to question the capability of their leaders to handle the situation.

This image was also perpetuated by the spokespeople chosen for each arena of action. Whether it was hard-nosed, but accessible Victoria Clarke, the stern, but occasionally jovial Donald Rumsfeld, the candid, yet low-key Gen. Tommy Franks, or the determined, confident face of President Bush addressing the public: all of the spokespeople knew how to interact not only with the media but with the American people. They knew how to convey a poised and united front imbuing citizens with a belief that this war, though difficult, would see Iraq freed from Saddam Hussein’s heavy-hand and the United States safe from its fear of attack (Fig. 10).

![Figure 10. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld during a press conference (DOD)](image)

By disseminating the same message through many different channels and media, American citizens were bombarded daily with that message. This repetition is another public relations tactic ensuring that the audience is soaking up the propaganda message
and, if repeated enough, will stop questioning it and begin spreading it themselves. “As a result, cable television viewers could watch a steady stream of the administration’s message starting at 7 a.m. Eastern time in the United States, when Brig. Gen. Vincent K. Brooks briefed (at CentCom). The briefing was deliberately timed, White House officials said, to run live on the morning news shows and to put the administration’s stamp on overnight battlefield developments.”  

This method of spreading the same message through different media to repeatedly reach the same audience also fit with the current fast-paced reporting styles of the news stations. Aching to be the first to interrupt with the coveted “breaking news” story, media outlets urged their correspondents to get information to them quickly. This urgency meant reporters were scrutinizing the information they received less and less, and seemingly becoming mouth-pieces for the messages spread by the United States government. “…Journalists are being converted to being public relations carriers of governments…because journalists do not seem to question the truth being presented by the politicians and military commanders.”  

These messages, with propagandistic undertones, are passed from the government to the press to the American citizens all in an effort to maintain public support for the military efforts abroad.

**War Terminology as Propaganda**

Upon hearing or reading reports on the war live from Iraq or from press briefings in the United States, individuals would not be likely to categorize them as propagandist.

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54 Kawach and Nowais, p. 2.
Rather, they were viewed as unbiased, informational news concerning America’s progress in the Iraqi conflict. Within the context of the nation, most citizens supported the war effort and therefore did not question whether the information they were receiving from their news sources was biased or not. Later it became apparent that the messages communicated to the public, not only from United States government officials, but also media correspondents covering the war, were covertly carrying propaganda targeted at producing a positive image of the war effort in the minds of Americans. The terminology used to refer to many aspects of the Iraq War was carefully chosen to shape public opinion in favor of the effort and place the conflict in a positive light.

Saddam Hussein and his top officials were referred to as the “regime” by the Bush administration and top-level government officials from the beginning of the conflict. While the word is a synonym for the term “government,” the connotations associated with each are different. The latter is generally a neutral term referring to the leadership of a large population, whereas the former carries a negative connotation associated with power usurped and held by a few. “Government is the catch-all term…regime makes you sound more despotic.” In utilizing the word, government officials were able to extend the image of Saddam Hussein as the villain in the Iraq War to the American audience. He did not lead with the interest of his people in mind, but rather worked to advance his own agenda. The term planted images of injustice and repression in the minds of the American public, pushing them to further support the war campaign.

After establishing the evil of the enemy, it followed that the goodness of the American forces would have to be ascertained to continue the universal theme of good versus evil. The title chosen for the mission of the military, “Operation Iraqi Freedom,”
set the stage for this theme to unfold. By attaching the word “freedom” to a military operation, the soldiers become overnight heroes. They are not viewed as trained killers, but rather as protectors of a sacred human right and liberators to the oppressed. Iraqi people are to be given freedom if the troops’ mission is successful. The title applied to the conflict adds a noble, heroic quality to the military aggression manifested overseas.  

While the propagandist title used in America gave the United States military the role of hero in the stereotypical battle, it was important to place the nation among allies to maintain public backing and stress that America was not striking out on its own. By labeling the American forces and its allies who entered the Iraqi conflict the “coalition,” the government planted the illusion of numerous foreign allies coming together to defeat the enemy.

Surely ‘the coalition’ sounded more prepossessing than ‘the United States, the United Kingdom, 2,000 Australians and various eastern European handfuls.’ The incessant use of the term ‘coalition,’ with ‘coalition forces’ commanding ‘coalition-controlled territory,’ solidified and magnified the sense that the United States and its (few) allies were a multinational force of sweeping proportions. The term itself seemed instantly to refute the oft-heard charge that George W. Bush took the United States to war almost alone.

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57 Todd Gitlin, “Embed or in bed? The war, the media and the truth,” in The American Prospect, Vol. 14 (June 2003), p. 44.
This propaganda rhetoric was used to desensitize the American public to certain war atrocities, while simultaneously targeting their emotions. For example, “collateral damage” was the name given to encompass any harm inflicted on the citizens of the enemy nation, whether they were injured or killed purposefully or unintentionally during a military operation. By taking the human element out of the event, the audience is kept at a distance from the horror of the truth, whereas speaking of “civilian deaths” brings about guilt in those who remain safe at home while innocent citizens are injured or killed by military aggression.\textsuperscript{58}

While some phrases were meant to desensitize society to the misery of war, others were employed to exact emotional responses from the audience thereby affecting their opinion. The Bush administration and the Pentagon began using the term “death squads” as a synonym for the Arabic military officials called “fedayeen” and nicknaming Saddam Hussein’s military fighters as “thugs.” Both names rouse fear in audience members, which the propagandists hoped would spur them to encourage the overthrow of the Iraqi dictator. “…Using the term ‘death squads’ to describe Iraq’s paramilitary fedayeen, was no accident. Because fedayeen means something like ‘dying for a noble cause,’ it has a positive connotation in the Arab world. It’s not a positive thing they were doing,” stated the White House communications director, Dan Bartlett.\textsuperscript{59}

