

**A comparison of how UK mainstream media and the Internet  
portrayed anti-war movements opposing the invasion of Iraq,  
2003 & 2011**

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**In partial fulfilment of a Master's by Research (MRes) in the Faculty of  
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## **Daniel Maple – A comparison of how UK mainstream media and the internet portrayed anti-war movements opposing the invasion of Iraq, 2003 & 2011**

This thesis will compare the focus given to opposition to the Iraq War by different types of British media sources, and in what ways this opposition was portrayed. These media sources will include newspapers, television reports, and internet blogs. This will be done by examining points in time immediately preceding and succeeding the conflict, providing two case studies for comparison. The case study concerning the events prior to the war will entail the public protests against the invasion of Iraq in the weeks leading up to its start, specifically on February 15th which saw one of the largest anti-war rallies in history, the most prominent taking place within Europe. The other case study will involve events related to the conclusion of the Iraq War. This will entail looking at the same sources in terms of their coverage of the war's aftermath, as well as acknowledgement of anti-war movements relating to Iraq or other conflicts.

What is significant to this field of study is how the focus on anti-war movements shifted over time. While there may have been some support from parts of the British traditional media towards these movements they were overall ignored, possibly due to the mainstream media following the government's line in justifying war and not showing attention to the messaging of these groups. Anti-war movements may have been ignored by these outlets even further once reporting became centred on the war itself rather than its public perception. Conversely, parts of the internet were supportive of opposition against the invasion, which continued past the February 15th rallies into the conflict itself. Within this support, these internet blogs and war reports displayed an antagonism against the mainstream media for what was perceived to be complicity with the UK government's actions in Iraq. It was most significant to discover how these foci have changed by 2011. Some outlets may have continued to vouch for the war's legitimacy, even after the war's failure had long since been made clear. Others may have given a voice to anti-war movements that they were unwilling to provide eight years prior, or at least an acknowledgement of their effects on conflict perspectives. As for the internet, their support for anti-war movements wavered as the Iraq War's conclusion neared.

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## **Preface & Acknowledgements**

This thesis project was undertaken in part because of a passion for analysing media that was developed through prior academic projects. My dissertation for an undergraduate degree in history focused in on a similar vein, searching through newspapers and determining the historical significance and methodological importance of the language and imagery used. The enjoyment I got from working on this project influenced my decision in determining the topic of focus for the mRes project, but with this I wanted to ensure I took on a topic with greater intrigue and controversy. With the dissertation I explored metaphorical sporting conflicts set against a contextual backdrop of real and bloody military history, while with this thesis I have focused on an actual conflict placed within the metaphorical “war on terror”. Throughout developing this topic, I have been required to realign the focus and approach to ensure it held a competent structure, and through honing in on anti-war movements and the internet it has proved a suitable contrast when analysing these mainstream media sources.

For why I went with the Iraq War specifically, its contemporary nature was just one of the things that really appealed to me. As I mention within the contents of the thesis itself, the conflict’s effects on the modern world are clearly felt every day, and even during the development of this research I had to verify the context to ensure it was not “outdated”. Analysing a conflict placed in such a way can be seen as quite tricky, it’s difficult to historically quantify something that in a way hasn’t written its final page. But that’s something that I saw as an unique challenge, to explore a conflict that was so recent and yet has already had so much revisionism and narrative shifts contained within.

I’d like to thank first and foremost Dr Ieuan Franklin and Dr Scott Keefer, my PGR supervisory team who provided me with exemplary advice on academic materials and thesis structure, and who overall I remained in constant contact and engagement with throughout the process. I thank David McQueen and Sam Goodman, the probationary panel members who gave much-needed feedback on the initial direction of the project and who I believed ultimately steered me into the correct direction. Dr Kevin Gillan and Dr Kristin Skoog have my utmost appreciation for agreeing to serve as examiners for the viva voce, as well as accepting my desire to have it commence in person rather than virtually. And finally, I must acknowledge Hugh Chignell and Dr Kate Terkanian for acting as examiners in “mock” probationary reviews and viva voces, which helped settle my nerves a little and prepared me for the real things.

## Appendix: Viva Voce Presentation

### Thesis Statement Comparison

- “While Iraq was seen in a clearly negative light by legacy media in 2011, anti-war movements were still overlooked in comparison to the internet.”
- Iraq did have a primarily negative portrayal by explored sources in 2011, criticism being directed at military handling and the general long-term consequences starting the conflict had.
- But there were at least some acknowledgement of anti-war movements of the past and present – though some of these mentions held its own sense of antagonism.

### Thesis Aims/Objectives

- The primary aim was set as displaying the differences in the coverage between both periods – the changes in how the media viewed Iraq were illustrated, along with aspects that remained entirely the same.
- Utilising multiple types of media sources provided multi-faceted comparison points between the two case studies – this allowed for the study to be more qualitative in how the material was analysed.

### Primary Materials

- Mainstream sources were identified as needing to concern both newspapers and television – newspapers concerning a more diversified political spectrum, while focusing on the BBC for broadcast sources presented something more “impartial”.
  - Settled on three print sources (Times, Independent, Guardian) – any more might have been too encompassing for the overall thesis study.
  - Internet materials were focused on blogs that signified the “renegade” aspect of online journalism around that period – sites that were aligned heavily with anti-war activism.
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## Secondary Materials

- Academic sources that covered the general subject of Iraq were first considered – then it was narrowed down to certain sub-topics, such as public opposition and the relationship of the media.
- An investigation was conducted into existing academia involving the internet's role – a connection was tied between the internet and activist movements (e.g. Alexander, Wolfson)
- Realisation of need to imbue academic material into case studies in order to boost argument.

## Research Process

- Resolved that the initial research focus was far too broad – narrowed down to only looking at coverage focused on the perception of Iraq and not the conflict itself.
- Need for a section on 9/11 to provide a contextual backdrop to form the first case study on – additional context was provided but had to be limited in some areas.
- Decision made to have first study revolve around certain flashpoints (primarily February 15<sup>th</sup>) and second have a broader outlook – these differences in approaches helped serve each study in their own ways.

## Thesis Findings – 2003 Case Study

- Although the political differences meant outlets had separate levels of support, coverage of anti-war movements faded across the board – both due to the WMD aspect and the rising thought that conflict was inevitable.
- Desire from newspapers to “discover” WMDs – particularly true from embedded journalists in one example.
- Online blogs presented themselves as directly opposed to the mainstream – promoting ideas of rallies that targeted news media headquarters.

