

# Counterinsurgency in Iraq

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Examining the different frames of the media, and the role of  
Information Operations during the surge

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## **Abstract**

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Information Operations during the surge.

Under the Direction of Napoleon Byars

In a counterinsurgency environment, Information Operations play a crucial role. The insurgents and terrorists in Iraq rely on shaping narrative through media events and propaganda, and these narratives allow them to convince publics to support their cause, as well as change the political support landscape as events unfold. If the U.S. allows these narratives to stand uncontested, then the insurgency controls information dominance. This thesis examined the frames present in articles, and the public support from the U.S. perspective, from the summer of 2007 through the summer of 2008. Additionally, recommendations for an Information Operations campaign moving forward in Iraq are made, using role theory and framing theory as a basis.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the problems that U.S. military Information Operations faced between the summer of 2007 and 2008 in waging a counterinsurgency campaign in Iraq, and to examine the different frames that the media apply to information and events in Iraq. PR role theory will be applied in order to examine Information Operations from a theoretical perspective. Finally, this thesis will provide recommendations for Information Operations moving forward.

The war in Iraq began with Special Forces groups on the ground, followed by a period of conventional warfare. U.S. Forces managed to win the conventional portion of the war within 21 days. However, the response to the insurgency which followed was not fast enough at the strategic level; the U.S. military continued to fight the war conventionally. In recent years, the U.S. military has been more conscious of the civilian population in Iraq, (Ricks, 2006) but the new strategy put in place came too late to avoid angering the civilian population initially. The surge of 2007 came at the height of the insurgency, but with the change of strategy to counterinsurgency (COIN) as well as the additional help of the increased number of troops, the insurgency reached their low point by the summer of 2008

(Ricks T. , 2009). In order to successfully combat the insurgency in Iraq, the U.S. military must win favorable public opinion in the U.S. and in Iraq, while devaluing the goals of the insurgency to the Iraqi people and helping the Iraqi government gain legitimacy (Emery, 2004).

In an insurgency, the goal is not necessarily to win military victories, but rather to win the hearts and minds of the local population (Galula, 1964). For an insurgency to succeed, the insurgents must find a cause behind which the population of the country can rally; either through active support or through participation in the effort, or through passive agreement (Galula, 1964). In order to wage a successful counterinsurgency campaign, it is important for the counterinsurgent force, i.e., U.S. and coalition forces, to achieve greater favor than the insurgency, either by winning popular support for the U.S. in Iraq, or by driving down support for the insurgents. The support of the Iraqi people is of key importance in order to succeed in a COIN campaign. Without the support of the population of the host nation, the insurgents can continue to move freely among the population, the civilians will not help the U.S. military, and insurgent activities can continue unopposed by the Iraqi people (Hoffman, 2004).

The role of public affairs (PA), civil affairs (CA), and psychological operations (PSYOP) are of paramount importance in waging a counterinsurgency campaign. These three branches, which fall under the umbrella of Information Operations (IO), are responsible for



affecting public opinion, which is the decisive factor in an insurgency (FM 3-24, 2007). The U.S. military must pursue an aggressive Information Operations strategy in Iraq, effectively implementing these three branches of IO in order to achieve a counterinsurgency victory. As a cohesive unit, IO could shift public opinion in Iraq, and by demonstrating that Iraqis support U.S. operations, this might shift public opinion in the United States in favor of continued operations in Iraq. Moreover, it could also garner more favorable coverage for the U.S. military operations in Iraq, as well as assist the Iraqi government in gaining legitimacy.

This paper will cover the background of the war in Iraq, as well as some background information about insurgencies and counterinsurgency drawing primarily David Galula's 1964 work, as well as the U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual No. 3-24. The importance of Information Operations will be discussed as it relates to counterinsurgency in Iraq, and what their role should be moving forward. The research will apply framing theory to a number of articles chosen over the period of one year from June 2007 through June of 2008 in order to determine the effectiveness of communication and messages put forth by military public affairs, and PR role theory will be applied in order to examine the responsibilities of IO moving forward.

## **Background**

In order to understand this research, it is important to understand the topics discussed in this section. Information about the war in Iraq, as well as information regarding insurgencies and counterinsurgency practices will be needed in order to understand the importance of Information Operations in a counterinsurgency environment.

## **Information Operations**

There are three different branches of information operations (IO) within the military that will be discussed in this research: public affairs, psychological operations, and civil affairs. These three branches each have a distinct, but often complementary role (Patton, 2000).

The role of military public affairs (PA) is to disseminate information to the American public in order to keep the public informed with truthful information, as well as to boost confidence and morale within the U.S. military (Department of the Army, 2000). The publics that the public affairs branch communicates with are military members and their families, and the communities surrounding military installations and the media. By successfully communicating with these core publics, military public affairs also reaches the broader audience to include the American public. Ultimately, the function of public affairs is to provide timely, factual information to key publics, rather than engage in lobbying or other

explicit influential behavior. In ensuring this amount of truthfulness, military public affairs is able to maintain a high level of transparency and trustworthiness (Keeton & McCann, 2005).

Psychological operations (PSYOP) are similar to public affairs insofar as they are responsible for dealing with the population and the media, but the intended audience is the enemy and neutral Iraqi population (JP 3-53, 2003). However, they differ from public affairs due to the secretive and persuasive nature of their work, whereas public affairs relies on truth and transparency. While PSYOP uses truthful information as well, public affairs must remain transparent and honest in order to maintain their credibility. PSYOP has a more flexible position. According to the Allied Joint Doctrine for Psychological Operations, the role of PSYOP is 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” (JP 3-53, 2003, p. 10). Specific to Iraq, they would disseminate information to the local population, through their own channels as well as the media, in order to dissuade the Iraqis from supporting the insurgency, or to instill confidence in the coalition forces, or the government in Iraq.

The third branch of IO is civil affairs. According to the United States Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command, the role of civil affairs (CA) is to “create immediate, direct, tangible benefits in host countries around the world: Roads and schoolhouses are built, wells are dug, mined fields are made safe, governments are stabilized,

chaos and confusion are diffused, and order is re-established. By making a difference in the lives of the local populace, civil affairs personnel are also helping to strengthen the good will of the United States in the eyes of the world” (JP 3-53, 2003, p. 7). They do the majority of relationship building in Iraq, while PSYOP is responsible for the opinion of the Iraqi people. For example, PSYOP dropped leaflets to villagers regarding a weapons reward program. The residents could utilize this program to turn in weapon caches, helping coalition troops eliminate violence in the area (Department of Defense).

These three branches are very important in fighting a counterinsurgency operation in Iraq, but cannot stand alone. A successful counterinsurgency operation requires a strong IO campaign, but must be supported by military force. Over the course of the war in Iraq, the military combat actions have mostly been successful, but they must be coupled with a counterinsurgency strategy, which did not happen until 2007 (Ricks T. , 2009).

## **The War in Iraq**

The war in Iraq began with the assumption that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The U.S. President appealed to Congress and the U.N. in an attempt to gain support on an international scale, and the U.S. was given U.N. authorization to use military force if diplomacy failed. A speech to the United Nations by General Colin Powell posited that Iraq had been manufacturing WMD for some time, and needed to be stopped for a variety of reasons in order to preserve stability in the Middle East (Gordon & Trainor,

2006). This speech won approval for international action, and was covered heavily by the media as part of the buildup to the war.

On March 20, 2003, the U.S. and coalition forces invaded Iraq and quickly defeated the Iraqi army and Sadaam Hussein's Republican Guard after Baghdad fell (Gordon & Trainor, 2006). On May 1, 2003, President George W. Bush announced that the mission in Iraq was accomplished while giving a speech aboard the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln (Shales, 2003). This event marked the end of the first conventional phase of the war. Hussein, the now-deposed dictator of Iraq, went into hiding. He was captured by U.S. forces on December 13, 2003 (Ricks, 2006).

Between the fall of Baghdad and the capture of Sadaam Hussein, the Iraqi insurgency came into being. Retired Army Lieutenant General Jay Garner, chief of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance in Iraq, was the first senior civilian authority to arrive in Baghdad. Garner, who began reconstruction efforts in Baghdad in March 2003, (Packer, 2005) was charged with planning the reconstruction of Iraq as well as designing a favorable exit strategy for Coalition forces that had deployed to Iraq. Fired on May 11, he was replaced by Paul Bremer III, who became the chief of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) for the next 13 months (Hoffman, 2004).

Under Bremer's command, the U.S. approved the policy of debaathification, or dismantling of the Baath party, Sadaam Hussein's former political party. Additionally, a

separate policy which formally dissolved the Iraqi military was approved. Bremer and the Bush Administration believed both the Baath party and former Iraqi military were substantial threats to the rebuilding process (Packer, 2005). It was the implementation of these two policies that created a breeding ground for the insurgency in Iraq.

The insurgency has been made of up to 70 groups at a time, with a few consistent major groups: Al Qaeda in Iraq, the Sunnis, the Shiites, the Kurds, and some surrounding countries. At this point in the war, there are several key players in the insurgency in Iraq. The most important factors are the organization Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and continuing sectarian violence between the Sunnis and the Shiites. The main goals of AQI are to establish a safe haven in Iraq, as well as the establishment of a caliphate (Sunni Islamic state) in the Middle East (Department of Defense, February 8, 2007). Additionally, in order to further complicate the situation in Iraq, they have waged a terror campaign in an attempt to push Iraq into an all-out civil war. The Sunni insurgency's goals are to weaken the Government of Iraq, as well as to continue attacks on Shiites (Department of Defense, February 8, 2007). The U.S. had been attempting to broker deals between the Sunni and Shiite factions in Iraq, in order to bring them both into the political process and placate their desire for control. Other players in the insurgency include the Kurds, criminals in Iraq, and a number of foreign groups.

In order to combat the insurgency in Iraq, the U.S. needed a strong counterinsurgency strategy. General David Petraeus was the first U.S. military general to

implement a counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq, a strategy that created hope for quelling the insurgent fighters. Once he was promoted to commanding general of Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), he was able to implement a change in strategy as well as a buildup of troops (Ricks T. , 2009).

### **The Surge, June 2007-2008**

The surge of 2007 saw the additional deployment of five army brigades, primarily into Baghdad. The first brigade arrived in February of 2007, and the last brigade arrived in June. President George W. Bush stated that the purpose of the troop increase was “to help Iraqis clear and secure neighborhoods, to help them protect the local population, and to help ensure that the Iraqi forces left behind are capable of providing the security that Baghdad needs” (NPR.org, 2007, par. 10). This troop level increase alongside a shift to counterinsurgency strategy showed that the military leaders had realized the true goal in the insurgency in Iraq: the population is the most important factor in Iraq. The additional troop numbers gave military commanders the resources to clear a neighborhood, and then leave a small force to patrol and secure the area. In doing this, the U.S. forces were able to provide security to the Iraqi people, building a more trusting relationship (Ricks T. , 2009). Additionally, the plan was for the additional troop numbers to provide enough breathing room for the Iraqi leaders to work on reconciling sectarian differences, as well as problems within the Iraqi government (Petraeus, 2007).