Similarly, Hussein’s henchmen became known as “thugs” across America because of the word’s connotation. A thug carries the stereotype of being a violent degenerate. Associating Hussein’s fighters with this stereotypical image enables the United States government to present an image of a respectable military defeating these

\textsuperscript{58} Saltzman, p. 19.  
\textsuperscript{59} Bumiller, p. B14.
cruel criminals abroad and disposing of one more source of fear in Iraq. Likewise, “weapons of mass destruction” continued to be so called to raise the fears of those in the United States of another foreign attack of greater proportions. The belief was that the audience would be more likely to maintain their support of the troops’ engagement as long as it was securing the safety of American citizens on the home front.⁶⁰

This war terminology, specially crafted and chosen for wartime discourse, found its way into news coverage of the conflict. These words and phrases were part of the public relations campaign waged and disseminated by the United States government; “the message discipline of a White House that plotted appearances by top officials on a daily ‘communications grid,’ ensuring that in the first half of the day there was a news briefing by an administration official every two hours, and that everyone was saying more or less the same thing.”⁶¹ This flood of press conferences and briefings throughout the day used this repetitive propaganda.

Aided by the repetition and the American public’s wish for the most up-to-date news at the soonest moment in the most succinct manner, these words and phrases seeped into the language used by journalists and television news anchors. Media channels were not only repeating the administration’s war rhetoric, but were in turn, adding another layer of legitimacy and credibility to what they were saying because the press is viewed as an unbiased news source. The audience saw no need to examine this choice of wording if they were not only hearing it from high-level government officials, but also from the reporters and stations providing them with news of the war.

⁶⁰ Saltzman, p. 19.
Lasting Stories and Images

With the advancement of communication technology and journalists embedded in military units reporting from the frontlines, it is not far-fetched to claim that the Iraq War produced some of the most enduring war stories and images of the last half century. Visions of sand-encrusted correspondents reporting from the rear of military Humvees as they moved steadily across the Iraqi desert, the nightscope video of Pfc. Jessica Lynch being carried on a stretcher to a waiting Black Hawk helicopter, United States army tanks rolling down the central streets of Baghdad with American flags waving, and finally the toppling of the larger-than-life statue of Saddam Hussein to the cheers of surrounding Iraqis greeted the American audience. These stories and images have remained engrained in the minds of Americans because they reinforce ideals of American society that the public already holds dear: bravery, heroism, victory, and freedom. By playing and re-playing these events, the public drowned itself in patriotism, ignoring the other images of a war-torn Iraq, injured soldiers and civilians, and the general ugliness of war.

Embedded reporters were constantly on television screens throughout the country “caked with yellow sand; chemical suits stiff with dirt and mud and sweat; goggles keeping the blowing sand out of their eyes.”62 This reality-military reporting placed audience members in the midst of the action. War was no longer a far-away event characterized by flashes of light indicating bomb explosions miles away from camera crews; suddenly Americans were watching their armed forces in real-time, viewing “images of Marine supply convoys fighting to get clear of the ‘irregulars’ or guerrillas

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making them run a gantlet of fire past Nasiriya.”63 These men and women were no longer names and identification numbers on paper, they were real people experiencing the threat of enemy fire, in the middle of America’s living rooms. Reports from the frontlines became indelible in the minds of a captivated public as citizens watched bravery and courage in action.

The most tangible example of bravery and heroism to emerge from Iraq that was presented on the home front was the “rescue” of Private Jessica Lynch. Pfc. Lynch, a 19-year-old supply clerk from West Virginia, was captured when her unit took a wrong turn and drove into an Iraqi ambush. When she was finally recovered by United States military special operations, the story was plastered over every news medium for the next several days. On 2 April, Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks held a special press briefing in which he reported that special ops had retrieved Lynch,

‘bringing her away from that location of danger (and had withstood) firefights outside of the building, getting in and getting out…At this point she is safe. She’s been retrieved and some brave souls put their lives on the line to make this happen, loyal to a creed that they know that they will never leave a fallen comrade and never embarrass their country.’64

The reports which followed illustrated how a country facing a military conflict craves good news from the battle. American citizens knew about Pvt. Lynch’s return to friendly territory within hours and in that time period, the story transformed from a

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64 Eviatar, p. 18.
“retrieval” mission carried out by special operations forces to a daring night expedition of heroic proportions (Fig. 11).

Two days later an article appeared in The Washington Post telling of Pfc. Lynch’s courageous spirit as she fought against the Iraqi soldiers who ambushed her supply unit. Not only that but several news sources reported that she had sustained numerous injuries and was poorly treated while held in the Iraqi hospital and the mission to extract her from hostile territory became a “raid” amidst gunfire and resistance from the enemy forces. It later became known that these details were exaggerated.

While looking for someone to blame for their inaccuracies, the media had to deal with the realization that many of them had jumped to conclusions from slight nuances they thought they had detected from intelligence reports and press briefings they heard on the subject. “Assembling stories out of incomplete information is what daily journalism does…what happened often happens on big breaking stories, especially from a war zone. The bits and pieces of information that emerge from the fog are fit into a familiar frame.”

It is doubtful that the military would spend its time or effort to critique the media analysis of Pfc. Lynch’s “retrieval,” especially when their soldiers were being

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65 Mark Bowden, “Ideas & Trends: War and Remembrance; Sometimes Heroism is a Moving Target,” in The New York Times, (3 June 2003), late ed., p. 4A.
praised for their role in the mission as opposed to criticized. Whose fault the story’s inaccuracies were did not change the affect it had on the public.