## Thesis Findings – 2011 Case Study

- Mainstream media perspective on Iraq by its conclusion had a negative consensus – though there were a few examples of a maintained defense or justification.
- Anti-war movements acknowledged in a more positive light – proof of revisionism or sincere retaining of support?
- Online sphere of anti-war movements seemingly took a major hit in terms of boosting voices – factors may include end of Iraq War as a drop-off point, and the fall of blogs/forums as main sources of internet communication.

## Reflection on Theoretical Framework

- The Hallin's Spheres theorem provided an effective angle to mix aspects of a media-based study within the thesis – it allowed a way to conclude how certain topics relating to Iraq/the “war on terror” were debated/ignored.
  - Limitations arose with the internet – such a diversified spectrum of media makes it difficult to truly quantify the levels of focus.
  - This in some way encapsulates the importance of the internet in this topic – as well as how the conflict Hallin's theorem was first demonstrated in (Vietnam) compares to Iraq.
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## Statement of the Thesis

- This thesis concerns the media coverage surrounding the Iraq War, more specifically responses to negative public reactions that escalated into protests.
- The “gap” in the academic research made on this topic that this paper aims to fill is a lack of significant focus on the internet's role in this coverage as an emergent medium.
- Through doing so this thesis highlights the significance of online blogs to the sustainability of anti-war movements, as well a level of antagonism towards legacy media sources.



## Introduction

### Subject Context & Background

Various factors make the Iraq War a complex conflict to fully quantify, with a lot of these having to do with the context associated with the period. For example, how the war concluded means its timeline is up to interpretation and debate. Saddam Hussein was ousted swiftly by the occupying British/American forces that saw no alternative but to make drastic military approaches and executed by the end of 2006. But the power vacuums his upheaval had left, particularly in terms of splinter factions and fringe groups, meant that the US and UK were forced to remain in the region until the end of the decade, and even the process of withdrawal was protracted between 2009 and 2011. The Iraq War is also complex contextually in respects to the numerous long-term effects it has left on foreign policy in the US and UK, impacts that can certainly still be felt in contemporary times with matters such as the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan in 2021. It is through this angle that we can interpret that the Iraq War, even almost 15 years on from its most recent possible endpoint, is still very much a conflict with great importance in the modern workings of the parties involved.

But what is even more complex to analyse is the level of opposition towards the war. In contemporary society, the Iraq War is often regarded as one of the most significant blunders in the history of foreign policy,<sup>1</sup> and one that tarnished the legacies of the high-profile figures involved such as Tony Blair and George W. Bush. This appears to be an opinion held in consensus, any deviations from this position may be regarded with scepticism if not outright dismissal. However, for the objectives of this thesis the perspective must not simply evaluate how the mainstream media were reporting on and in ways ‘framing’ the Iraq conflict. It must look at more domestic matters, namely the various anti-war groups that seemed eager to direct public opinion on to what extent this war would be rejected.

Opposition to war has been a regular feature in exploring conflict since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is something that can be viewed from the “conscientious objectors” of the two world wars, and the student protests in America as a response to the conflict in Vietnam, which in some cases caused brutal violence and police clashes. The Iraq war was no different, and indeed the level of opposition created within led to unprecedented demonstrations. But to approach this aspect of the war, it must first be ascertained how “anti-war movements” are “defined”. There were traditional groups that were established by the time of these protests, such as the Stop the War Coalition, but we can stretch this definition to include personnel ranging from politicians, popular figures and celebrities, and even just ordinary individuals who both rejected the war and held the desire to participate in rallies bolstering this stance. Naturally, this variety of backgrounds and establishments caused fragmentation, particularly with the anti-war

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Porter, *Blunder: Britain's War in Iraq* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)

groups such as the Stop the War Coalition. But it was a variety that proved without a doubt how strong the argument not to enter the conflict appeared.

Academic sources have strengthened the extent of the relevance of anti-war movements during this period. *The World Says No to War*, for instance, specifically explores how the Iraq War was rejected by the public, using a crux point identical to one used within this study. The title is a clear indicator of how the literature frames the events, describing the demonstrations as a global consensus against the war.<sup>2</sup> Another study that signals prior literature to this facet of the conflict is *Anti-War Activism*, which holds a strong focus on exploring anti-war groups within the UK.<sup>3</sup> And Nick Thomas' work on protests and their perception through the British media provides contextual background to approaching this relationship within this specific topic.<sup>4</sup> However, while all of these works present clearly the significance of these movements at the start of the Iraq War, it is also important to understand how these demonstrations were perceived as the conflict involved, and indeed the mainstream perspective shifted. Therefore, it is crucial in this study to determine whether current perspectives are simply hindsight, or a continuation of an opinion that was popularly held throughout the conflict.

Again, quantifying this is difficult, if not outright impossible. There is simply too much primary and secondary evidence to sort through, particularly when the Iraq War still influences certain aspects such as how we view foreign policy. To study anti-war opposition towards Iraq in a truly effective way, an angle with a focus on quality rather than quantity must be assumed. What this means for this thesis is that instead of attempting to analyse the depth of the material sampled, or examining its effects in the modern day, it will investigate the content of the material itself and use this information to develop a conclusion about anti-war opposition. This qualitative analysis therefore must examine material crucial to the issue investigated.

But what type of material should be analysed, and what conclusion could be reached from the results? One example will be media, specifically newspapers and television broadcasts within the UK. From an academic viewpoint this seems to be a safe group of artefacts to start from, as media has been linked to many striking methodologies. Its relationship to conflict has been intrinsic throughout history, with innovations relating to the business of news reporting (such as photography and video) coinciding with wars such as Crimea and Vietnam. Another aspect of this relationship is the crucial role media plays in shaping the public opinion of conflict, with Iraq being no exception. Indeed, how major news outlets such as the BBC portrayed Iraq, and its opposition became another source of controversy both during and after the conflict. Detractors of the viewpoints taken by these publications encompassed the whole political spectrum,

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<sup>2</sup> Joris Verhulst, "February 15, 2003: The World Says No to War", in *The World Says No to War: Demonstrations against the War on Iraq*, ed. Stefaan Walgrave and Dieter Rucht (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 1-19.

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Gillan, Jenny Pickerill & Frank Webster, *Anti-War Activism: New Media and Protest in the Information Age*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

<sup>4</sup> Nick Thomas, "Protests Against the Vietnam War in 1960s Britain: The Relationship between Protesters and the Press." *Contemporary British History* 22 (3): 335-54.

ranging from those who accused the mainstream of having a bias towards how the government framed the conflict, as opposed to those who may have believed these publications placed a harsh light on the events in Iraq.

Historiography relating to this topic seems to take a preference towards the former argument, but of course we must consider how information may have been controlled by the government or other parties (the outcome of the Chilcot Inquiry for example) and how available said information was to media outlets at different points of time.