The first few months of the surge proved to be some of the bloodiest in the war, due in large part to the rise in offensive operations undertaken by the U.S. (Department of Defense, 2008). By the middle of the summer in 2007, violence had dropped significantly due to the increase in security provided by the additional troops (Department of Defense, 2008). Additional causes for the drop in violence included a six-month cease-fire announced by Moqtada al-Sadr, leader of the Mahdi Army; as well as the recruitment of Sunnis who had rejected al-Qaeda in Iraq or who had been paid by the U.S. to stop fighting coalition forces (Partlow, 2007).

However, the task of preparing the Iraqi government proved to be more difficult than had been predicted. Prime Minister Maliki, a Shiite, seemed unwilling to reach out across sectarian lines in order to help bolster the strength of the government, which was problematic (New York Times, The, 2009). Through the winter of 2007-2008, the surge began to split distinctly – it was militarily successful, but failing politically (Ricks T. , 2009). However, March of 2008 brought about a turn in the political landscape: the Battle of Basra. Maliki declared that the Iraqi Army would be used to drive the Mahdi Army out of the city of Basra, an important port city in Iraq (BBC News, 2008). This event was significant because it was the first operation carried out by the Iraqi Army since 2003, and the first military action against Shiite militias by the Iraqi Government (Ricks T. , 2009). It is also worth noting that Maliki had declared as early as July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007, that Iraqi security forces could secure the country on their own (Oppel, 2007).



In the opinion of Thomas Ricks and others, the surge worked well tactically, but ultimately fell short strategically. The surge brought enough troops to Iraq to improve security and build relationships with the Iraqi people, but the overarching goal was to provide room for the Iraqi Government to solve many of its own internal and sectarian problems. Even though the U.S. helped get a large number of Sunnis on payroll away from the insurgency, Ricks believes that the country still teeters on the edge of a possible civil war (Ricks T. , 2009). However, the improved security has allowed for an opportunity to pursue an improvement in the quality of life for the Iraqi people, as well as an opportunity for the Iraqi people and the Iraqi government to begin to take charge of the future of their country (Odierno, 2008).

### **Counterinsurgency Warfare**

The current strategy in Iraq, championed by General David Petraeus, focuses on counterinsurgency tactics (Ricks, 2006). Counterinsurgency warfare attempts to first isolate the guerilla fighters and insurgents, and then provide protection and support for the government and the population. Counterinsurgency essentially seeks to win over the support of the occupied territories' population (Galula, 1964). If this goal can be achieved, then the insurgency is deprived of their supplies, shelter, and most importantly, their legitimacy (Galula, 1964). If these factors can be stripped from the insurgents' arsenal, then the insurgency is doomed to fail and the counterinsurgent force will be able to help rebuild the government in the host nation.

## **Insurgency**

To understand counterinsurgency, one must first understand the goals of an insurgency. The insurgent forces, typically made up of guerilla fighters, rebels, and other militants, undergo a five-step process as outlined by David Galula (1964). First, the insurgency must form a strong party around a central cause; second, the insurgents must create a united front; third, the united front must begin attacks using guerilla tactics; fourth, the insurgency begins movement warfare; and finally, the insurgency must undertake an annihilation campaign. Through these five steps, the insurgency creates a solid foundation from which to rally the local population, as well as stage military operations capable of handicapping or destroying the counterinsurgent force (Galula, 1964).

The first step is for the insurgency to form a strong party around a central cause (Galula, 1964). In the case of Iraq, many of the insurgent groups are banded together by a strong sense of Arab nationalism united against U.S. occupation in Iraq. The Shiites and the Sunnis, who are rival factions within Iraq, are both attempting to rid the country of the U.S. military occupation (Hoffman, 2004). However, AQI has complicated the situation in Iraq, attempting to pit the groups against one another in order to seize power in Iraq and create an Islamic state.

According to Galula (1964), the second step necessitates that the insurgents create a united front. This has not been the case in Iraq, as the insurgency is comprised of many groups with different goals, and this has resulted in a large amount of infighting.

Third, the united front created by the insurgency must begin using guerilla tactics (Galula, 1964). This is beneficial to the insurgency for two reasons. The first reason is manifested primarily by necessity. Guerilla warfare is characterized by small, surprise tactical attacks conducted by a lightly armed force (Galula, 1964). Examples of guerilla tactics include ambushes, raids, and the use of familiar enemy terrain in order to combat a larger, less mobile standard military. This is a byproduct, as most insurgencies are not born from standard militaries. Therefore they do not have the resources necessary to wage a conventional war against the counterinsurgents.

It is important for the insurgents to move easily among the populace. This grants them several advantages. They are able to move from town to town, or within a city, relatively unnoticed. They are able to live among the local population, thereby gaining support for their cause. Consequently, the counterinsurgents are forced to disturb the local population in order to flush out the insurgent combatants (Galula, 1964).

For an insurgency to be victorious it does not necessarily have to win militarily; rather they only need to make the counterinsurgents lose (Galula, 1964). If by hiding amongst the local population they cause the counterinsurgent force to destroy a community,

they have created animosity towards the counterinsurgents. However, the insurgents can only hide amongst the population as long as the people support the insurgency (FM 3-24, 2007).

The fourth step, which very few insurgencies reach (Hoffman, 2004), is movement warfare (Galula, 1964). At this stage, the insurgency has the military power of a standard military force, indicated by their possession of military machinery (planes, tanks, ships, etc.) and their ability to construct bases and run strategic military campaigns (Galula, 1964). This would allow an insurgency, which has not driven the counterinsurgency force out by swaying public opinion, to undertake the fifth and final step - an annihilation campaign (Galula, 1964). This step necessitates that the insurgents drive the counterinsurgents out of the country militarily, as they would in a conventional warfare environment.

## **Counterinsurgency**

According to David Galula, in addition to the U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Manual (FM 3-24, 2007), there are five overarching requirements for successful counterinsurgency (COIN) operations:

First, U.S. and Host Nation (HN) – for this research, Iraq - military commanders and the HN government together must develop a plan for attacking the insurgents' strategy (FM 3-24, 2007). In doing this, the Iraqi government as well as the counterinsurgent forces achieve legitimacy. However, it cannot be understated that the Government of Iraq must be able to stand on its own. This tenet goes for all projects in which the HN government and the

COIN force collaborate. The people of Iraq should not view the government or any other organization as a front for oppression by the U.S. forces. It is important that the government and the U.S. have a working relationship, but the government must be supported by the population as an entity separate from the U.S.

Secondly, HN military forces and other counterinsurgents must establish control of one or more areas from which to operate (FM 3-24, 2007). The COIN force must monitor the population closely, in order to prevent insurgents from infiltrating the populace (Galula, 1964). As the COIN effort grows stronger, it is important to continue to gain new areas in order to create a new base, as well as to afford the COIN force the ability to monitor the local population (FM 3-24, 2007). This ties into the third goal, which states that operations should be initiated from the HN government's areas of strength against areas under insurgent control.

The host nation must retain or regain control of the major population centers to stabilize the situation, secure the government's support base, and maintain the government's legitimacy (FM 3-24, 2007). It is important for the HN government to begin taking responsibility for the military actions and civil reconstruction, in order to establish legitimacy as a ruling force with the best interests of the population in mind. This is also linked to the fourth step, which states that regaining control of insurgent areas requires the HN government to expand operations to secure and support the population (FM 3-24, 2007). If

the insurgents have established firm control of a region, their military presence and political apparatus must be eliminated in order to ensure control of the area is held by the COIN force as well as the HN force.

The fifth (and most relevant) goal states that information operations (IO) must be aggressively employed to accomplish the following: IO must favorably influence perceptions of HN government legitimacy and capabilities, and IO should obtain local, regional, and international support for COIN operations (FM 3-24, 2007). In order to do this, an IO campaign should be launched to publicize insurgent violence, as well as discredit insurgent propaganda and provide a more compelling alternative to the insurgent ideology and narrative (FM 3-24, 2007). This goal can be achieved by these three separate branches of IO: Public Affairs (PA), Psychological Operations (PSYOP), and Civil Affairs (CA). Each of these branches has a specific area of operation (AO), and working in a complementary way, they can achieve this goal.

However, the U.S. forces must succeed militarily in order to garner favorable coverage. The U.S. military must provide security to the Iraqi people in addition to removing the insurgent threats from cities and neighborhoods in Iraq. The Iraqi people must believe that the U.S. is in Iraq for their best interest, and if the U.S. cannot provide security to the Iraqis then they will not accept our messages. Furthermore, it would be impossible for

military public affairs to push stories about positive events to the media if it were clear that the U.S. forces were failing militarily (FM 3-24, 2007).

Ultimately, counterinsurgency strategy is about winning the support of the people by supporting and helping to build a government in the host nation (Galula, 1964). The host nation government must be successful in displaying their power without continued support of the counterinsurgent force. The government must also be able to create a party or cause around which the people of the host nation can rally, or else insurgent activity will continue. However, the counterinsurgent force must be able to assist in providing security for elections as well as any action taken by the HN government in the early stages. Once the host nation government has won the support of the people, then the counterinsurgent force can draw back their involvement (Galula, 1964). If a counterinsurgency strategy succeeds, the security and governmental responsibilities will be returned to the host nation, with the support of the host nation populace.

### **The Importance of Information Operations**

The counterinsurgency manual for the U.S. military was edited in 2006, after 20 years of not being revised. It is crucial for the U.S. military to understand the importance of the IO aspect of a counterinsurgency operation (Galula, 1964). Without a response to their arguments and narratives, the insurgents are able to convince the local population that the counterinsurgent force is not acting in the best interests of the local population (Galula,

1964). If the insurgents achieve their goal, the United States will not have the support of the Iraqis or the U.S. public, in which case the U.S. will not be able to defeat the insurgency.