“The fact is, Jessica Lynch as war hero sells…in today’s quick, high-tech wars, there’s little time for the seeds of dissent to sprout, and the media seem eager to please a patriotic public.” Americans want the heroic stereotype; they want the romantic war. After viewing the soldiers’ hardships live, the image of a young private being rescued from enemy captivity by her fellow servicemen was the story the public wanted to see and believe. It fit into their perception of the American war effort and therefore the media continued to tout Pfc. Lynch and the special operations unit who extracted her as war heroes: strong, brave, and loyal. The footage of Lynch being carried to a waiting helicopter became the enduring image of the American war hero.

Finally, public opinion was maintained, if not bolstered, by the images of American tanks riding down the main streets of Baghdad and the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein. To the American people, these were symbols of victory and freedom, two of society’s cherished ideals. The reports showing the tanks driving through the streets with American flags flying were steeped in victory celebration. While the war had many objectives, this was the first well-defined mission the American forces had executed. They had made the trek to Baghdad and had taken control of the city. The United States was victorious! Polls have shown that the American public is willing to sustain more war casualties if they believe the country will be victorious in the conflict. These triumphant images strengthened support for the war abroad, though they might

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66 Eviatar, p. 18.
have also suggested an early end to the conflict. However, they accomplished what was necessary in the eyes of the propagandists.

Along with victory, watching a crowd of Iraqi citizens cheering while American forces toppled a long-standing statue of Hussein moved an American audience to believe the military forces had been successful in ultimately bringing freedom to Iraq (Fig. 12). This statue collapsing before their eyes symbolized the crushing of Saddam Hussein’s iron grip on Iraqi politics and the Iraqi people. The image could be likened to the breaking down of the Berlin Wall. People celebrating as the hard rock, signifying years of oppression, crumbles and brings with it the reality of freedom.

**Figure 12.** A group of Iraqis and Americans pull down a statue of Saddam Hussein in downtown Baghdad (AP)

Images such as these were vital to a public relations campaign because they played into the American people’s perceptions of how a war should be executed; they provided the framework for the romantic war stories people want. Hard-working journalists risking their lives to report the war’s progress to those on the home front, while providing a personal view of the average American soldier, grainy videotape of a daring POW rescue creating American war heroes whose bravery exemplifies what it means to be American, and images of victorious American troops liberating an oppressed
people and watching as they taste freedom for the first time: these are the stories and images public relations teams want and the public craves.

**American Propaganda in Iraq**

While the public relations campaign was in full swing on the home front, the United States government was also disseminating its propaganda messages across Iraq, targeting the nation’s military and civilians. Utilizing psychological operations (psy-ops), the American government dropped over two million leaflets targeted at Iraqi soldiers and civilians on the first day of the war during the military’s “shock and awe” attack. By the end of the war, the total would reach 31 million. “U.S. PSYOP specialists use expert knowledge to design messages bearing the intended audience’s language and customs. An effective PSYOP campaign is a ‘force multiplier,’ doubling or tripling a military’s strength by persuading enemies to surrender, or even to befriend adversaries.”

![Figure 13. A propaganda leaflet dropped during the Iraq War (CentCom)](image)

One such leaflet was a surrender pass, suggesting submission as an alternative to destruction by military forces, and illustrating how to make this decision known (i.e., displaying white flags). Few of these were dropped, however, because the intimidation
of annihilation is a much harsher theme. Another propaganda flyer threatened the soldiers with death if they did not abandon their weapons, depicting a demolished tank with Iraqi soldiers in the act of surrendering (Fig. 13). Other leaflets targeting Iraqi civilians by appealing to their impoverished living conditions, promised rewards for aiding any member of the “coalition” military finding him/herself in enemy territory, with food or shelter or medical care. Recognizing that the entire population may not be literate, the United States public relations campaign also dropped propagandist comic books and radios locked on an American propaganda message.69

When creating propaganda messages for another country, it is important to understand the culture and its stereotypes and ideologies. One stereotype that the United States psy-ops specialists discovered was that Iraqi men were extremely sensitive to criticisms degrading their manhood. Using this information, loudspeakers were attached to American military vehicles and as they drove down the streets of Baghdad frequently broadcast the message, in Arabic, that Iraqi men were impotent. This repeatedly led guerilla soldiers to angrily emerge from their positions, coming face-to-face with the American military units. “What you say is many times more important than what you do in this part of the world,” stated a United States psychological warfare specialist.70

The United States military also supplied its soldiers with decks of cards, each card depicting a different leader in Hussein’s government with Saddam as the Ace of Spades, in order to help them encourage Iraqi citizens to divulge information about individuals’

68 Friedman, pp. 80-1.
69 Ibid, pp. 80-4.
This public relations move enabled the Iraqi people to make the revealing of information more of a game than a betrayal of their government, giving the allusion of keeping their integrity intact which was necessary due to the number of years they had lived in fear of being punished for betraying their government.

Figure 14. Some cards from the 55 card deck used by the U.S. military (www.calpundit.blogspot.com)

It was necessary for the United States to target propaganda to Iraqi audiences as well as its own citizens in the hopes of winning small victories for the war effort that would not involve risking lives. Utilizing psychological operations, specific messages and tactics streamlined to the Iraqi culture worked alongside military action to destroy Saddam Hussein’s government. “In many cases psychological warfare was enough to spook the Iraqis into surrendering--or blundering into a trap.” Whether in the form of propaganda leaflets or devices aimed at easing Iraqi fears, United States used public relations in Iraq to aid the soldiers in their eventual destruction of the Iraqi government.