Regardless, this affects anti-war movements in the questions that will be asked when examining the primary material. Are these mainstream publications critical of opposition towards the Iraq War, or are they simply unsupportive? Are they ignored entirely, for whatever reason? With these questions, the potential of political bias must certainly be considered. A right-wing newspaper such as the Times would be expected to have an opposing stance on Iraq than a left-wing newspaper such as the Guardian. Indeed, throughout this thesis we can see all these questions come to light with differing outcomes. But these are areas where knowledge of historiography proves to be useful. *Pockets of Resistance* is just one example of an examination of the British media and its reporting of the Iraq War that will be present within this thesis' literature review.

But *Pockets of Resistance*, and numerous other examinations of this aspect of the Iraq War in previous years have held a common oversight. While print media and visual media are popular areas of investigation, with this thesis being no different, there is one aspect of news media that has been largely overlooked by historiography: that being the influence of the internet. In contemporary society, the online world has assimilated both the media industry and its social connectivity, to the extent that news globally travels exponentially faster than it may have done two decades ago. This unprecedented rise of internet media carries its own dangers and flaws, specifically its lack of regulation and penchant to spread 'fake news'. But while the internet wasn't as critical to everyday life in the 2000s, it still held an influence that historians might not have truly linked to the conflicts within that period. *Pockets of Resistance*, for example, acknowledges its utility for journalists at the time, but doesn't seem to recognise its potential in boosting the voices of anti-war movements.

That is how the internet will be used as another type of material to analyse. Whereas the mainstream media possibly overlooked or criticised opposition to the Iraq War, the internet was used as an outlet to boost these anti-war voices, ensuring their relevance in the Iraq debate and in some cases directly sustaining the support for anti-war activism. Its presence as an emergent medium is comparable to what was purported about the television's effects on the Vietnam War, as outlined further in the literature review section. This line of thought has been explored through examining certain blogs, such as Indymedia and Medialens, that reported on the Iraq War and the protests against said conflict. Displaying how the internet changed anti-war movements against Iraq fills a 'gap' that can be found in this area of study. But with studying the internet this way, one fact must be considered. Just as there were blogs supporting opposition to war, that were to some extent rallying against the mainstream for how their portrayals

and perspectives, there also exists evidence of an opposing force critical of the media for the opposite reasons. This resembles much of the controversy previously mentioned when discussing the UK media and the Iraq War, but with a far greater sense of insurgency. After all, the internet proved difficult to properly regulate in the early 2000s.

As for the methodology behind the mainstream in an apparent opposite to this critical medium, particularly in terms of how the material data was chosen and accessed, the analysed newspapers are the Times, the Independent and the Guardian, as the first two outlets were easy to access specific archives, and failing that browser searches with specific keywords provided me with sufficient findings. The BBC seemed an easy pick for broadcast media, since its presence in the British media and stance on controversial matters like Iraq provided intrigue. There were other aspects of the mainstream, such as radio and the tabloids, that seemed appropriate to omit to not stretch this thesis too thin in trying to reach every corner of the media sphere (although radio's role in the Gilligan affair cannot be overlooked entirely).

### Case Studies

Now that the primary material has been solidified, periods of time within the Iraq War must be identified for analysis. This study will be comparative in nature, and by utilising two contrasting points, it will be more effective to illustrate the portrayal of anti-war movements. The first of these case studies will be centred around 2003, in the months leading up to the invasion of Iraq by British and American forces. More specifically, this case study will focus on the mass rallies and anti-war movements against the invasion during this period, the most significant of which being the February 15<sup>th</sup> protests. Within this time, both the UK mainstream media and internet blogs will be analysed from separate angles, considering multiple factors. For the former, it will be explored how the anti-war perspective was portrayed by the mainstream before February 2003, in certain terms of how prevalent the talking points were brought to light and the consensus on said arguments.

Relevant historical context must also be referenced thoroughly throughout this chapter to show how certain outlooks were affected and to display the background to the Iraq War in general. For example, 9/11 forms a prominent section of this first case study, since the backdrop it provides the Iraq War and the metaphors associated with the overall "war on terror" is crucial to understand, particularly in terms of its media analysis.

However, the overall focus of this section of the thesis will be the mass protests in February 2003 and displaying examples of how they were treated by the mass media. Was there a realisation within certain outlets that there was an evident opposition to war by a significant portion of the public? Was there a clear antagonism towards protests by other sources, using certain disparaging terms such as 'Saddam's useful idiots?' Or, as previously suggested, were the protests simply overlooked, either immediately following their occurrence or due to a lack of focus in the aftermath? This will be crucial in determining how UK newspapers and broadcasters held stances on

different factors of this event, which in some cases resulted in opposing articles and editorials within the same outlet.

The internet will be explored in this case study through comparison of blog reports to mainstream reporting. Examples of these blog posts will be those that display accounts of the February 15<sup>th</sup> rallies (e.g. those that display examples of violence against protests) as well as those that provide access to the workings of anti-war figures during this time (e.g. Noam Chomsky). What we will mainly search for in this section, however, is the antagonism these parts of the internet held towards the mainstream media. Is there direct criticism of how particular outlets handled anti-war movements and the government's response to those voices? In this regard, it seems likely that this kind of animosity will be mostly one-sided, although we must consider the full picture to be far more complex.

The second case study will be focused on the situation in Iraq in 2011. This year represents a moment where the conflict had truly become complex, as well as when the US withdrew their troops from Iraq. For this thesis, analysing 2011, rather than tying it to one event, should be more beneficial in terms of displaying the immediate aftermath of the war, and in particular the type of hindsight associated with it. This is around the time you would see the idea that the invasion of Iraq was a 'mistake' become more prevalent, and opinions that were previously dismissed (e.g. the idea that gaining control of Iraq's oil supply was part of the motivation behind the invasion) be more likely to be accepted by the mainstream consensus. But what is most important within this period regarding the mainstream media is if their stance on anti-war movements changes in any way. If they were ignored in 2003, does that continue into this stage of the conflict? Does outward antagonism shift into at least a recognition that these protests should have been paid more attention to in prior material (although we can't anticipate that these outlets would acknowledge apparent prior faults)?

Another aspect of mainstream media in this period where Iraq begins to be viewed as within the past tense is how it is related to then current conflicts, Afghanistan and Libya being examples of how the conflict was used as a point of comparison. With the negative perception the UK government's handling of Iraq may have garnered by this point of time, would further tests of foreign policy provide a better perception of anti-war movements by mainstream outlets? Or would there continue to be a lack of support, or perhaps rather a lack of interest in displaying these protests?