Information Operations play a critical role in a COIN strategy. Insurgents and terrorists rely on shaping narrative through media events and propaganda. These narratives allow them to convince publics to support their cause, as well as change the political support landscape as events unfold (Peskowitz, 2009). With no information from the counterinsurgent force, the narrative of the insurgency stands uncontested. Therefore, Information Operations have several responsibilities in a COIN operation. By publicizing counterinsurgent victories, successes, and actions favorable to the people of the host nation, IO can win support for the COIN force. Additionally, it is important for IO to counter insurgent propaganda (FM 3-24, 2007). If IO points out the deception and lies propagated by the insurgency, then the host nation population will begin to doubt the validity of claims made by the insurgency. Furthermore, it is important to take control of the narrative of an event first. If an attack is made by the insurgents, then the COIN force should be the first to interact with the media. IO should be active rather than reactive, if they hope to control the narrative rather than dispute claims made by the insurgents. In this way, the COIN force must forbid the insurgents from gaining legitimacy in their actions (Roca, 2008).

Ultimately, the support of the Iraqi people is the most important factor in a COIN setting. Garnering popular support from the Iraqis and convincing them that the temporary



U.S. involvement is necessary to rebuild Iraq using an IO campaign would make significant strides towards a COIN victory (Emery, 2004). In order to do this, IO must ultimately convince the Iraqi people that helping the enemy will have a negative effect of the future of the country, whereas helping the U.S. defeat the enemy will aid in the rebuilding effort. In order to further bolster support for the U.S., IO should make the Iraqi people aware of the progress, so that the Iraqis will be convinced and reminded that the U.S. is there to help them (Emery, 2004). Furthermore, if the Iraqi people believe that the U.S. is acting in their best interest and begin to build a trusting relationship, then the U.S. military will be able to receive information about insurgent movements and actions within villages from the Iraqis (Emery, 2004).

Additionally, it is important for IO to build domestic support in order to “put time on the clock.” At this point in the war, the U.S. support for continued action in Iraq is low. If support continues to fall, the U.S. military will ultimately be forced to withdraw from Iraq. It is the role of public affairs to provide information to the U.S. media, and though they are not allowed to explicitly advocate for the war, the information can be framed to highlight the importance of continuing action.

Therefore, Information Operations are crucial for a COIN victory. However, without the kinetic military aspect, it is impossible to provide population security. If the population is not secure, then IO efforts cannot succeed.

## **Military Challenges in Iraq**

Until the surge, the insurgency had outmaneuvered the U.S. military in terms of winning public support in Iraq (Hoffman, 2004). This was due in part to the U.S.' inability to immediately recognize the presence of an insurgency in Iraq after the fall of Baghdad, and the lapse in time between this recognition and the ability to put any concrete COIN strategy into place (Ricks, 2006). On June 30 2003, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said "I guess the reason I don't use the phrase "guerrilla war" is because there isn't one, and it would be a misunderstanding and a miscommunication to you and to the people of the country and the world," in response to a question about why the Department of Defense had not defined the situation in Iraq as a guerilla war (U.S. Department of Defense, 2003, par. 74). The surge in 2007 was intended to provide additional troop support in Iraq, and in doing so the U.S. military was able to better secure areas in Iraq, providing the stability necessary to rebuild and maintain infrastructure. Coupled with a shift to counterinsurgency strategy, the U.S. began to more effectively combat the insurgents.

The insurgents had managed to control the narrative and messages during this lapse prior to the surge, providing disincentives for supporting the U.S. The campaign of insurgent violence convinced many of the Iraqi people that the U.S. was not there in the best in interests of Iraq. Moreover, the U.S. did not counter this initial barrage of strategic information (Ricks, 2006). The insurgents swayed Iraqi public opinion in their favor, using a combination of propaganda and violence. A poll conducted by D3 Systems for the BBC,

ABC News, ARD German TC, and USA Today between February 25<sup>th</sup> and March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007 indicates that Iraqis remain concerned about their security, with 48% of respondents reporting security issues as their number one problem (D3 Systems, 2007). Additionally, this poll also shows that 38% of Iraqi people blamed the U.S./coalition forces for most of the violence in the country, while only 11% of respondents blamed the Sunni and Shiite militias (D3 Systems, 2007). Furthermore, actions taken by the U.S. could not be secured, and many people in Iraq felt abandoned once the U.S. left an area after clearing it of insurgent activity. The shift to a COIN strategy and the surge provided the strategic goals as well as the manpower to secure the population (Ricks T. , 2009).

Furthermore, by creating media events for the media to cover such as IEDs, suicide bombings, and other attacks, the insurgents also managed to produce more newsworthy material than the U.S. military (Ricks, 2006). For example, the Al Qaeda in Iraq bombing at the Shrine in Samarra in February 2006 garnered 165 newspaper stories between February 23 and February 25 of 2006 (LexisNexis). This negative information became the primary type of coverage broadcast domestically, and the insurgency effectively conveyed the impression that they were creating a larger impact than the U.S. military, both to the U.S. public as well as the Iraqi people (Ricks, 2006). The insurgents created an impression that they were willing to do anything for their cause through the type of attacks caught on tape, effectively making the insurgency seem willing to fight indefinitely in order to drive the U.S. out of Iraq

(Waller, 2007). The impression of the U.S. domestic audience was that the U.S. was losing the war in Iraq.

One of the main problems facing the COIN operation in Iraq was that many military leaders had been attempting to achieve military victories over COIN victories (Ricks, 2006). Some units were employing COIN early in the war, but many others were continuing to fight conventionally. The leaders of the conventional units did not realize that many of these military victories were irrelevant in a COIN situation, but their training was reminiscent of the first Gulf War when conventional warfare prevailed as the dominant military strategy. For example, cities and roads are of strategic military importance in standard warfare, but insurgents have no base of operations. Their AO is too mobile and scattered to be able to cut off their supply routes, or to capture enough territory to be of strategic importance.

Another challenge is the priority commanders gave to force protection (Ricks, 2006). The upshot of this priority led to the alienation of the Iraqi people. For example, U.S. vehicles would drive fast and recklessly while forcing Iraqi civilian cars off the road. Many battlefield tactical decisions were made for the sake of unit safety, as that was the strategy at the time. For example, if a patrol comes under insurgent fire from a neighborhood, the patrol would return fire. Typically, the insurgent would leave following the initial salvo, and the U.S. patrol will be left firing into a neighborhood of civilians. This undercuts larger strategic goals by achieving either an irrelevant battlefield victory or no victory at all, while angering

and alienating an entire neighborhood (Kilcullen, 2006). It is important from an IO standpoint for the combat troops to exercise controlled response, in order to gain and maintain support from the local population (Roca, 2008).

If the U.S. military comes under fire from the insurgency, they should return fire defensively on a visible target when in an urban environment, rather than launching mortars into heavily populated areas (Kilcullen, 2006). U.S. forces should continue to defend themselves in rural areas of Iraq, due to the low impact on the populace. Not only would military security be lost if the U.S. were to stop fighting the insurgents entirely, but this would compromise any sense of security that the population in Iraq may have with the presence of U.S. forces. If the insurgent fighters were to attack the U.S. military unchecked, then the population of Iraq would see that the U.S. has stopped trying to fight the insurgents militarily and lose faith in the U.S.'s ability to provide security for civilians.

These conventional military challenges are important to meet in Iraq, in order to provide the kinetic aspect of the counterinsurgency operations. Both information operations and military operations must work in harmony in order to succeed. However, the main challenge facing the PAOs as well as an IO campaign in general is the battle for U.S. and Iraqi public opinion (Starnes, 2004). This is due in part to two factors: a declining relationship between the U.S. military and the media, and the inertia of public opinion as the result of an extended war. As stated earlier, one of the most important parts of a COIN

operation is the support of the people in Iraq. If the Iraqi people identify with the insurgency, then the insurgents are able to easily recruit new members and move freely throughout the population, while maintaining legitimacy in their narratives and their attacks on U.S. efforts.

## **Literature Review**

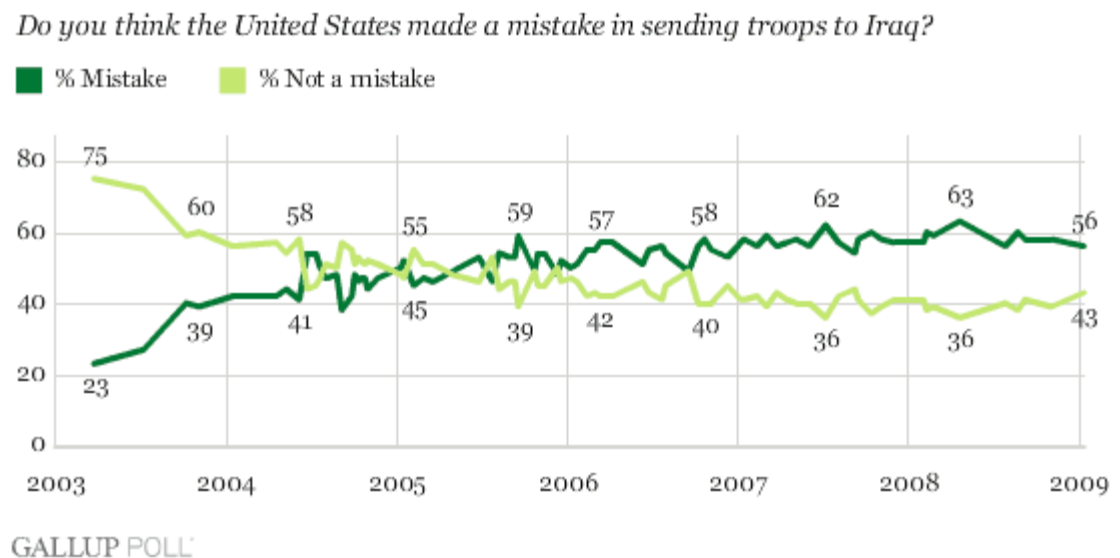
The importance of public opinion on the war in Iraq will be explained in this section, as well as the trend of media coverage up to this point in the war. Additionally, a brief history of military/media relations and the media coverage of the war up to the surge will illuminate the primary research. Finally, framing theory will be introduced in order to place the research in the context of media theory.

Public opinion as well as the history of media coverage related Iraq are both important to understand when considering the importance of Information Operations in a counterinsurgency situation. Public opinion is influenced by Information Operations, both in the U.S. and in Iraq. The past media coverage from the beginning of the war until the beginning of the surge (2003-2007) will show that generally, coverage of the war in Iraq has been negative. The research done in this study will determine if that trend has continued, and whether military Information Operations had been able to influence media coverage of the war in Iraq without being framed in a negative light. Finally, PR role theory will be introduced in order to view the role of Information Operations in a theoretical light.

## Public Opinion and Iraq

U.S. public opinion has become negative regarding the mission in Iraq. A 2009 Gallup poll (see figure 1) shows that there has been a large change in the number of respondents who believed that the war in Iraq was a mistake in 2003 vs. 2009. Additionally, these polls show that support has declined.