The United States government acknowledged the need for a public relations/propaganda campaign that would span the duration of the war. To maintain public support, the American citizens were consistently presented with confident spokespeople broadcasting the same message about the war effort abroad. The fast-paced, live reporting enabled the administration’s chosen terminology to seep into the

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media’s coverage of the war, while it also created lasting images and stories that played to the audience’s stereotypes of the romantic war experience. The propaganda distributed overseas utilized psychological warfare in the hopes of limiting the number of American casualties. By defeating Iraqi forces mentally and emotionally before the actual fighting began, the wartime public relations campaign waged by the American government would be determined a success.
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Post-War Challenges:
Redefining a Mission

Figure 15. U.S. soldier handing out school supplies to Iraqi children (www.army.mil)
When viewing post-war situations through the eyes of the victor, the stories of bravery on the battlefield and evidence of the triumph are the only propaganda needed by the government. From the perspective of the defeated country, more public relations is needed to keep the faith and respect people hold for their government intact. An explanation for what went wrong, coupled with stories of courage and perseverance in the face of defeat are necessary to guarantee that when asked to face a conflict again, the public will not lack morale. However, the war in Iraq put the United States in a unique position that demanded more post-war propaganda from a victorious nation than usual circumstances would require.

America did not enter the war because it had been attacked. It also was not called upon to help protect or defend another country in need. Nor did the nation go to war in order to advance its own power and prestige. Rather, the United States attacked Iraq as a preventive measure. Not only was Saddam Hussein a ruthless dictator who could decide to wreak havoc on the Middle East at any time, but he was also reportedly stock-piling weapons of mass destruction, meaning he could wreak havoc across the globe as well as his own backyard.

The United States pre-war propaganda campaign was able to successfully win the support of the public majority and with the nation’s citizens behind its troops, America attacked Iraq. Public relations efforts were restructured and kept up throughout the duration of the intense fighting to boost the morale of the country and maintain public backing for the conflict abroad. The end of major combat saw a time for post-war

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propaganda to be distributed throughout various media channels to citizens of the United States and Iraq in order to convince them of the necessary and ongoing role American troops are playing within Iraq and to redefine the nation’s mission there. This campaign would be unlike others because while President Bush declared a definitive end to “major combat,” on 1 May 2003, that did not translate to the conclusion of the conflict. The United States was victorious in ridding Iraq of Saddam Hussein’s tyrannical government, yet the population of Iraq is divided into many different political and religious factions, some of which have pitted themselves against American forces and continue to rebel against the formation of a new Iraqi government. How do you announce the termination of a war that could continue indefinitely and still convince American citizens that troops must remain there?

Redefining America’s Role In Iraq

Americans’ craving for “victory on fast forward” creates the need for a post-war propaganda campaign that will dissuade them of this mentality and show them the importance of continuing the work that has already begun overseas. On 1 May 2003, President Bush stated that, “‘major combat operations have ended in Iraq.’” This declaration was translated as the end of the war by the media, though the President’s speech had gone on to say that US troops had “‘difficult work’” ahead in securing Iraq’s freedom and bringing more members of Saddam’s government to justice for the

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74 Pritchard, p. 12.
mistreatment of their people. The government was attempting to redefine the mission in Iraq in order to maintain public support. By renaming the mission as reconstruction, the White House and Pentagon could move the public to view the events to come as part of the *rebuilding* process as opposed to a continuation of *war*.

How is such an announcement made so that the information will not only convince, but invigorate, the American people? The answer is by creating an atmosphere characterized by not only celebration, but resolution to finish a job that has been well done thus far. On 1 May 2003, the President, a former National Guard pilot, landed a jet on the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier and emerged from the co-pilot seat in his flight suit (Fig. 16). He later addressed the crew and the nation from underneath a banner reading “Mission Accomplished” on the deck of the carrier. It was from this impressive position that the President announced that the large portion of combat in Iraq had come to an end, and while the United States had emerged victorious, the country must now finish what it began and help the people of Iraq rebuild their nation.

![Figure 16. President Bush after successful trap on USS Abraham Lincoln, 1 May 2003 (CVN 72)](image)

Media coverage of the event discussed the President’s confidence and determination from the jet landing to the end of the speech. “The images of a victorious and popular leader celebrating the liberation of a country from tyranny amid a backdrop of American power was universally hailed as dramatic and brilliantly

76 Ibid.
choreographed...hailed as sheer genius from a PR perspective.”77 President Bush’s actions, along with his statements, indicated to the nation that he was a leader that could pull the nation through this experience triumphantly. This was the beginning of the government’s post-war propaganda campaign which hoped to instill the public with pride in their country and resolve to successfully complete the final mission of helping Iraq heal and rebuild.

In a way, the United States government was catering to the American population’s desire for quick victories, announcing the end of the major fighting only six weeks after the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Yet, at the same time, they were attempting to coerce the public into understanding that there was still work to be done by changing the terminology used to describe the duties of American forces. Before they were at war and now US troops are aiding in the reconstruction of Iraq. This wordplay is not completely misleading because reconstruction does describe the job the troops are currently completing; however, it is a word that excludes bloodshed from its connotation. With the introduction of this term into the Iraq rhetoric, the American people were no longer expecting stories of American casualties and insurgent fighting, rather they were expecting stories of rebuilding and community reorganization.

The government defined reconstruction for the American people to explain why American troops needed to remain in Iraq after the major combat was complete. Forces were needed to keep the peace as Iraqis rebuilt their criminal justice system that was no longer controlled by Saddam’s government. Vast amounts of labor were necessary to renovate schools and hospitals which had been used for weapons storage or rebel shelters.