Regarding how the internet will be analysed within this chapter, it will involve a mirrored approach of sorts. Rather than analyse the material through measuring a potential increase in the discussion of anti-war movements, it will look at how the internet's support of these movements may have been reduced by 2011. This can be considered a result of multiple factors. The closing of several blogs that once provided a voice for protests against the invasion (and the lack of general interest in blogs by the New 10s, a result of the rise of social networks), the emergence of right wing news sites (there had been a conservative presence within the internet as far back as 2003, but none garnered the same level of prominence that InfoWars and Breitbart had), as well as a greater

desire from the government to regulate the internet, particularly after events such as the WikiLeaks scandal. And of course, it must be considered that the anti-war movements themselves had fragmented by this stage, and internet activism was focused on other topics (e.g. economic crises). Overall, it is crucial to show that it wasn't just the mainstream media who had their stance on opposition to war shifted by 2011.

#### 'Methods' of study – Historical and media-based

For this thesis to possess meaning, it must hold a perspective centred within the field of media study. But what does this mean, exactly? In the view of this thesis, this means utilising a theoretical framework to boost the strength of the analysis, such as highlighting how the media viewed dissent or how the ownership of media may have played a part in influencing negative portrayals. But in this scenario, the most effective framework will be the 'Hallin's Spheres' theorem, which specialises in the idea of consensus within the mainstream media. Further details on the workings of this theorem, and how it can be connected to the research of the project will be within the literature review section of this thesis.

Additionally, it is important to stress the differences between a historical study and a media-based study. Certainly, there is an overlap between the two, such as in the way primary materials are approached. But in terms of contrasts, one of the primary divisions is the focus of the analysis. For a historical study this would typically be the historiography of the topic, or primary artefacts. For a media-based study, however, this would instead be the different types of media that may be analysed within a certain project, with a greater focus on phrases and metaphors used within the material. These can have differing effects on the approaches taken towards research studies such as this one. Additionally, a further difference between these two fields of study is the perspective that would be taken with the overall project. A historical study would usually be viewed from a balanced perspective, considering all notable stances towards the topic or chosen matter of debate. By contrast, a study within the field of media may only consider one perspective and base their research upon displaying that perspective within the sampled primary material.

The point of explaining the differences and similarities between these two approaches to research is to explain what the approach to this thesis will look like. Specifically, this thesis will be based within the field of media studies but taken from a historian's perspective. By looking at the material in this way, it should be possible to utilise the necessary historical context and historiography in tandem with theoretical frameworks and its use in studying the primary material; while also allowing the consideration of every perspective towards the issues investigated.

The historiography that will be studied within this thesis will focus in on different aspects of the topic of the Iraq War. Of course, those with a specific exploration of anti-war movements and their media portrayal will be the sources given the most attention, but other aspects such as coverage of the war itself, the US media's role in broadcasting anti-war movements as well as studies into the framing associated with the 'war on

terror’ and its implications on foreign policies. These historiographies do have limitations in being applied to this project, whether due to a lack of focus on the internet or the UK mainstream, or a lack of consideration for alternative perspectives. These limitations will be identified and evaluated within their analysis in the literature review.

### Research Questions

To conclude, the precise questions and aims that this thesis will seek to solve must be established. In this regard, the primary question is discovering the differences in the media’s coverage of both periods. By ascertaining and illustrating what changes were made to how the media viewed Iraq, and by extension anti-war groups, it will showcase how exactly the narrative on the war had changed at its beginning and end, and potential reasons for this shift.

A secondary question, and one that holds thematic value in terms of the identified “gap” that this thesis aims to fill, is examining the precise role of the internet in this topic. This can range from analysing how the portrayal of anti-war movements was different between the mainstream and a more “independent” online facet, to how the presence of the internet itself as a new form of medium presented both an innovative perspective and potential issues in narrative control. The latter may best be viewed in the relationship between mainstream and online media, a theme that will often be brought to attention across this text.

Contextually as well, identifying the main factors in how these shifts and similarities in media perspectives occurred is also integral to the objectives of this thesis. Some may be of historical importance, such as political changes or certain events within the Iraq War itself that deeply affected how the public – and the media sources themselves – supported the conflict. But they can also have to do with a simple movement in media focus, as illustrated by the methodology section of this thesis – identifying how and when certain aspects of the Iraq War became often or rarely reported in is crucial to understanding these potential perspective shifts.

Overall, this thesis will aim to discover how exactly anti-war opposition to the invasion of Iraq was portrayed differently by the UK media and independent internet blogs, and how these portrayals may have shifted positively or negatively by the war’s conclusion. This thesis will also, to some extent, identify some of the factors associated with this shift, such as the metaphors of the ‘war on terror’ fading away from focus or political shifts within the nations associated with the invasion. These are goals that will be elaborated on slightly throughout the course of the literature review.

# Literature Review

## Introduction

Within this thesis, I have considered a variety of historiography, all covering crucial areas for the research. These areas include evaluation of anti-war movements over time, to show some of the context behind the protests against the invasion of Iraq, analysis of the media's role in covering Iraq, providing a glimpse into academic perspectives with how they portrayed opposition to war, and material published on the conflict in general. This section of the thesis will analyse secondary sources and display their significance in relation to my research, but in addition, it will also show their limitations and how this project may be able to fill these potential gaps.

## UK News Media & Iraq

One piece of literature that has informed my research is *Pockets of Resistance: British news media, war and theory in the 2003 invasion of Iraq*, by Piers Robinson, Peter Goddard, Katy Parry and Craig Murray.<sup>5</sup> This collaborative study explores the debate over the role of the media in the coverage of the Iraq War and attempts to determine where the truth lies between opposing accusations of bias against UK media coverage. This approach, along with the fact that this material was published a few years after the war had reached its conclusion, means it holds a lot of relevance in this thesis.

From the very beginning of the study, it becomes apparent that the authors want to highlight that news media is integral to the development of conflict. This also highlights how modern aspects have made this more prevalent, such as the concept of a 24-hour news cycle and the utility of the internet.<sup>6</sup> But a major part of this study focuses on the patterns throughout time of national censorship of mainstream criticism, tendencies to appeal to the patriotism of the consumer base, and an overt focus to play up themes of heroism and drama. Each of these themes can be found in the coverage of Iraq, and some of this linked to the media's focus on anti-war movements. What is established as central to the analysis of this study, mainly in how the topic of British mainstream media is approached, is the disagreements within the media in how they presented opposition to the invasion, as well as the criticism of said portrayals.<sup>7</sup> Utilising this context within the study is somewhat like my approach, and viewing how this study handles a lack of media consensus can certainly help my own. Another similarity to my study is that the authors have also identified the need to establish an analytical framework<sup>8</sup>. The theorem they use specifically takes the form of multiple media performance models, different interpretations of how supportive news coverage was of government conflict aims. Throughout this section, I will detail examples of how this study utilises this

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<sup>5</sup> Piers Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance: British news media, war and theory in the 2003 invasion of Iraq* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010)

<sup>6</sup> Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance*, 1

<sup>7</sup> Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance*, 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance*, 3-5.

framework to show a perspective of the research material and explain their utility in terms of my own perspective.