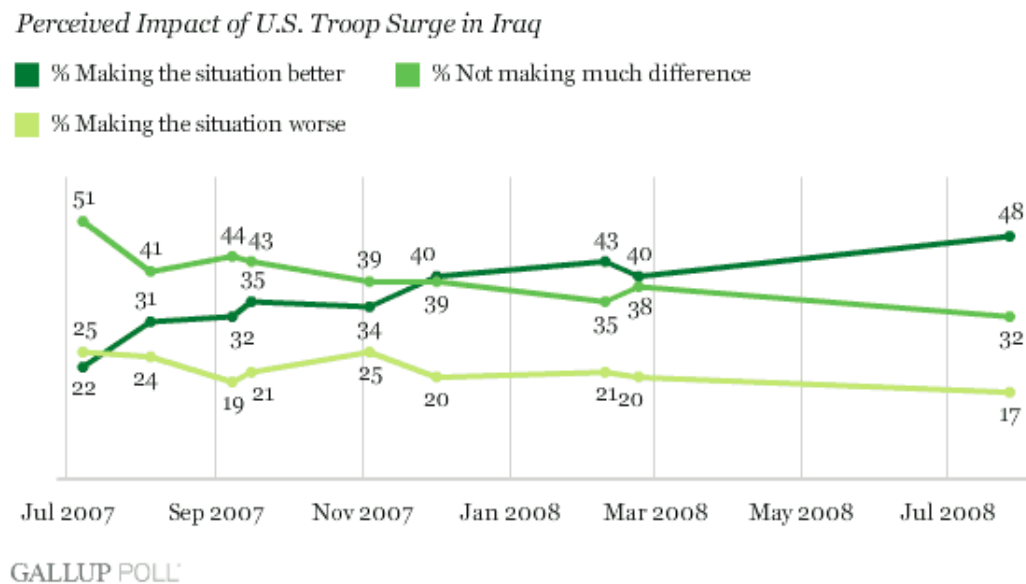
Figure 1: Gallup Poll, Was Sending U.S. Troops a Mistake?



The war in Iraq had suffered a loss of domestic support for the war in Iraq for a multitude of reasons. First, the American public had long since given up on the war in Iraq. The U.S. made so many mistakes from a public affairs perspective early on that the American public made an assessment that the war had already been lost (Kakutani, 2006). However, the surge gained strong support between July 2007 and July 2008, with 48% of respondents reporting that they felt that the surge was making a difference (see figure 2).

However, the increased support of the surge did not change the overall support of the war for Iraq (see figure 3). A 2008 poll, conducted at the same time as the poll in figure 3, shows that 57% of respondents in January of 2007 believed that sending troops to Iraq was a mistake, whereas 56% of respondents still believed this to be a mistake at the end of the surge.

**Figure 2: Gallup Poll, Is the Surge Making the Situation in Iraq Better?**

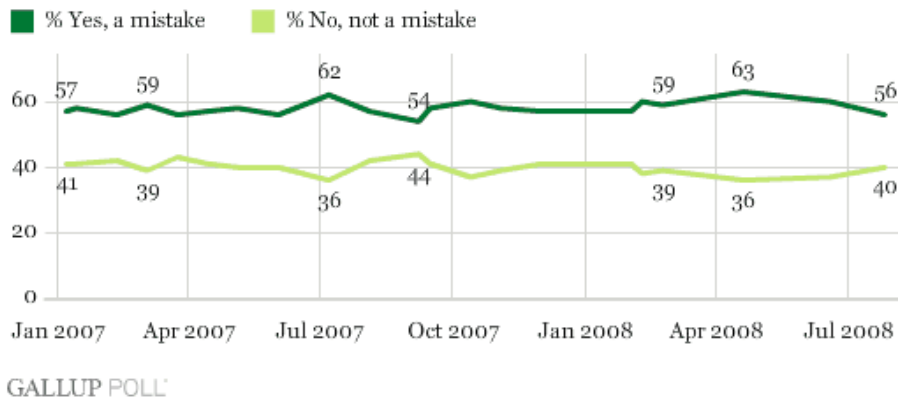


**Figure 3: Gallup Poll, Was Sending U.S. Troops a Mistake, re: The Surge?**



*In view of the developments since we first sent our troops to Iraq, do you think the United States made a mistake in sending troops to Iraq, or not?*

Recent trend: January 2007-July 2008



COIN strategy is exceedingly complex, and therefore the media has not thoroughly explained the U.S.'s reason for remaining in Iraq to the American people; either because they chose not to, or because they did not understand COIN well enough themselves. The Bush administration is partially at fault for not adequately explaining why U.S. forces remained in Iraq after no WMD were found.

The public affairs effort needs to direct their attention to heavy, consistent messages, focusing on different news stories that highlight the positive aspects of the U.S. mission in Iraq. Given that PA does not explicitly decide the which news stories get picked up or what the tone of an article will be, it is important for military public affairs to build a strategy for contextualizing events in Iraq. Additionally, these stories must conform to the standards of newsworthiness and appeal to recognized news values such as timeliness, impact, conflict, and emotion (Shoemaker, 2006). However, it is also important to ensure transparency and

remain in a non-advocacy role regarding both good and bad news. The U.S. cannot afford to suffer another public opinion fall-off as it did during the Abu-Ghraib scandal. The abuse at Abu-Ghraib began as far back as October, 2003 and continued until photographs were published in the spring of 2004 (Ricks, 2006). This provides a prime example of how a failure at the military operational level along with a poorly executed response at the information level served to fuel the insurgency.

As a function of the program that allows reporters to embed in military units, journalists were able to write generally supportive and personal stories of the war and the men and women fighting in the armed forces during the 21 day combat phase. The stories typically took a positive tone, and an angle usually focusing on the personal lives of the troops and their particular experiences during the war. The stories were positive at this point because the war was going well from the U.S. perspective, and the insurgency had not yet begun (Aday, Livingston, & Hebert, 2005). Lately, despite the large amount of journalists who continue to conduct their own research, a number of journalists have relied on Iraqi stringers to get the stories for them (Peters, 2006). The stringers are used in order to ensure the journalist's safety, who would remain in the Green Zone while the stringer collected information. This has raised a great number of issues, namely the quality of stories being brought back from the stringers, the truthfulness of these stories, and the possibly complicity of the stringers with the insurgency.

Stories that originate from stringers complicit with the insurgency are typically filmed purposely, in order to provide video footage of an attack on U.S. troops. Another problem exists in the dishonesty of Iraqi people complicit with the insurgency. For example, a photograph taken by an AFP photographer depicts an elderly Iraqi woman shows her holding two bullets which she said hit her house following a coalition forces raid on her suburb near Sadr City. However, when examining the photograph, it is clear that neither of the bullets in her hand had been fired from a weapon (Magic Bullets Discovered, 2007). When the media release this imagery, it further solidifies the impression that the U.S. is consistently under attack by the insurgency, or that the U.S. is not acting in the best interest of the Iraqi people. Furthermore, much of the disagreement between the military and the media is the result of the information that the media choose to release (Graham, 1996).

Another problem presents itself on an international scale. In this age of global information, or global information environment (GIE), it is impossible to tell the local population that the U.S. military is there to help them with their best interests in mind, while the U.S. public no longer supports the military effort (Nacos, 2007). The Iraqi people cannot be given one message while the U.S. public is given another, as all the information exists on a global scale, and all key publics are able to access the narratives and messages put forth by the U.S. and the insurgents. The U.S. COIN efforts in Iraq will lose legitimacy if the Iraqi people see that the U.S. populace does not support the efforts of their own military, and it will become increasingly difficult to devalue the messages of the insurgency. It is important

for the U.S. to maintain support for the COIN mission; otherwise any IO or COIN efforts will lose legitimacy in the eyes of the Iraqis. Furthermore, insurgent and terrorist propaganda is spread more easily using modern technology, making control of the narrative significantly more important from an IO perspective.

### **The Military and the Media**

Historically, the military and the media have had a relationship characterized by high and low points. During the war in Vietnam, the military gave the media a great deal of trust and freedom due to the good relationship following World War II as well as the invention of television, which the military saw as an innovative way to send good news home. However, this relationship immediately soured once the media began to report negative stories about the military action in Vietnam, and it has taken years for the relationship to heal (Paul & Kim, 2004). In Grenada, the media were denied access altogether, except for a press pool following the military intervention. This was widely seen as access denial and censorship, and much of the media coverage focused on the problems of access rather than the military action. In Panama, the same problems occurred, though due in large part to logistical problems (Paul & Kim, 2004). In the First Gulf War, however, things began to change. This war was widely known as the CNN War, because it was the first military conflict to feature a large amount of visuals live from the battlefield. However, media outlets believed that the military was spoon-feeding them information in order to provide positive coverage about the war. In Haiti, the press was able to gain access before the military arrived, and therefore they

were able to control the coverage. This was also the case in Somalia. Bosnia saw the beginnings of an embedded journalist program, while Kosovo and Afghanistan were difficult to cover given the nature of the military action taken by the U.S. Kosovo was primarily an air war, and missions in Afghanistan were undertaken primarily by Special Forces. Iraq, however, provided a new ground for the military and the media to form a relationship, through the embedded journalism program (Paul & Kim, 2004).

Given this storied history of the military-media relationship, the role of military public affairs has changed over time. The role has always essentially been to inform the media and the American people, as well as provide information internally; but the goals have been different during different armed conflicts. In Iraq, the goal of public affairs is to keep the military and the U.S. media informed about the state of the war and the state of the rebuilding process. This is important in supporting the counterinsurgency campaign, as counterinsurgency operations rely on the distribution of information that supports the cause of the United States while devaluing the goals of the insurgency. While public affairs must be truthful in their messages, the recommendation of this research is that they could help boost support for the war effort by highlighting successes in the battle against the insurgents as well as the successes in restoring peace and infrastructure to areas of Iraq. Support could be gained by providing truthful information to the U.S. public and the Iraqi people with contextual information.

## **Past Media Coverage of Iraq**

Initially, U.S. public opinion was in support of the war, especially following the events of September 11 and the fight in Afghanistan. However, over time, the war has slipped further and further into a nigh-unsolvable quagmire. The US public has long been observing the war through the only lens they know: the news media. The media coverage has varied widely throughout the course of the war. Following September 11 and during the fight in Afghanistan, coverage was inaccurate but supportive (Bray, 2002). Throughout the spring of 2003, the Iraq War, the press coverage was highly favorable, at times even refusing to air dissident opinions (Rutenberg, 2003). Following the end of major combat operations in the late spring of 2003, coverage immediately dropped away from battle stories and tactical discussions, but remained largely favorable (Calabrese, 2004). From 2003-2005, coverage varied from positive to neutral, with major events impacting the coverage (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005). The 2004 election had an impact on the coverage of the war, specifically relating to President Bush's approval rating, and the capture of Saddam Hussein also saw a spike in coverage. However, from 2005-2007, the coverage has grown increasingly negative (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2007).