77 Hugh Clifton, “Media Watch—President’s aircraft-carrier appearance hailed as
during the war. Having American military there was also sending a message to any of
Iraq’s neighbors that may have considered attacking the country while it was still in
disarray. The troops’ presence was a clear warning that any other country that posed a
threat to the rebuilding nation would have to confront the United States. Finally, the
military was there to help police the construction of an interim government, along with
several other United States officials such as Ambassador L. Paul Bremer, making sure
that no revolutionaries or other corrupt forces attempted to sabotage the reconstruction
process. All of these tasks were described to the public with the emphasis on the
rejuvenation of an impoverished nation, as opposed to the military threats and revolts that
could accompany such aid.

While these were all legitimate reasons for troops to remain in Iraq, the public
was getting anxious to have their military personnel home. The government had to create
a campaign based on overseas progress which could not be seen first-hand, only heard
about through the news. That, along with several other factors, presented a challenge to
the administration’s public relations team.

Bad News Reports Spur Loss of Momentum

United States citizens ended their obsession for “live from Iraq” reporting with
the conclusion of heavy fighting and resistance. They no longer were glued to their

screens for images of the reconstruction; somehow it did not offer the same intrigue or
glory that viewing a firefight in the middle of a sandstorm held. People were at the
mercy of the media reports which, lacking the personal perspective and romantic war
image of the young, courageous soldier battling Iraqi insurgents, turned to their other
“morbid obsession with death and destruction.”78 The news became saturated in the
growing number of casualty statistics and reports of skirmishes, resistance movements,
suicide bombings, and terrorist attacks throughout Iraq.

Not only has the news from Iraq been depressing and negative, but critics have
begun to spread their skepticism about the hunt for weapons of mass destruction. So far,
none have been found. This presents a problem to the United States government which
sold the war to the American people on the premise of making the world more secure by
destroying Saddam Hussein’s arms’ store. The American people have begun to question
the reliability of US intelligence and the credibility of the government.

This was a battle to disarm Saddam. If he had no WMD (weapons of mass destruction) at
the outset of the war, then the war’s stated purpose was false. That is no minor
embarrassment. The failure to find WMD has a bearing not just on the short-term pros
and cons of the war, but also on the willingness of Americans and their friends to fight
the next time.79

The trustworthiness of America’s military forces is being brought into question
along with the country’s intelligence sources and the government. In early October 2003,

79 Crook, p. 1.
at least 11 local newspapers across the nation published identical letters from soldiers in the 2nd Battalion of the 503rd Airborne Infantry Regiment. The letter explained the unit’s work in Kirkuk, Iraq and the warm reception they were receiving from its citizens. An excerpt read, “The quality of life and security for the citizens has been largely restored, and we are a large part of why that has happened. The majority of the city has welcomed our presence with open arms.”80 Once word of the form letter spread throughout the media, an investigation uncovered that it was an individual public relations campaign taken on by Lt. Col. Dominic Caraccilo in response to the overwhelming amounts of negative news reports that were finding their way back to the United States.81 He had written the letter and then asked some soldiers if they would be willing to sign their names so the letters could be sent to their hometown newspapers. However, not all soldiers signed their names or had even heard about the letter until their friends or relatives back home asked them about it.

This home-spun propaganda campaign illustrates the frustration many military personnel felt concerning the news carried home to the United States. The letter was one soldier’s attempt to spread news of the positive work his unit is doing, to allow the people back home to hear that strides are being made and good things are being accomplished. This personal perspective from the military should have been one of the government’s main propaganda tactics in the post-war environment. “…those who are actually serving in Iraq are powerful and unpredictable stakeholders. Soldiers can speak the pro-Iraqi

81 Ledyard King, “Officer was the one behind 500 letters,” in USA Today, (15 Oct 2003), p. 14A.
campaign messages more eloquently than President Bush or anyone at the Pentagon.” Yet, this public relations opportunity is no longer a viable one for the government because of the form letter’s mass mailing. The credibility of the military has been compromised with these pieces of positive news from Iraq arriving under false identities. The public will be less likely to trust stories which claim to be from a soldier’s first-hand experience and so the government must look to other methods of maintaining public support.

**Showing the Other Side of the Issue**

To combat the negative reports, the government’s propaganda campaign has focused on the positive accomplishments of the military and what is being achieved in Iraq now that the nation’s people have been liberated. In order to highlight these endeavors, the White House and Pentagon first drew attention to the media’s negative pessimism, declaring that they were only reporting the negative news from abroad and not covering all the advancements that were being made. By pointing the finger at the national media, it forced correspondents and news sources to examine their own reporting.

We journalists sometimes say, self-mockingly, that only bad news is good news as far as we’re concerned….News is what is exceptional and what requires immediate attention…(however) normalcy in Iraq is abnormal. For a change, school buses really are

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bigger news than ambulances. Journalists, however, have not been able to reorient their vision. Most of the Western media are covering Baghdad as if it were Detroit, where crime is news and calm is not.\textsuperscript{84}

While this dialogue of good versus bad news from Iraq was occurring in the national news media, President Bush approached the local media with the positive stories emerging from the nation. Not only did these items get printed and discussed in local news sources across the country, but the national media began reporting on why the President was bypassing their news sources and what he was telling the local media: “‘There’s a sense that people in America aren’t getting the truth. I’m mindful of the filter through which some news travels, and sometimes you have to go over the heads of the filter and speak directly to the people.’”\textsuperscript{85} So, not only were positive stories about Iraq suddenly emerging, but the national media was also questioning its negative reports concerning the state of affairs there and drawing more attention to the positive ones.