To start, this study uses prior conflicts, such as Vietnam, the protests they caused and the reaction of said opposition from the media, as a backdrop to compare Iraq to. Throughout this context, the authors utilise prior analytical perspectives on each case study, including the works of Daniel Hallin.<sup>9</sup> I will explore how this research explores Hallin's theorems in the "Theoretical Framework" section of this chapter. What this study seems to suggest from using both historical and theoretical context is that the invasion of Iraq was a crucial turning point in terms of political attempts to influence the news, as well as how said mainstream tried to maintain its independence.<sup>10</sup> This context also shows that in comparison to prior conflicts where news media would traditionally side more with the government's perspective, the reaction to Iraq was much more polarising in this aspect.

The concept that Iraq as a conflict broke the precedent of media coverage of war is explored further throughout the study. For example, a line of reasoning providing for this 'unique' approach was the 'death of ideology' coinciding with the end of the Cold War.<sup>11</sup> There was either a difficulty or a lack of interest by the media to invoke those patriotic feelings as a way of stoking popularity, at least with British outlets. There's an argument that while terrorism could be portrayed in the same way Communism had been in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it couldn't be perceived at the same extent of potential danger. On the other hand, one may argue against this stance, when taking into consideration that the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and 'war on terror' rhetoric in general showed a vast amount of patriotic fervour within the US (and even in the UK, certain tabloids did not cease the framing of soldiers as "our boys") Nonetheless, this idea of the media no longer siding with ideology by the time of the Iraq invasion establishes a possible argument that the mainstream had greater independence with their coverage.

Throughout this study, one trend can be found that may be a flaw within the research, that being the lack of focus on online media. While the internet is referred to multiple times within the study, particularly in the context of the conflict in Iraq, and its use in terms of allowing greater access to news outlets and potentially providing alternative viewpoints is firmly acknowledged, the online anti-war voices themselves are not given a large extent of coverage by the authors here. This isn't a fundamental issue with the study's structure, as it clearly wants to focus only on the mainstream, and it does crucially display how the online world bolstered a global public sphere for the traditional media to exist within. But these renegade outlets the internet created must also be accounted for, and their presence within the debate surrounding the invasion holds significance for the topic.

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<sup>9</sup> Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance*, 14-15

<sup>10</sup> Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance*, 25.

But there are academic materials that do touch upon this topic directly. Alistair Alexander's work, for example, makes the claim that the web "came of age" in the advent of 9/11, and directly links its use as a technology to "disrupt" the flow of the Iraq conflict.<sup>12</sup> Other works that explore this link between the internet and the growth of activist movements include Todd Wolfson's *Digital Rebellion*<sup>13</sup> and Stuart Allan's *Online News*.<sup>14</sup>

What *Pockets of Resistance* suggests is that these new developments should have created an environment with coverage of Iraq where the UK mainstream media were less dependent on the government, particularly in attempts to influence the news agenda, therefore making this conflict unique in terms of its predecessors and their media output.<sup>15</sup> However, an argument put forward by this study is that alternative avenues were perhaps rarely considered by the media, and that the 'war on terror' and the concepts associated with it potentially forced these outlets to frame the conflict in a certain way.<sup>16</sup> But at the same time, a contradiction is also put forward that parts of the media did show criticism of the invasion and its handling, which in turn caused pressure towards the broadcasting by a government concerned with the perception of the Iraq War. What this situation creates is a split consensus on what the UK media's stance on the invasion and importantly its opposition was, with accusations of bias produced from both sides of the political spectrum. This clearly highlights a factor of what is a diverse spread of newspapers in terms of their political allegiances, an obstacle I will confront through exploring the primary material.

Similar historiography that delves into a journalist's perspective of the Iraq conflict includes *So Wrong for So Long: How the Press, the Pundits, and the President Failed on Iraq* by Greg Mitchell, which holds a critical view of how the US media handled and portrayed the invasion of Iraq and its surrounding discourse<sup>17</sup>, as well as *Weapons of Mass Persuasion: Marketing the War Against Iraq* by Paul Rutherford, which displays some of the tactics the Bush administration utilised in attempting to shape public opinion regarding the conflict.<sup>18</sup> *The War We Could Not Stop: The Real Story of the Battle for Iraq* by Randeep Ramesh also holds interest as it displays first-hand perspectives of UK journalists embedded within the invading force in Iraq, showing an unique collection

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<sup>12</sup> Alistair Alexander, "Disruptive Technology: Iraq and the Internet", *Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media Distortion in the Attack on Iraq*, ed. David Miller (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 277-285

<sup>13</sup> Todd Wolfson, *Digital Rebellion: The Birth of the Cyber Left* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014)

<sup>14</sup> Stuart Allan, *Online News: Journalism and the Internet* (Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education, 2006)

<sup>15</sup> Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance*, 27.

<sup>16</sup> Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance*, 38.

<sup>17</sup> Greg Mitchell, *So Wrong for So Long: How the Press, the Pundits, and the President failed in Iraq* (New York: Union Square, 2008)

<sup>18</sup> Paul Rutherford, *Weapons of Mass Persuasion: Marketing the War Against Iraq* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004)

of reports that also may display some of the limitations placed on these journalists by higher authorities.<sup>19</sup>

### Media & War

An aspect of the historiography that will also be essential is an exploration of the general advancement of media leading up to the Iraq conflict and its connection to the perceptions of war in its visual portrayal. Media journalism has been prevalent within the theatre of conflict since the Crimean War, and with each innovation the reporting of war has taken on greater depth and accessibility. Showing these innovations in comparison to how the internet was utilised with the Iraq War may be significantly interesting. An example of a secondary source that follows this line of thought is *The Media at War* by Susan Carruthers, which investigates this seemingly symbiotic relationship between media and war and serves as a partial inspiration for the topic of this thesis.<sup>20</sup>

As Carruthers quickly establishes in her study, the evidence showing media's connection with war in terms of their respective innovations can be shown in the popularisation of certain forms of medium. The rise of still photography, for example, can be traced back to its usage in the American Civil War to illustrate to the reader the aftermath of conflict in its reality, rather than an artist's impression. Cinematography was used to portray the Spanish-American War at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century not long after its commercial establishment, although much of the footage was discovered to be inauthentic.<sup>21</sup> As Carruthers suggests, the symbiosis between media and war helped benefit both. A new conflict naturally bolsters demand for newspapers and broadcasts to be supplied with the latest updates, and the coverage of the war itself appealed to feelings of patriotism to boost the war effort. This concept can be shown in how the US government transformed Hollywood into a 'war industry' during WW2, and allegedly considered adopting a similar tactic as the 'war on terror' began.<sup>22</sup>