### ***Positive Coverage***

The coverage of the Iraq war began immediately following the invasion in 2003 with predominantly favorable coverage. However, according to Andrew Calabrese (2004), the media exhibited an extreme pro-war sentiment during the beginning of the war. Calabrese

examined how the media were manipulated in their coverage of the war, and therefore how their readers were manipulated as well. The media bias and the governmental control in the form of military public affairs is examined in Nossek's (2002) article about military-media relations prior to the war in Iraq. They state that during wartime, positive reports of military morale through the media serve to reinforce support on the home front, which in turn reinforces military morale even further (Nossek, 2002). His article discusses how military-media relations are constantly evolving towards a common goal of being pleasant, but does not explain how the coverage of wars deteriorates. Calabrese's study draws from news analyses, as well as polls taken by viewers of different news media sources. In his article he examines a study conducted by *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting*, a media watchdog organization.

Following the End of Major Combat Operations in the late spring of 2003, media coverage of Iraq remained positive. One notable event that signaled the end of the war was the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein on April 9 2003 (Aday, Cluverius, & Livingston, 2005). The announcement by President George W. Bush in April of 2003 coupled with the toppling of the statue provided a landmark for the media. However, fewer soldiers died during the war compared to the number of casualties following the announcement of the end of combat operations (Aday, Cluverius, & Livingston, 2005). Additionally, major operations had yet to be staged in many important areas of the country,

and Saddam Hussein would not be captured for several more months (Aday, Cluverius, & Livingston, 2005).

Aday et al. employed two levels of analysis: one to assess whether a victory frame was adopted on April 9 2003, and one to analyze whether or not this new frame would affect news coverage in the coming weeks (Aday, Cluverius, & Livingston, 2005). The study concluded that, given the tone of the articles, a victory frame had been established by day's end (Aday, Cluverius, & Livingston, 2005). Therefore, they went on to examine how this day and the new frame which it provided affected news coverage the following week. The study shows that stories related to battles and tactics declined by 79% and 81% respectively on Fox; while stories about battle and tactics declined by 81% and 89% respectively on CNN.

A study done in May of 2006 by a Department of Defense Joint Course in Communication at the University of Oklahoma examined the media coverage of Iraq for a three year period, from 2003-2006 (Binstock, et al., 2006). In the summer of 2004, casualties were a hot-button news item. The war in general and how it relates to politics was heavily discussed leading up to the election in November of 2004, and following a decrease in the number of embedded reporters, no trend was noticed. This study shows a different view of war coverage from 2004-2006, but one must consider that the study was conducted by a Department of Defense joint operations class. As with any study, it is important to recognize



any ulterior motives that the researcher might have. In this case, the Department of Defense wanted to ensure positive coverage and opinion of military operations in Iraq.

Based on these studies, positive coverage was attributed primarily to public opinion in the early stages of the war. Early “rally-around-the-flag” tendencies by the American people as well as multiple media organizations in addition to an overall support for the war caused the early coverage to be overwhelmingly positive.

### ***Neutral Coverage***

Some research, however, revealed that the media coverage of the war in Iraq was almost entirely neutral, due in part to possible media bias. In a 2005 study, Sean Aday, Steven Livingston, and Maeve Herbert (2005) found that almost all television media coverage of the war had almost no bias whatsoever, and (with the exception of Fox News) that their coverage exhibited neither a pro-war or anti-war tone. This study taped 24 hours of coverage for one month from March 20<sup>th</sup> to April 20<sup>th</sup> of ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox News, and Al Jazeera. They found that Fox and CNN provided the most coverage of the war, especially coverage devoted to battle and tactics. They also found that almost all U.S. news broadcasts ignored dissent regarding the war, both at home and abroad, despite the numerous and constant protests during that time. The study also examined how stories regarding civilian casualties were presented, and they found that very few stories existed regarding civilian casualties (Aday, Livingston, & Hebert, 2005). The significant findings of this study

showed that almost all the U.S. media and Al Jazeera presented a neutral tone, with the exception of Fox News. FOX was recorded as only reporting 62% of their stories neutrally, whereas 38% of their stories were decidedly supportive (Aday, Livingston, & Hebert, 2005).

Similarly to Rutenberg, Aday, Livingston and Hebert (2005) attributed positive coverage primarily to Fox News. Beyond that, however, their study concluded that many of the other outlets covered the war without a bias.

### ***Negative Coverage***

By 2005, the coverage of the war had shifted to a negative tone according to a study conducted by journalism.org. This study measured the amount of coverage devoted to Iraq, and within those stories, how the war was being portrayed (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005). 2005 saw a fairly even split between the 2004 election and the war in Iraq, and both were mired in accusations of media bias (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2007). Gone were the days of pro-war sentiment in the mainstream news media, as the country had become tired of hearing about constant battles long after the end of combat operations. Overall, 25% of coverage was negative, whereas only 25% of coverage was positive towards the war (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005). Additionally, 20% of the coverage was about multiple subjects for which tone did not apply, and only 35% of the coverage was considered to be neutral in tone (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005).

The findings of this study show that media portrayal overall had shifted from a neutral portrayal of Iraq to an increasingly negative portrayal.

2007 saw a steady increase in the amount of time dedicated to the topic in the press. Due largely to the impending election, as well as policy talks about bringing the troops home or not, the news media have devoted a large amount of coverage to the conflict (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2007). The Project for Excellence in Journalism tracks the news coverage of 48 different outlets, and reports on its findings each quarter. In the first quarter of 2007, Iraq comprised 22% of all news coverage, split between stories about policy debate, events in Iraq, and the home front. The majority of the coverage (55%) centered on the political debate in Washington, as well as how the Iraq war hung over President Bush's political career. Only 31% of the coverage was devoted to events in Iraq, and roughly half of that coverage was devoted to American soldiers. Only one-sixth of the analyzed stories focus on Iraqis, Iraqi casualties, or the politics in Iraq (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2007). This is a clear deviation from the coverage of the Iraq war in the past, where much of the coverage was devoted to events in Iraq, and before that, battle strategies and tactics. The Project (2007) found that the presidential election is the next largest topic, but that the Iraq war plays a major part in those news stories as well. This is due to the fact that many American were interested in what the administration intended to do about ending the conflict in Iraq, once and for all (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2007).

Many of the studies about the media portrayal of the war draw different timelines for positive or negative coverage, but when examined as a whole, they arrive at the same conclusion. The collective average of studies concludes that coverage began as positive and shifted to negative coverage over time. It is important to notice these trends, given the possibility that frames establish the tone of support in media information.

### **Framing Theory**

Framing theory was developed in 1974 by Erving Goffman, who identified the idea of frames to label schemata of interpretation that allow individuals or groups to label and interpret events and experiences in their daily lives. In using these frames, individuals or groups create meaning and organize experiences. Words and phrases play a large part in framing, and allow individuals to interpret a greater meaning of the event.

This theory was developed over the years, and Robert Entman stated in 1993 that each of us is engaged in the process of framing, because we develop individual frames. Furthermore, the media assists in creating individual frames through their choice of narrative, as well as through their choice of messages and news stories to publish (Iyengar, 1993). The media often create or stress central ideas within a story, making these ideas more salient, or memorable, to the audience. When the salience of an object is high, it becomes easier for the audience to derive meaning from the object through the frame applied by the media, as well

as through their individual frames (Iyengar, 1993). Similarly, if the media do not focus on an issue, then this issue is less memorable or salient to the audience.

Because framing involves the selection of a particular viewpoint or focus on one aspect while communicating the meaning of the whole piece of information, Entman (1993) believes that framing can take place in one of four locations along the communication process. The four locations that he cites are: the communicator, the receiver, the text, and the cultural framework. The communicator and receiver each have their own individual frame, and either party may have an ulterior motive for framing information in a certain light. The text carries a frame through the words and phrases chosen to bring salience to certain aspects of the information, and the cultural framework affects the frame of a group of people (Entman, 1993). The media are able to frame events using metaphors, catchphrases, depictions, moral appeals, and other symbolic devices present within the media outlet's communication (Aday, Cluverius, & Livingston, 2005).

The ability of the media to frame the news is equally as important as the ability for the source to frame the story (Zoch & Molleda, 2006). For the purpose of this study, the source is the Information Operations branch of the military, who put forth messages regarding action and events in Iraq. The Information Operations branch could affect the frame of a story by highlighting or withholding specific information about a subject or issue from the media covering a particular story (Zoch & Molleda, 2006).

The shift to counterinsurgency strategy as well as the implementation of the surge attempted to create a winning strategy in Iraq. Information Operations continued to be heavy throughout this time period, and the results of their efforts will be examined using framing theory in this research. Public affairs would not be able to effectively distribute their messages to key publics in the media have consistently been framing the information in a different way. This would make it difficult for military PA to reinforce the strategic goals through the media.

### **Role Theory**

Role theory was developed in 1979, initially defining four roles of PR practitioners: expert prescribers were the very informed, expert PR practitioners; problem-solving process facilitators help define PR problems and issues, and help management think through these issues; communication facilitators manage the information between management and publics; and communication technicians are experts at producing actual material used in the organization's communication (Broom & Smith, 1979). Further research in the 1980s narrowed these four roles into two categories: the public relations manager and the public relations technician. In this consolidation, the public relations manager serves a management function, in addition to enacting public relations at a strategic level. The public relations technician, on the other hand, produces and distributes the material on a tactical level (Dozier D. , 1984).

Another branch of PR roles research involves the publics' perception of PR practitioners and their ability to effectively communicate messages to their publics (Callison, 2004). Callison concludes that PR practitioners are viewed cynically by the public and are therefore less effective than an independent source in communicating messages.

Over the years, roles researchers have surveyed PR practitioners repeatedly to examine how the profession has changed. Chad Carroll writes that military public affairs could benefit from analyzing how military PAO roles have changed over the years, in order to adapt to new challenges (Carroll, 2007). He states that the roles of public affairs, civil affairs, and psychological operations officers have all unofficially merged in recent years. This is especially relevant during this point in the war in Iraq. Carroll discusses the changing role of PAOs in a COIN environment, and adapts role theory to the military. Globalization and the rapid emergence of technology have created a new domain in which friendly and enemy information sources operate: the global information environment (GIE). This new domain shows a departure from the historical military-domestic media relationship; because now anyone involved in IO cannot easily address only one audience with their communications (Howell, 2006). They currently address both domestic and international audiences, especially during war.