The public relations campaign used the President to draw attention to the onslaught of negative news from Iraq in the hopes of encouraging the public to call the media on poor reporting and begin thirsting for other news from overseas. The administration is reporting that:

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\textsuperscript{83} Wolffe et al., p. 33.
\end{flushright}
Almost all of Iraq’s universities and hospitals have been reopened, while Iraqi schools are being cleaned up and rebuilt to make way for the students returning to school.\textsuperscript{86}

New Iraqi bank notes, minus Saddam Hussein’s portrait, arrived in the third week of October 2003, freshly printed in five different countries since Iraq’s two plants could not handle the job. Mountains of the old bills were burned while the new currency was flown to Baghdad in 25 jets.\textsuperscript{87}

Old Iraqi propaganda is being removed from textbooks in classrooms throughout Iraq. Children will no longer be doing math problems featuring S and H as variables, solving word problems asking how many missiles it would take to destroy a number of American tanks, or learning in history class that Kuwait is actually an Iraqi territory. They will no longer have to fear harm coming to their families for asking “a politically incorrect” question of the teacher.\textsuperscript{88}

All of these stories tell of the positive strides being made in Iraq, yet it is not the portrayal the public receives from the media daily in the newspapers or on news stations, even after the President’s attempt to balance the scales. One reason that these

\textsuperscript{87} Wolfe et al., p. 33.
propaganda efforts are failing is because the military has yet to find weapons of mass destruction. This was touted as the most pressing reason to go to war with Iraq.

**Losing Credibility?**

Americans were frightened after 9-11 and feared being attacked again by enemies of the United States. Soon after the bombing of the Twin Towers, Saddam Hussein was considered a threatening enemy and when he began refusing to allow arms inspectors to visit particular plants, the public became nervous. Backed by intelligence reports claiming he was harboring such weapons, the majority of American people were behind the decision to go to war with Iraq. Now they are faced with the aftermath of war without the vindication they were expecting for their suffering.

The administration’s pre-war propaganda, while effective at the time it was needed, is now posing a problem. With no weapons of mass destruction turning up so far in post-war Iraq and the number of total casualties continually growing, Americans are becoming more and more apprehensive about the military involvement in Iraq’s reconstruction. Accusations of leading officials exaggerating United States and British intelligence reports are bringing the credibility of the government into question. This is an issue that needs to be addressed and explained to the American people before they begin to lose faith in the government’s intelligence and foreign policy decisions. The war in Iraq accomplished a great many things, first and foremost the liberation of the Iraqi people from the oppressive force of a heartless dictator. And only now is the public becoming aware of the massive cruelty this man was capable of, as mass graves are
uncovered and millions of dollars found hidden away in palaces of the government “elite.” Yet, the American people want to know they backed the war for a legitimate reason. With the destruction of Saddam Hussein’s government, the United States’ safety from attack becomes more certain, but the public wants to know if there was something to fear before all of the bloodshed began.

**Propaganda Directed Toward Iraqi Citizens**

Not only did the American government need its nation’s support for the redefined mission in Iraq, it also required backing by the Iraqi citizens. The reconstruction of Iraq is a long, difficult process that would be almost impossible with the lack of American forces to help the Iraqis rebuild an infrastructure that had crumbled with the fall of Saddam Hussein and the Ba’ath party. In order for the country to become stable, it needs to re-establish a societal structure that is no longer based upon fear, but the voices and values of the Iraqi people. American troops are currently attempting to create a non-violent, structured environment for the citizens to begin the enormous task of constructing a nation from scratch. However, the United States wanted to make clear that U.S. forces and government officials were not remaining in the country in order to place the United States’ influence on the new Iraqi government rather, they were there to keep the newly freed people safe from those who may attempt to sabotage the reconstruction efforts. To spread this message and combat those entering the country through neighboring nation’s broadcast systems, a propaganda campaign was set up in Iraq to
send the message that America’s concern was for their continued freedom and safety as they began to heal as a nation.

The first step in the campaign was the establishment of a U.S.-funded television station, the Iraqi Media Network, able to broadcast programming into Iraqi homes just days after the end of the most severe fighting. This station would allow the United States to illustrate their commitment to helping Iraq rebuild, and keep Al Alam, the neighboring Iranian government’s station, from gaining loyal viewers among the Iraqi citizens.89

But, because of poor planning, equipment not appropriately suited for the task, and the tumultuous environment that the television crew had to battle daily, the station did not begin broadcasting until 13 May, and then it was only for four hours at night (Al Alam had 24 hour programming). “Every day, you see more people poisoned by Iranian television because that’s all they see,” noted a Baghdad resident.90 Along with these technological glitches, the station was viewed as culturally insensitive by only using Hussein to refer to Saddam. Imam Hussein was a seventh century hero of Shiism and many Iraqis viewed this as a cultural affront, disgracing the name of a blessed religious figure.

In another attempt to illustrate America’s willingness to help but reserve in involving itself in rebuilding the Iraqi government from a United States perspective, the government brought in members of the Iraqi National Congress, many Iraqi exiles themselves (seen as ill-informed), to develop plans for the interim government of the post-war period. Hoping to elicit Iraqi support and leadership from within the country’s own pool of citizens, General Jay Garner was to lead the American forces in their role as

90 Ibid, p. 10.
peacekeepers and aides to the interim government construction. Gen. Garner hoped to use the Iraqi army to help troops rebuild Iraq but began placing Ba’ath party members in key decision-making positions for reconstructive projects. The United States believed this would lead to another Ba’ath uprising in which they would attempt to sabotage the interim government, and therefore moved Ambassador L. Paul Bremer to Iraq to head the government restructuring.\textsuperscript{91} Bremer initiated a Governing Council of 25 community leaders to discuss their visions and help reform the Iraqi government.\textsuperscript{92} By placing Americans in charge of these tasks, the United States is hoping to offer advice and even win over the “hearts and minds” of the Iraqi public.