However, Carruthers also shows the opposing power of media to damage war. The images shown to American audiences during the Vietnam War are shown as potential proof of this<sup>23</sup>, the sights of the violent measures taken in the battlefield and the brutality inflicted on protesting students on campuses has been seen by some academics as a major factor in why the conflict went so poorly for the US, and why television, which in the 1960s became far more prominent in terms of how Western audiences accessed the news, is commonly associated with Vietnam. But to look at it in another way, the fact there isn't a significant amount of historical evidence to support this viewpoint in the first place, and that what the proof actually signals is that the main demographic viewing this coverage frequently held a hardline stance towards the

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<sup>19</sup> Randeep Ramesh, *The War We Could Not Stop: The Real Story of the Battle for Iraq* (Faber & Faber, 2003)

<sup>20</sup> Susan Carruthers, *The Media at War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011)

<sup>21</sup> Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 1-3.

<sup>22</sup> Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 4.

conflict one way or the other, suggests the television audience at large were unlikely to have had their perspective changed by what was broadcasted.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, Carruthers accepts that Vietnam has come to be known as the ‘television war’, and through that line of reasoning she also suggests that Iraq might be known as the ‘YouTube war’.<sup>25</sup>

This part of Carruthers’ study is partially responsible for the direction of this thesis. It clearly links an innovation in media, the internet, with the conflict in Iraq, and shows that its effects on the war were significant and potentially disruptive in terms of its outcome. In Carruthers’ terms, she relates it in terms of how both media may have frustrated the government. To ‘sell’ war, media would need to follow a certain strategy in terms of presentation, or else the public might begin voicing for immediate forfeiture of the government’s goals in the conflict.<sup>26</sup> Both the television and the internet, particularly the latter, may have presented an unique, ‘renegade’ style of reporting that may have been contradictory to this strategy, thus affecting the government’s general reputation. There are other factors in why a war might not be ‘sold’ to the public, such as a feeling of the war ‘dragging on’ which may lead to apathy from the media itself to report on the conflict for example, UK coverage on Iraq lessening after 2003). But overall, what this all shows is how deeply embedded the relationship between media and war is, and how important it is for both sides that this connection holds more benefit.

One avenue Carruthers explores this concept in the context of Iraq is through how British and American media interpreted WMDs in the build-up to the invasion. As the study makes evident, the prospect of Saddam possessing what was likely to be a nuclear arsenal was provided as the major justification behind the invasion in its preceding weeks and until it became clear that no such weapons existed in Iraq. Carruthers shows evidence that these claims were supported by some mainstream outlets in late 2002/early 2003, although these reports soon came under disrepute. But this scepticism would be overlooked in the face of an institution such as NYT affirming these reports, and Carruthers uses this belief to argue that these types of early reports boosted American and British justification for the Iraq War.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to this, Carruthers interprets how broadcast news may have supported the incorrect consensus that Iraq had ties with Al-Qaeda and therefore 9/11, an emotionally resonant justification for war that saw little correlation in 2001-02 which significantly rose in 2003-04. In the sphere of US media, Carruthers reasons that there was a movement by the Bush administration to establish a link between 9/11 and Iraq within the public, and Fox News is listed as a conduit for this connection.<sup>28</sup> While Saddam wasn’t explicitly accused of involvement with the attack, he received to some extent blame by association, the ‘terrorism’ behind 9/11 being used in the same breath as the

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<sup>24</sup> Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 112.

<sup>25</sup> Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 4-5.

<sup>26</sup> Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 5-7.

<sup>27</sup> Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 29-31.

<sup>28</sup> Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 30.

‘terror state’ of Iraq. It’s this type of media framing that forms the bedrock behind why the US government portrayed the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan as a ‘war on terror’. It would seem easier to sell the plot to depose Saddam to the public if it was depicted as a step closer to vanquishing terrorism as a concept.

Beyond providing this study with a lens to view the invasion of Iraq and its opposition, Carruthers’ work has proven largely significant in the fact that shows the different concepts utilised by the US government to direct a positive media portrayal of the conflict. Stoking themes of patriotism (which presents a contradiction with what was claimed in *Pockets of Resistance*) after the events of 9/11, as well as placing the war within a wider crusade against terrorism, indicates how the media may have circumvented the voices of anti-war movements. The limitation with this study is that Carruthers doesn’t overtly explore these movements, instead mainly focusing on coverage of the invasion itself, and it is also more focused on American depictions. But in general, this doesn’t lessen the usefulness of the information provided.

Other secondary material has been identified that pursues the relationship of media and war in a similar direction to Carruthers’ study. *At War with Metaphor: Media, Propaganda & Racism in the War on Terror* by Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills also explores the concepts associated with Iraq and the wider ‘war on terror’ and additionally relates them to discrimination of Muslims in the US during the 2000s.<sup>29</sup> *Selling War: The Role of the Mass Media in Hostile Conflicts from World War I to the War on Terror* is an edited collection that also explores the idea of the government having to ‘sell’ a war to the public in order for their campaign to be effective, and does so similarly to Carruthers by linking multiple major conflicts to the state of news media at that time.<sup>30</sup>

## **Methodology**

The following section will concern the chosen approaches to covering the research and topics associated with this thesis, and the rationale for analysing through these paths. By doing so, it should provide clarity on how this study was conducted and put together, as well as connect to the designated research aims and objectives to some extent. This section will start by displaying the design of the theoretical framework chosen to support the thesis and the reasons behind selecting said framework, before moving on to discussing how and why certain primary and secondary sources were selected for evaluation. Finally, thoughts will be provided on how effective these methodological approaches were, the limitations encountered in certain areas, and what could have been accomplished better in a re-examination of the resources available.

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<sup>29</sup> Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills, *At War with Metaphor: Media, Propaganda & Racism in the War on Terror* (Blue Ridge Summit: Lexington, 2008)

<sup>30</sup> Josef Seethaler, *Selling War: The Role of the Mass Media in Hostile Conflicts from World War I to the War on Terror* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013)

### Mainstream sources – newspaper/broadcast selections, omission of certain aspects

Within this thesis, three sources of UK print media have been selected for research and analysis – *The Times*, *The Independent* and *The Guardian*. The rationale for doing so with all of these is that it would provide a wide variety of views within the political spectrum – something that would illustrate the polarisation within the mainstream journalistic sphere. *The Times*, as an outlet leaning more to the centre-right, might hold hawkish and patriotic attributes that could see them inclined to be in full support of initiating the conflict, but with Labour in power at the time they could have also shown an eagerness to reject their policy. *The Independent*, meanwhile, lean more towards the centre-left, and as such would have more of an allegiance to the Liberal Democrats who were firmly against the Iraq War in the build-up to its start. Therefore, one can assume that they would have strongly backed anti-war voices at some point. And finally, while *The Guardian's* party of choice tended to be Labour, their status as a firmly left-wing news source might have led them to support the wing of the party that opposed Blair's desire to enter the conflict. All cases gave these sources a high level of intrigue in examining.