Another aspect of role theory is posited by David Dozier. He proposes that public relations practitioners perform "environmental scanning" (Dozier D. , 1992, p. 327) in

proactively analyzing their key publics. This is done in order to effectively communicate messages to these publics by gaining an awareness of their needs.

Both framing theory and roles theory are important in understanding how Information Operations employed messages during the surge, as well as understanding how Information Operations should adapt going forward.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions are posed for this study:

**RQ1.** What frames were used by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* during the surge in 2007-2008?

**RQ2.** Did *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* consider counterinsurgency and/or the surge to be a salient issue?

**RQ3.** What should be the role of public affairs and Information Operations in a counterinsurgency campaign going forward?



## Chapter II

### Method

For this study, a mixed methods approach was used. Documents from the RAND institute as well as other scholarly sources were examined as part of the literature review in order to gain and present a thorough analysis of the counterinsurgency efforts to date, and PEW and Gallup polls were examined in order to measure the shift in public opinion regarding U.S. military operations in Iraq.

The majority of the data were collected and analyzed using a quantitative content analysis. The two newspapers were chosen over using a disproportionate stratified sampling method. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were chosen given their high standing as national newspapers, and their long history of military coverage. The articles were chosen from these two papers using a systematic sampling method. The articles sampled were news stories, and did not include letters to the editor, opinion pieces, or columns. One article from *The New York Times* and one article from *The Washington Post* were chosen each Sunday from June 3 2007, through June 29 2008, from the Iraq section of the Early Bird newspaper archive. The Early Bird is the military's daily newspaper, which

aggregates the most relevant news stories of the day and places them into topic sections.

These articles have been pre-screened by the military for relevance to the war in Iraq.

The articles were examined using a set of codes that qualify whether or not the media applied a positive or negative frame to a particular event. The codes were determined by the researcher by reading through the articles several times, in order to discern what frames emerged. The three coders were instructed to code frames based on tone, judgment, topic, and the inclusion of key words including “counterinsurgency,” “insurgent,” “terrorist,” and “extremist.” These words are often used to describe the same groups of people, but imply different levels of good and evil. Insurgent is a neutral term, whereas terrorist and extremist both frame the person or group as inherently evil.

Additionally, the coders were instructed to determine the tone of the article in relation to support for the continuing effort in Iraq as well as whether the article implied success or failure. Support for continuing action in Iraq was coded as a statement or tone within the article that applied a positive judgment to the possible future of the war. The coders were asked to discern between a positive, negative, or neutral judgment. Additionally, the coding sheet provided for a “no judgment” response. This differs from a neutral judgment, as the journalist presented no qualifying remarks to the statements within the article. Coding as “neutral judgment,” therefore, was defined as a qualifying statement that did not imply success or failure, rather than no statement at all. A lack of support for the war was coded as

an inherent tone or statement expressing dissent for continuing action. In rating the overall tone of the article, a five-point Likert scale was used ranging from very positive to very negative (see appendix B). News stories from both papers covering the same topic were examined by the coder in order to identify specific instances of different frames applied by the two papers.

The coders were from varying backgrounds: two coders were master's students in a journalism and mass communication program, one with prior military experience. The third coder was a PhD candidate in a behavioral neuroscience program. These three coders were chosen to prevent a bias from appearing in the coding sheets when observing frequency data, although they rated the neutrality of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* differently.

PR role theory was applied by the researcher to the state of IO operations in Iraq, and in recommendation to PAOs in moving forward. While role theory does not play an explicit part in examining the data, it is briefly discussed in the literature review in order to highlight some areas of the discussion. The data were analyzed using SPSS. Relevant material from the research, including the coding instruction and frequency tables, are included in the appendices.

## **Limitations**

This study focused on examining the frames put forth by the media, as well as the messages that the media deemed salient enough at the time to publish from two high-profile newspapers. This research did not include stories from any additional newspapers, or from any other news media. Furthermore, the primary research of this study did not focus explicitly on messages put forth by the military. Given that this research focused on two major U.S. newspapers, it cannot be generalized to international media outlets. Furthermore, given the fact that the Early Bird pre-screened the articles used, it is possible that the sample did not include other articles relevant to the war. A thorough examination of all articles by both papers would be an area for future research.

Additional research would include a thorough framing analysis of other newspapers and media, in order to determine what other topics and frames were salient during the surge. An examination of framing internationally would also greatly contribute to the field, given the global information environment that exists today.

A framing analysis of military press releases in order to determine what messages the military is putting forth and what frames they had adopted at the time would also be an area for future research. Furthermore, in-depth interviews with public affairs officers involved in Iraq should be conducted in order to acquire information regarding public affairs tactics and strategies during the surge. Interviews should also be conducted with members of General

Petraeus' staff at United States Central Command in Tampa, Florida in order to gather information regarding the current strategy in Iraq, as well as challenges currently facing the information warfare campaign. Both of the interviews should include a retrospective analysis of the efficiency of the information operations campaign from the period following the surge to the summer of 2008. Other research should further explore the different roles of IO moving forward in Iraq, as well as in a counterinsurgency setting in general.

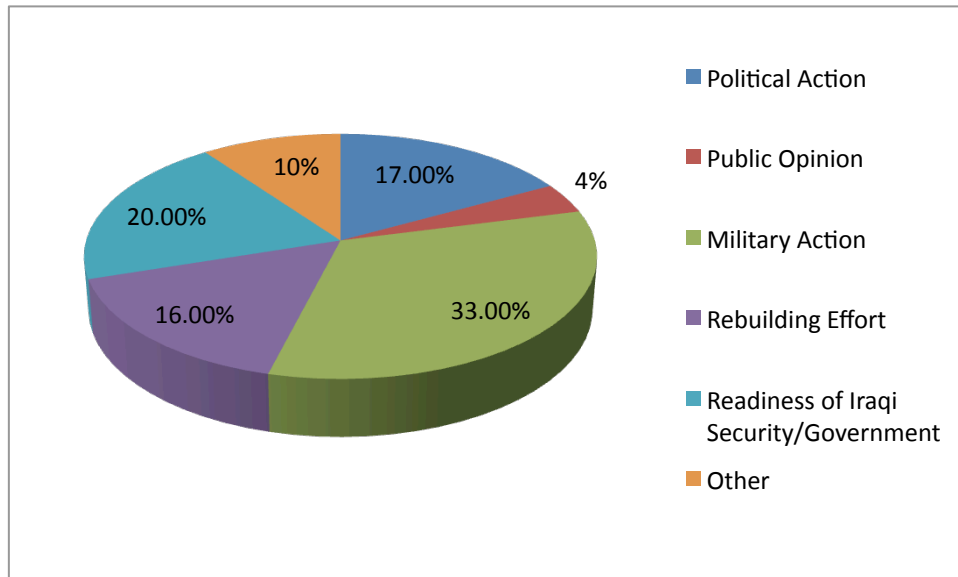
## Chapter III

### Findings

A total of 100 articles were coded, 50 from *The New York Times* and 50 from *The Washington Post*. Articles were placed into six thematic frames: political action, to include bills, congressional debate, and budget concerns; public opinion, including opinions and public action; military action, which included attacks from terrorists, the insurgency and coalition forces as well as news about bombings or attacks; the rebuilding effort regarding the reestablishment of infrastructure and social order to Iraq; and the readiness of Iraq to handle security and military operations on their own (See Figure 4). The majority of the articles focused on military action, with significantly fewer focusing on the rebuilding effort in Iraq and public opinion. Seventeen percent (17%) of the articles coded were about political action, 4% were about public opinion, 33% were about military action, 16% were about the rebuilding effort in Iraq, and 20% were about the readiness of Iraq to handle security on their own. 10% of the articles were placed into the “other” category, with frames of Iranian involvement and private military contractor concerns being the primary focus of these articles. The articles coded with an “other” frame did not pertain to counterinsurgency. *The*

*Washington Post* had the highest number of articles with political action and public opinion themes, while *The New York Times* led in all other categories (see appendix C).

**Figure 4: Distribution of Thematic Frames**



The coders were asked to rate the articles on two levels: the implications of the article as to whether the U.S. was succeeding or failing in Iraq, and the overall tone of the article regarding support for continued military action in Iraq. Most of the articles did not imply either, but almost twice as many articles implied that the U.S. was failing. Of the 100 articles, 12% adopted a frame that the U.S. was succeeding, and 23% adopted a frame that the U.S. was failing. The remaining 64% of the articles were coded as not having a success or failure frame. Two (2) percent of the articles adopted a very supportive tone for continued military action, while 11% adopted a supportive tone. Eight (8) percent of the articles did not support

continued action in Iraq, and 2% adopted a very negative outlook for continued action in Iraq. The remaining 77% contained a neutral tone regarding continued military action.

Coders were also asked to look for certain themes and words, including the words “surge,” “buildup,” and “counterinsurgency.” Seven (7) percent of the articles contained the word “surge,” and 3% of the articles referred to the surge as a “buildup.” Four (4) percent of the articles mention both words, and 86% of the articles did not mention either. For articles that contained the word “surge,” “buildup,” or both of these words, 20% of the articles were supportive of the surge. Twenty-four (24) percent were unsupportive, and 54% were neutral regarding the surge. Twenty-two (22) percent of the articles mentioning the surge also mentioned counterinsurgency, while only 7% of all the articles mentioned counterinsurgency. Fifteen (15) percent of these articles expressed support for counterinsurgency and 7% expressed neither support for counterinsurgency nor a lack of support. Twenty (20) percent of articles that mentioned the surge adopted a success frame, and 34% adopted a failing frame with 46% of the articles remaining neutral. Seventeen (17) percent of the articles mentioning the surge were supportive of continued military action in Iraq, while 24% of the articles were unsupportive of continued action.