However, these various councils and committees that are slowly coming together to rework the politics of Iraq not only need time, they need a safe, stable environment for their exchange of ideas. This is what the United States military is attempting to provide for them, yet it is still confused in its task.

U.S. propaganda touts the military overseas as a friendly force aiding the Iraqis in building a stable environment for themselves, yet they are often sent to dispel insurgent skirmishes and have had to monitor civilian protests and demonstrations which have gotten out of hand, placing the military in a precarious situation. So many factions exist amongst the people that the military is having trouble distinguishing who they are helping and who they are taming. This was supposed to be a short transition period for Iraq and many did not predict the vast numbers who would resist the remaining American military. Iraq lacks the manpower to rebuild by itself, yet many want the military gone.

The U.S. government recognizes that the state in which the military leaves Iraq is crucial to whether or not the operations abroad are considered an overall success or failure.

**Evaluating the Progress**

The post-war public relations effort the United States government is executing, both at home and abroad, needs to become more flexible to the changes taking place in Iraq. The nation began the post-war period with much celebration and enthusiasm to finish a job well done, and the administration’s redefinition of the military’s tasks helped explain what a necessity it was that troops remain. However, it was not adequately communicated to the public the wide spectrum of work left to be done and how much of what the nation did would depend on Iraqi affairs. The campaign faced many more unforeseen challenges in this portion of the war timeline because it was the most unpredictable. No one really knew how the Iraqi people would respond to the toppling of their dictator and it was hard to speculate where the United States would fit into the picture. It was evident that Iraq would need help rebuilding, but the world did not truly know the internal state of the nation until the war reports began detailing the horrors the Iraqi people had suffered.

The public relations campaign was able to meet the challenge of bad press by simply bypassing the national media and taking news straight to regional sources. Not only did this force the media to examine its own reporting, but the government was able to spread its reports of the positive strides that are being made in Iraq, attempting to balance the negative images people were viewing. The most damaging challenge to the
campaign is the loss of credibility government officials and the military are experiencing. The lack of weapons of mass destruction has made the American people suspicious of government reports and guarantees, while a member of the military’s attempt at his own PR stunt forced the public to question whether or not the soldiers are telling the truth about progress in Iraq or simply saying what they think the public wishes to hear.

Finally, the United States’ propaganda campaign abroad has not succeeded in creating a stable, peaceful environment in which to rebuild a nation. Rather, it has been thwarted by continuing rebel attacks and violent uprisings requiring military discipline. The nation’s public relations efforts have not thoroughly convinced the Iraqi people that America is not remaining in Iraq to further its own interests. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz stated that the Pentagon’s strategy was to “‘get us into the background before we become the issue.’”93 Because of the continuing violence, the United States military has been unable to take a backseat and many are becoming suspicious of the nation’s intentions.

Americans, along with the Iraqis, must hear a new message from the government that explains the issues at stake and admits that the policies will continue to change because of the volatile environment. The campaign on the home front must recall the patriotism and pride American citizens have for the military forces that are helping to reconstruct a free nation and have saved people from a ruthless dictator. The evidence of corruption within the Iraqi government continues to increase daily. The campaign in Iraq needs to emphasize the need for community stability and show that the American government does not wish to remain in the nation any longer than is necessary. Now that

93 Ibid, p. 64.
its mission has been redefined, the government must redefine and redirect its messages both at home and abroad.
Conclusion:
Destination Unknown

Figure 17. U.S. tank guarding one of the Iraqi government palaces in Baghdad (www.army.mil)

Public relations and propaganda exist in every aspect of life, whether it is in a campaign encouraging consumers to purchase a particular product, publicizing a great achievement by an individual, or convincing a nation’s public to stand behind the government’s decision to launch military operations. Creating a message with emotional undertones is a frequent technique used to appeal to an audience because it engenders the quickest response and enables each individual to relate to the situation on a personal level. A propaganda campaign, besides working to disseminate a specific message, targets a certain audience whom they wish the message to affect. An effective public
relations plan will distribute a message with veiled appeals to a target audience in an
effort to prompt the sought after response.

Over time, with such experiences as Vietnam in its recent past, the United States
government has learned that the nation cannot enter into a conflict without the support of
its citizens because domestic upheaval leads to dissension within the effort itself and
requires the attention and resources of the government which should be otherwise
occupied during the war. Therefore, when the Bush administration and the Pentagon
decided America would attack Iraq, there was a recognized need for a propaganda
campaign to garner public support for the approaching offensive. In the lead-up to the
Iraq War, officials used emotion-laden language and utilized the universal hero versus
villain theme, stressing such ideals as freedom, security, and justice, to rally the
American public in a united front against the enemy.

The campaign generated successful results with a majority of Americans backing
the invasion of Iraq. Once the offensive actually began in late March 2003, the
government faced its next home front challenge: holding public support through the
gruesomeness of battle and realization of casualties. Launching another propaganda
campaign directed at maintaining morale, government officials looked to embedded
reporters to not only spread the news of military operations, but to present a personal
picture of the men and women fighting for those at home. The public was glued to their
television sets, obsessed with “breaking news,” losing themselves in the Iraqi desert with
a military unit as it drove through a sandstorm and came under enemy fire. The war was
no longer a faraway idea, but a reality show watched from the safety of a living room,
experienced, however, with tension and anxiety as the individual was made to relate to those truly facing the danger.

On top of these personal connections, the audience was constantly hearing the same message from confident, yet staid government officials. Images of American heroes were broadcast across the nation, romanticizing the war effort and inoculating the audience from the harsh reality of daily casualties and civilian suffering. The public remained supportive as the military drew closer to Iraq’s power center and finally rejoiced at the fall of Baghdad and the declaration of the end of “major combat” on 1 May 2003. Again, the government’s public relations’ team was victorious in keeping home front dissent to a hushed minimum, however, no one expected what came next.