Other print sources were considered as being potentially useful in researching the topic but were ultimately overlooked primarily due to ensuring that the sample size for analysis was concise enough to be effective. For example, tabloids such as *The Sun* provided a level of intrigue in how the mainstream could portray the conflict and anti-war groups using more frivolous language. Tabloids could also be considered as far more willing to utilise themes of patriotism to provoke that sort of sentiment within its reader base. Other outlets across the spectrum, such as *The Telegraph* were also considered as having an useful perspective. Overall, while this thesis only opts to use three sources of print media, the presence of others further cements the point that UK newspapers were spread across a wide political landscape, which proves a particular challenge in developing a consensus on the perspective of Iraq.

But how were these sources accessed, and what parts of their material needed to be analysed the most? In this regard, a mostly intact collection of relevant papers and articles was gathered using online backlogs, such as the *Times Digital Archive*. Using these resources provided a solid base in terms of accessibility and gave some level of insight when choosing what sources to fully analyse. As for how these materials were sampled, an equal level of priority went into both regular bulletins and opinion articles, for different reasons. The former was useful in signalling how the conflict and extent of opposition was framed, both in terms of framing and imagery used. The latter, meanwhile, displayed an in-depth landscape of what type of viewpoints each outlet was willing to promote regarding Iraq, while the names of some of the people writing these articles also raised interesting points (e.g. Charles Kennedy and Jack Straw). Setting a balance between these types of materials is therefore essential to effectively displaying their traits.

As for broadcasting, the BBC was selected as the primary node of research, since its goal of maintaining an impartial nature provided a sharp contrast from the spectrum that the print sources were poised on. In another difference to how the newspapers

were examined, the decision was also made to place the focus on certain genres of programming, such as investigative documentaries and shows dealing with current affairs. This was done to look beyond how they may have presented the conflict matter-of-factly as a news service, while within its programming there was a more pointed consensus. To boost this approach, the specific shows chosen were Panorama, an investigative documentary series, and Newsnight, an analytical perspective of the week's headlines that often featured interviews and segments with notable political figures. Both would almost certainly have the biggest flashpoints regarding Iraq and its opposition front and centre when they occurred and could show a far different viewpoint that the print media sources could not, particularly with the style of programming such as Newsnight's interviews with figures such as Blair.

Again, internet archives were used to ascertain when and how both programmes covered Iraq and/or anti-war groups. BoB was the main method in achieving this, as its backlog allowed access to a small selection of broadcasts that illustrated what the controlling topics of the time seemed to be. Failing that, the BBC website itself had transcripts and synopses from both Newsnight and Panorama that were still crucial to signalling how each programme covered the conflict. Meanwhile, an example of a broadcast source that was ultimately omitted from the research is radio, since it was considered that the sample of materials it could provide wasn't as integral to the goals of the thesis as visual broadcasting. However, it cannot be denied that radio media had its uses within the topic, and this should have been acknowledged within the text. In addition, it was also decided to only focus on the BBC for broadcast media, rather than alternative outlets such as ITV and Sky News.

#### Online media sources – ways of access and limitations

Online blogs were identified as the best way to explore the internet's perspective on this topic, the examples chosen for sampling being Indymedia and Medialens. Both were selected as they provided frequent news updates that were aligned on the political left, with said updates often involving social concerns and matters that were perhaps overlooked in the mainstream. These concerns held a global focus with a similar range in terms of audience, and both promoted certain prominent figures such as Noam Chomsky. As such, it could be assumed that they were fully supportive of the anti-war movements in their reports on Iraq and its public perception. To access both blogs, the Wayback Archive was used to access records on certain relevant dates, such as 15th February 2003. This would allow a full display of how frequently the topic of Iraq was being covered at these points, and the specific perspective they were presenting to those engaging with the website. Using the data ascertaining from both angles, it could provide a partial look at how the internet's role in boosting anti-war voices shifted and altered over time.

However, there were some limitations identified with this part of the methodology. For instance, while the Wayback Archive did provide a glance at certain blog updates within 2003, it was not a comprehensive backlog that fully encompassed the year's events, and as such there were several missing dates that limited the amount of material

available to be examined. While these gaps weren't overly damaging to what could be analysed, it did provide a challenge in terms of truly encompassing the extent to which Indymedia and Medialens engaged with the actions of anti-war groups.

What should also be acknowledged is the other facets of the internet within the time periods covered that can also provide useful data on the topic. For starters, while this research covers purely blogs that were closely aligned to the anti-war movements, the presence of similar sites more closely leaning towards the right wing should also be noted. Some of these blogs were strongly tied to the military, if not established by soldiers embedded in the frontline themselves; and would therefore be considered to have a strong approval of the war offensive and a sharp rejection of any resistance to the conflict. In addition, other nodes of discussion that overtook blogs and forums in popularity must also be considered in terms of their impact, the most prominent being social media.

### Theoretical Framework

As referenced at numerous points so far in this study, a theoretical model will need to be adopted to fully support the examination of the primary material sampled. What has also been noted frequently is the name of this model, that being the "Hallin's Spheres" theorem devised by Daniel C. Hallin. This framework was used in the context of the Vietnam War, specifically Hallin's book *The Uncensored War: The Media & Vietnam*.<sup>31</sup> As can be implied through the title, this theorem was utilised within the context of studying media and its approximation to war. As such, displaying how Hallin describes this theorem and uses it to analyse primary media artefacts will be useful in showing how significant this model is in depicting the work studied in this thesis.

Hallin states his model was an attempt to hold a complex view towards televised journalism, which he considered a much less objective perspective than their print counterparts. A journalist in broadcast news was more likely to act as a 'patriot' rather than an observer without an interest in the outcome, and as such may have acted much more subjectively.<sup>32</sup> To combat this, Hallin created his theorem to better represent a more diversified media perspective.