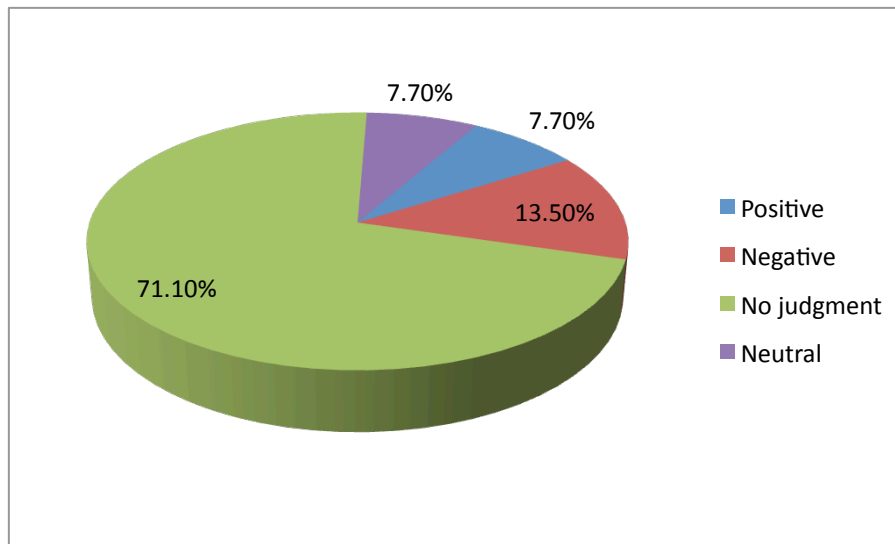
Of the 20% of selected articles that had a readiness of Iraq frame, 80% were coded as neutral. Thirteen (13) percent of the articles implied that the U.S. was succeeding in Iraq, and 7% implied that the U.S. was failing. Eighteen (18) percent were coded as supportive for



continued action in Iraq, while only 2% were coded as unsupportive of continued military action.

Coders were also asked to identify articles that contained an official statement from the military, as well as any judgments as a result of the way that the information was framed. 35% of the articles were identified as having an official statement. Of the articles with an official statement, 7.7% were identified as having a positive judgment, 13.5% were identified as having a neutral judgment, and 79% were coded as having a neutral judgment or no judgment at all (see figure 5).

**Figure 5: Judgments Applied to Official Statement**



## Differences in Media Coverage

Several articles were selected for additional examination by the researcher. These articles were selected based on additional comments from the coders, as well as their relevance to key events during the surge and notable differences in the way that the two papers framed similar events.

On December 30 2007, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* both published articles summarizing and discussing the contents of Gen. Petraeus' year-end briefing. Both articles were rated as positive, though *The New York Times* article was coded as having a more positive frame. *The Washington Post* started by saying that Petraeus' report was positive, but cautious (Partlow, 2007). *The New York Times* on the other hand, evaluated the report on the progress in Iraq as tenuous and fragile (Farrell & Moore, 2007). These different phrases used to describe the same event apply different frames to Petraeus' report. *The Washington Post* applied a positive frame to Petraeus' report, and dubs him as being cautious. *The New York Times* applied a frame of tenuous fragility to the situation in Iraq, making Petraeus and the report seem unsure. Both articles mentioned the continued presence of al-Qaeda in Iraq, and both articles cited AQI as the number one threat to progress and security. The article in the *Post* attributes the decline in violence to three factors equally: the arrival of additional combat troops, the Sunni fighters who had aligned with the U.S. against AQI, and al-Sadr's cease-fire. The *Times* mentions all three of these factors as well, but states that the fall in violence was caused chiefly by the increase in U.S. troops and the new

counterinsurgency strategy. In doing this, *The Washington Post* does not apply a judgment to which of the three factors was most important in reducing violence. However, *The New York Times* attributes the drop in violence mainly to the increased number of troops.

Another example of these two papers framing the same event differently occurred on January 20 2008. One coder reported that the article in *The New York Times* implied that the U.S. was failing in Iraq, while the other coders gave each article a rating of neutral. An attack occurred in Northern Iraq during the Shiite Holy Day of Ashura, killing a disputed number of people. In the headline, *The Washington Post* claims at least 9 were killed in the attack (Paley, 2008), whereas *The New York Times* states that the number was at least 15 (Oppel Jr. & Mizher, 2008). The two articles went on to report other attacks and deaths in various parts of the country, to include fighting in Basra. However, *The New York Times* judged the fighting as an exposure of the vulnerability of the Iraqi security forces, whereas *The Washington Post* made no such judgment call. This shows an example of *The New York Times* framing the violence in Basra as a result of the inability of Iraqi security forces to maintain order in Basra.

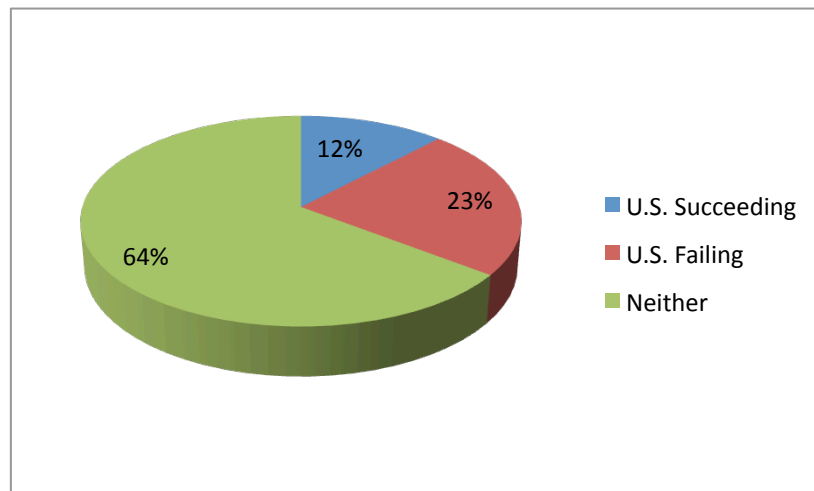
These articles highlight the different ways in which similar events are framed differently, in order to make certain attributes more salient. It is important for IO to be aware of this possibility when constructing messages or when communication with key publics in order to maintain control of the narrative.

## Discussion

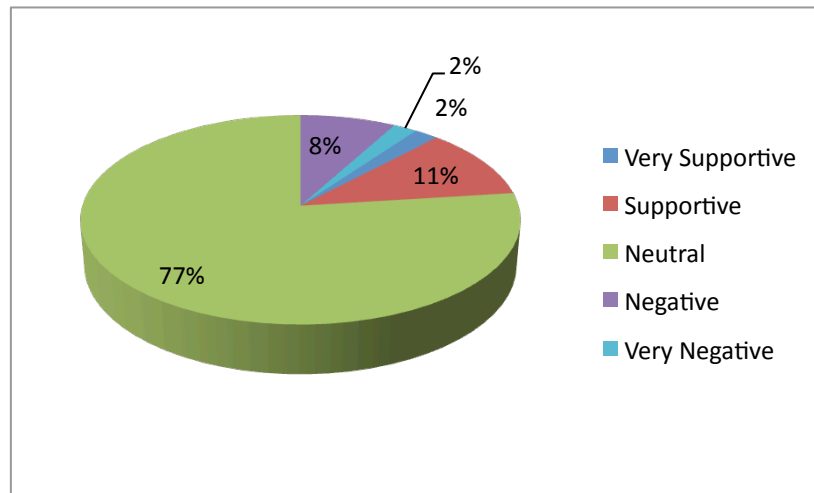
### Frames

Based on the data collected in this study, the articles from both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* overwhelmingly express neutrality when examining a success/failure frame (see figure 6), or a frame regarding continued support for the war (see figure 7). In spite of this neutrality, it is worth noting that almost twice as many articles adopted a failure frame when comparing success to failure. This is in line with previous negative coverage of the media throughout the course of the war.

**Figure 6: Adoption of a Success/Failure Frame**



**Figure 7: Support for Continued Action**



Only 7% of articles examined mentioned counterinsurgency explicitly. This is noteworthy, given that counterinsurgency is a complex issue foreign to the media and the American people. While many of the articles sampled during this period covered specific aspects of counterinsurgency, they were not framed within the greater strategy of the U.S. military operation. Given the importance of smaller events to the overall goal, military public affairs should provide information within the context of counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq to highlight U.S. efforts, rather than leaving this responsibility to the media.

Of the 35% of the articles identified as having an official statement, 20.7% contained a positive or negative judgment to the statement. An example of a negative frame applied to an official statement occurs in a *New York Times* article from June 24 2007. This article was coded as being unsupportive of the surge, as well as having a failing frame and a negative outlook for continued action in Iraq. The article focuses on the commissioning of reports in

addition to the report that Gen. Petraeus gave on September 11 that fall. The article includes several statements, including a quote from Gen. Raymond Odierno, Petraeus' second in command. His quote was optimistic about the surge, stating a possibility for the Iraqi military to shoulder more security responsibility by spring 2008. However, the article implies that additional reports were being commissioned in order to dilute the findings of Petraeus, as well as give President Bush a "wide range of options" for choosing whose advice to listen to (Sanger & Shanker, 2007). The inclusion of speculation regarding the former President's intentions in commissioning additional reports frames the article as skeptical towards the surge, and furthers the notion that there was no timetable for drawdown or withdrawal.

On the positive side, an article in *The Washington Post* from February 3 2008, was identified as having an official statement with a positive judgment. The article was coded as having a very positive outlook on continued operating in Iraq, and adopted a frame that the U.S. was succeeding in Iraq. The article focuses on the different insurgent factions active in early 2008, and includes a few military statements about foreign support for Shiite extremist groups, as well as a statement by the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's director of operations, who said that the difference between U.S. program between February 2007 and February 2008 is remarkably more effective (Ricks T. , 2008). The article applies an optimistic and supportive frame in stating that the fight against AQI is going well, as well as stating that the war is going well overall. The frames applied in this article are supportive overall, with few negative comments towards the progress that the U.S. has made.

The ability of the media to frame the news is equally as important as the ability for the source (IO) to frame the story (Zoch & Molleda, 2006). This research recommends that IO could affect the frame of a story by highlighting good news stories, and framing all events in the context of the counterinsurgency strategy. Given that framing can take place at the origination of the message (Zoch & Molleda, 2006), it should be the responsibility of military PAOs to provide a constant reminder of how specific events are relevant to COIN operations. While PAOs are not allowed to explicitly advocate support for the war, and this research does not recommend that the regulations should change; a strong, consistent message clarifying the role of the U.S. should be employed across the board. While remaining truthful and transparent, military PA can still consistently provide contextual information to the media, which will then inform the U.S. public. By reminding the key publics of the benefits to succeeding in Iraq by contextualizing events, it may be possible to raise optimism about continuing involvement. However, in doing this, it is important for military public affairs to remain truthful, as their transparency is the key to making them a valid source of information.

## **Roles**

A COIN force benefits greatly when a media source or organization supports their efforts or carries its messages (Callison, 2004), and they also benefit greatly when their PA efforts are not obvious to the HN populace. This ties into why it is important for the COIN

force to work very closely with the HN government, and try to operate in the background as much as possible.