No one could have predicted how Iraq would respond to sudden freedom from a dictator but continued occupation by the triumphant nation. It was necessary for a propaganda campaign to create an image of the soldiers as liberators and explain the need for forces to remain within the country to help them rebuild while also emphasizing that they were not there to overtake or covertly affect the reconstruction process. This campaign is still occurring and while it has attempted to roll with the punches, it is difficult to continue a public relations plan under a constantly changing atmosphere. The propaganda revolving around the United States’ involvement in Iraq is continually sliding on and off the media radar, but one message made it quickly and smoothly home: the capture of Saddam Hussein.

Since the end to major fighting in Iraq, the video of Saddam Hussein was the only public relations’ image that has made a lasting impact on its audience. The film clips that

were chosen for distribution spread a clear message of American dominance and justice. It showed the ruthless dictator as a disheveled, scruffy, beaten man having his hair and beard examined for lice and undergoing a medical examination (Fig. 18).\textsuperscript{95}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{saddam_hussein_medical_exam}
\caption{A still from the videotape of Saddam Hussein submitting to a medical examination (www.cnn.com)}
\end{figure}

This tyrant was now a prisoner, submissively succumbing to inspections by American doctors: a captured man. Not only did this image stick with the American public, but the first words spoken by Ambassador L. Paul Bremer announcing the capture of Saddam summed up the emotion surrounding the event: “Ladies and gentlemen, we got him.”\textsuperscript{96} Those three words told the nation and the world with certainty that America was not only the victor, but in control of what seemed to be an out-of-control situation. In the days after the capture of Saddam Hussein the government relied on public patriotism to re-engage support for the operations in Iraq, but with only more casualties and behind-the-scenes progress, the “victory on fast forward” public is growing weary of the effort.\textsuperscript{97}

In the recent past, the government’s public relations have been hit with ostensibly daunting blows. Books published by two ex-administration officials, Paul O’Neill (former Treasury Secretary) and Richard Clarke (former counterterrorism advisor), along

\textsuperscript{97} Pritchard, p. 12.
with the most current addition of Bob Woodward’s *Plan of Attack*, claim top officials within the Bush administration and the Pentagon were focusing on a war with Iraq as soon as 9-11 occurred. Both Clarke and Woodward’s books have made their appearance at the most crucial public relations’ time: a presidential reelection year. Allegations of an obsession with ridding Iraq of Saddam and a predisposition to choose war over floundering diplomacy efforts are plaguing the White House and Pentagon. Officials from both have come forth to refute the authors’ presentation of the government atmosphere at the time of and just following the terrorist attacks. Most recently, a debate has emerged regarding some 350 photographs of coffins containing the remains of those killed in Iraq and a block on their publication. As the nation approaches the anniversary of the end to major combat in Iraq, public support is once again being tried as individuals question who in the government is telling the truth and who is spinning their own propagandist agendas.

Iraq is a nation still experiencing violent hostilities and an unknown future. While the United States looks to step completely out of the governmental picture on 30 June 2004, it remains to be seen whether or not a government run by a small group of beleaguered Iraqis will be able to maintain order in a war-torn, politically-split environment. Creating a particular message for a specific audience can be difficult enough, let alone when the message must consistently morph with the transforming atmosphere. Iraq is a newborn nation and it will take a long time to determine what it wants to be and where it wants to go. Whatever and wherever that ends up taking the

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country, the United States will need a plan to gain its citizens’ support for the efforts it will have to make in response to these international changes, or it will be facing another domestic crisis, this one on the home front and in the political ring of fire.
Appendix I:  
Timeline of Iraq War

2003

17 March - President Bush issues Saddam Hussein and his sons a 48-hour ultimatum to leave Iraq. Televised worldwide.

19 March - President Bush announces beginning of military operations in Iraq. Selected targets of military importance struck by forces.

20 March - United States military forces enter southern Iraq and come under enemy fire.

23 March - U.S. supply convoy ambushed near Nasiriyah. 12 Americans missing and believed to be held by enemy forces.

27 March - 173rd Airborne Brigade parachutes into northern Iraq to begin offensive in Kurdish-controlled area.

1 April - Army Pfc. Jessica Lynch, 19, retrieved by U.S. special forces from Saddam Hospital. Lynch had been held since March 23rd when her convoy was ambushed by civilian-clothed Iraqi soldiers.

4 April - Saddam International Airport is captured by U.S. Army and renamed Baghdad International Airport.

7 April - U.S. forces capture Presidential Palace in downtown Baghdad.

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9 April - Statue of Saddam Hussein torn down in Baghdad by Iraqis and Americans. Images televised worldwide.

12 April - Card deck of 55 “most wanted” Iraqi officials publicized.

13 April - Gen. Tommy Franks announces no Iraqi town under Saddam Hussein’s government control.

1 May - President Bush declares the “end to major combat” from deck of Navy aircraft carrier, USS Abraham Lincoln.

6 May - Counterterrorism expert Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III appointed to serve as civil administrator in Iraq.

13 July - Iraqi governing council established in Baghdad.

22 July - Uday and Qusay, Saddam Hussein’s sons, killed by military forces in Mosul.

27 November - President Bush pays surprise visit to troops, joining them for Thanksgiving Day dinner in Baghdad.

13 December - U.S. forces capture Saddam Hussein in spider-hole outside Adwar.

2004

8 March - Iraqi Governing Council signs an interim constitution in Baghdad including 13-article bill of rights.

30 June (expected) - Coalition Provisional Authority to return sovereignty to Iraqi people.
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