This goal ties into the PR role management function. The members of the military serving the managerial function in PA, PSYOP, and CA must serve an important function in Iraq: the PAO can serve as expert prescribers in the U.S. and for the military as well as the problem-solving process facilitators, PSYOP can serve as the expert prescribers in Iraq, and CA can serve as the communication facilitators between the U.S. military in Iraq and the Iraqi civil services, who must be the recipients of the responsibility for the future of their country at the end of the U.S. COIN campaign. CA is especially important in working with the Iraqi government, as the government is truly the organization that needs to gain legitimacy among the Iraqi people. If the Iraqi government can achieve legitimacy, then the transition from the U.S. involvement to a self-sufficient state will be made significantly easier. As Callison points out, PR practitioners (in this case, military PA) are regarded with cynicism, and this is important in considering IO goals (2004). Given the initial lack of trust from the Iraqi people during the early phases of the war when force protection was the priority and the Iraqi government appeared to be a puppet for the U.S., future messages put forth by IO to the Iraqi people should be focused on successful actions taken by the Iraqi government.



Additionally, Dozier posited the process of environmental scanning as part of the managerial role of PR (1992). This is relevant when considering that much of the strategic aspect in a COIN operation are complex, and military IO should be mindful of the fact that many key publics do not understand why certain issues and actions covered at the tactical level are strategically important. By understanding what information key publics lack, IO could more efficiently frame their narratives in order to bolster support, in the U.S. and abroad. The findings in this research showed that information explicitly related to counterinsurgency strategy was lacking, and therefore the key publics were not provided with contextual information about the importance of certain events to a COIN strategy. Furthermore, environmental scanning would aid in identifying and adopting a proactive stance against insurgent narratives.

## **Conclusion**

The war in Iraq has been long and complex. From conventional warfare to counterinsurgency, many events have transpired and many narratives put forth from the U.S. as well as the insurgents.

It is important to win domestic support in order to continue counterinsurgency operations in Iraq. Given the findings of this study, and the information presented in the discussion, IO should focus on presenting a clear, honest case for counterinsurgency by consistently contextualizing events in the U.S. and abroad.

In a counterinsurgency environment, Information Operations play a crucial role. The insurgents and terrorists in Iraq rely on shaping narrative through media events and propaganda, and these narratives allow them to convince publics to support their cause, as well as change the political support landscape as events unfold (Peskovitz, 2009). If the U.S. allows these narratives to stand uncontested, then the insurgency controls information dominance. Therefore, Information Operations have several responsibilities in Iraq moving forward.

By publicizing counterinsurgent victories, successes, and actions favorable to the people of the host nation, IO can win support for the U.S. military actions. Additionally, it is important for IO to counter insurgent propaganda. If IO points out the deception and lies propagated by the insurgency, then the host nation population will begin to doubt the validity of claims made by the insurgency. Furthermore, it is important to control the narrative of an event first. If an attack is made by the insurgents, then the COIN force should be the first to interact with the media. IO should be active rather than reactive, if they hope to control the narrative rather than dispute claims made by the insurgents. In this way, the COIN force must forbid the insurgents from gaining legitimacy in their actions (Roca, 2008).

The overwhelming neutrality exemplified by the data in this research was surprising. The majority of the articles were coded as being neutral both in terms of supporting continued action as well as whether or not the U.S. was succeeding in Iraq. This is

noteworthy, given the popular opinion that the news media are biased against the war.

Though this research does not draw conclusions of media bias, this study did not point to an unsupportive frame for the war in Iraq.

Ultimately, the support of the Iraqi people for the government and security forces in Iraq is the most important factor in a COIN setting. In order to further bolster support in Iraq, IO should make the Iraqi people aware of progress made by the U.S. and the Iraqi government, so that the Iraqis will be convinced and reminded that the U.S. is there to help them (Emery, 2004). Raising popular support from the Iraqi people by convincing them that the temporary U.S. involvement is necessary to help rebuild Iraq using an IO campaign would make significant strides towards a COIN victory (Emery, 2004). In order to do this, IO must ultimately convince the Iraqi people that helping the enemy will have a negative effect of the future of the country and prolong the occupation, whereas helping the U.S. defeat the enemy will aid in the rebuilding effort. Most importantly, the U.S. must ultimately help create an environment in which the Iraqi government is supported by the people, and an environment in which an insurgency cannot thrive.

## **Appendix A: List of Acronyms**

AO – Area of Operation

AQI – al-Qaeda in Iraq

CA – Civil Affairs

COIN – Counterinsurgency

DoD – Department of Defense

GIE – Global Information Environment

GOI – Government of Iraq

HN – Host Nation

IO – Information Operations

MNF-I – Multi-National Force-Iraq

PA – Public Affairs

PAO – Public Affairs Officer

PSYOP – Psychological Operations

SOF – Special Operations Forces

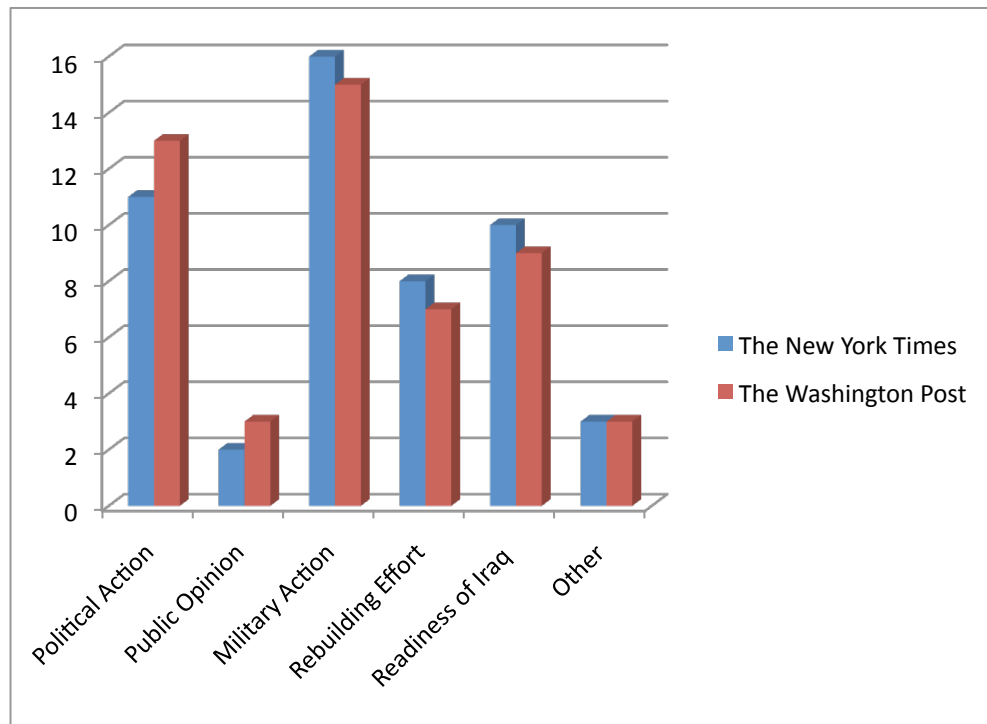
WMD – Weapons of Mass Destruction

## Appendix B: Coding Sheet

CODING SHEET: Joe Recomendendes Framing Analysis							
<b>Coder:</b>							
<b>Additional Comments:</b>							
<b>News Focus</b> A Political action: Bills, Congressional debate, Opinion in Washington, Congressional or Executive Action, Budget B Public Opinion: Actions by the public, protest, public demonstration, opinion C Military Action: Coalition forces, raids, bombing, invasion, U.S. Forces D Rebuilding Effort: The reestablishment of infrastructure and social order E Readiness of Iraq to handle security/operations on their own F Other _____	<b>How would you rate the overall neutrality, both politically and in regards to their support for the war in Iraq, of these two newspapers?</b>  <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;"> <i>The New York Times</i>            - Very liberal            - Liberal            - Neutral            - Conservative            - Very Conservative         </td> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;"> <i>The New York Times</i>            - Very supportive            - Supportive            - Neutral            - Unsupportive            - Very unsupportive         </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;"> <i>Washington Post</i>            - Very liberal            - Liberal            - Neutral            - Conservative            - Very Conservative         </td> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;"> <i>Washington Post</i>            - Very supportive            - Supportive            - Neutral            - Unsupportive            - Very unsupportive         </td> </tr> </table>	<i>The New York Times</i> - Very liberal - Liberal - Neutral - Conservative - Very Conservative	<i>The New York Times</i> - Very supportive - Supportive - Neutral - Unsupportive - Very unsupportive	<i>Washington Post</i> - Very liberal - Liberal - Neutral - Conservative - Very Conservative	<i>Washington Post</i> - Very supportive - Supportive - Neutral - Unsupportive - Very unsupportive	<b>2. Does the article include an official statement from a Department of Defense or other military official?</b> A Yes B No	<b>2a. If yes, does the article apply a judgment to the official statement?</b> A Yes, and it is a: Positive judgment Negative judgment Neutral judgment B No
<i>The New York Times</i> - Very liberal - Liberal - Neutral - Conservative - Very Conservative	<i>The New York Times</i> - Very supportive - Supportive - Neutral - Unsupportive - Very unsupportive						
<i>Washington Post</i> - Very liberal - Liberal - Neutral - Conservative - Very Conservative	<i>Washington Post</i> - Very supportive - Supportive - Neutral - Unsupportive - Very unsupportive						
<b>3. Does the article mention counterinsurgency?</b> A Yes B No	<b>3a. If yes, how would you rate the tone of the article regarding counterinsurgency efforts?</b> A Supportive B Unsupportive C Neutral	<b>4. Does the article mention a timeline for U.S. withdrawal?</b> A Yes B No	<b>4a. If yes, does the article mention the readiness of Iraqi security forces and/or government to take over in Iraq?</b> A Yes B No				
Tone/Frames							
<b>5. Does the article mention any of the following words? (Circle all that apply)</b> A Insurgent   B Fighter   C Rebel   D Terrorist   F Other _____   E None of these							
<b>6. Does the article imply that the U.S. is succeeding or failing in Iraq?</b> A Succeeding B Failing C Neither							
<b>7. Overall tone of the article regarding support for continued military action in Iraq</b> A Very Positive B Positive C Neutral D Negative E Very Negative							

## Appendix C: Thematic Frame by Paper

	Political Action	Public Opinion	Military Action	Rebuilding Effort	Readiness of Iraq	Other
<i>The New York Times</i>	11	2	16	8	10	3
<i>The Washington Post</i>	13	3	15	7	9	3



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