The "Hallin's Spheres" theorem consists of three separate spheres that media operates in. The first of these spheres is the "sphere of consensus", which concerns perspectives usually agreed upon by both media and public opinion. Therefore, there isn't really a compulsion from journalists to really debate these topics, instead their motivation is to present these viewpoints as objective fact. The second sphere is the "sphere of legitimate controversy". This concerns matters that are held in a more subjective light and thus hold more potential for argument. Naturally, topics held within this sphere are usually what the media is most interested in, particularly if it involves to some extent a particularly partisan matter such as the two-party system in America or indeed, the

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<sup>31</sup> Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media & Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986)

<sup>32</sup> Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 116.

effect of anti-war movements. Finally, the last sphere is the “sphere of deviance”. This concerns matters that are considered too beyond the political or public mainstream to be voiced as a legitimate perspective, an example Hallin gives being the devotion of screentime to the Communist Party. What Hallin establishes with these spheres are not solid, and that there is a clear overlap where a certain topic may encompass multiple spheres or even migrate from one to the other. And this can be shown in how Hallin relates his theorem to Vietnam. At multiple points throughout the conflict, matters such as America’s performance in the war, the rise in public protests and the response they were met with, and even the mention of Vietnam itself all migrated through different spheres. This can be attributed to certain factors, such as a perceived pressure from Congress to not be shown as antagonistic towards the American troops serving in Vietnam, or conversely a realisation that public reaction against Vietnam was so strong that certain topics could not remain in the sphere of deviance.

As previously stated, *Pockets of Resistance* elaborates further on this theorem. Specifically, this study interprets that Hallin’s work attempted to challenge the claim that the journalistic consensus towards Vietnam during its span was negative overall. In this, it is asserted that Hallin indeed finds evidence that news media coverage was mostly supportive of the war effort and related this to the sphere of consensus. The first clear signs of opposition to Vietnam from within a journalistic consensus didn’t occur until 1968 and even then, according to Hallin this was due to a rising split within the government itself over the approach to war at that point.<sup>33</sup> As *Pockets of Resistance* makes clear, this is what the sphere of legitimate controversy consisted of, and the sphere of deviance mostly concerned fundamental criticism over the war itself, Hallin noting perceptions of immorality were ‘simply not on the news agenda’. *Pockets of Resistance* referencing his findings shows how other historians studying media and Iraq have found his framework significant.

There are some areas with the Hallin’s Spheres theorem that create an issue with adopting it for a study for Iraq. Firstly, Vietnam is shown to be a much different context than Iraq. Hallin frequently mentions Communism and the need to be evidently anti-Communist as potential effects on how print and broadcast news approached their coverage on Vietnam. While terrorism was presented as a similar conceptual villain on the government and media within the ‘war on terror’, it didn’t have quite the same extent of influence on public opinion as Communism did, although events such as 9/11 did present a domestic threat more real than anything during the Cold War. Additionally, Hallin himself has noted that his theorem requires a media landscape that is not fragmented.<sup>34</sup> While with Vietnam the only deviation in American media was television journalism presenting more complexities in terms of approaching the conflict, the internet’s usage of Iraq was that of a ‘renegade’ media that would have a significantly differing opinion to the mainstream consensus. The political spectrum within the media is also so wide that it fractures the landscape, therefore making it harder to organise

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<sup>33</sup> Robinson et al, *Pockets of Resistance*, 14-15.

<sup>34</sup> WNYC, “Does NPR have a liberal bias?”, *On the Media from NPR*. 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2011.

each relevant topic into the different spheres. But overall, I think adopting Hallin's framework will be a wise approach to initiating a media-based study, and prior historiography has shown that this model has previously been looked at regarding the Iraq War.

### Reflection on Qualitative Study

To best reflect on possible modes of study and why the method of a qualitative approach was selected over something more quantitative, academic research would help in illustrating the reasoning. *Media at War: The Iraq Crisis* is an example of previous literature that achieves this, examining similar primary material to this study through both a qualitative and quantitative lens to signal the tone of UK media in Iraq's "pre-invasion phase".<sup>35</sup> It is with their own conclusions that we can see the benefits of a qualitative approach in this particular thesis, as they discuss that while the collecting of simple data fully displayed the rift in positive and negative reaction by the contrasting political wings of the British newspaper landscape, it is also noted that it "underestimates" some of the patterns and trends that might have been ascertained from the actual reporting, which could be identified with the opposite approach. For example, a sampling of how each outlet responded to the Blix report of January 2003 describes how the *Mirror* and the *Guardian* interpreted it as a non-justification of the proposal to invade Iraq (with the latter going as far as to condemn the UK and US governments for making an opposing inference), though they both note aspects of the report that implicate Iraq and Saddam specifically; on the other hand, the *Telegraph* states that the report does support the policy, and while the *Mail* shows slightly more restraint, the study notes that their hostility to Blair's government might have caused some discrepancies.<sup>36</sup> And with this approach, the study shows precisely how the policy on Iraq was criticised or praised, and in the study's own words, how media coverage seemed to "conform to a pattern of political allegiance." This extended to what is viewed as a desire to seek facts that suited a specific newspaper's own predisposition, but also a sort of mass consensus in terms of covering the major flashpoints associated with this preceding point of the conflict. It is in this regard that the study poses the idea that news outlets were hesitant to raise a difference in opinion than what fit their respective demographics, a viewpoint that would have brought criticism from anti-war groups whose efforts may have been deemed too "radical" to support by any facet of the mainstream print media. But it also solidifies why it was crucial for this specific study to hold a qualitative stance, to display what exactly these firm opinions were.<sup>37</sup>

Another example of a source that describes the use and benefits of a qualitative approach to analysing media coverage is *News Discourse*, by Monika Bednarek and Helen Caple. The source does this by performing a case study of stand-alone stories from one outlet, therefore sampling across a period of issue releases rather than

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<sup>35</sup> Howard Tumber & Jerry Palmer, *Media at War: The Iraq Crisis* (London: Sage, 2004), 77-95.

<sup>36</sup> Tumber & Palmer, *Media at War*, 85-86.

<sup>37</sup> Tumber & Palmer, *Media at War*, 86-94.

focusing on one specific topic. From there, the source separates articles into “soft news”, referring to human interest stories and similar styles, and “hard news” which usually concerned more consequential events of importance. By doing this, the source can fully evaluate a variety of articles ascertained from the selected outlet, identifying themes and patterns in everything from the page image, the composition to the article, and the meaning of the words used in the headline. But it also splits them into differing categories, showing perhaps how different frames are required/opted for when approaching news stories of a certain priority or “hardness”.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

To conclude, this section should signal how certain decisions were made in regards to selecting the right approach to collecting primary material or omitting certain sources from the sample, and how these choices were based on fulfilling the aims and objectives set out prior to research. In the interest of examining print media, this concerned ensuring that the political spectrum was effectively displayed in some way, with outlets from either side portrayed, while tabloids were ultimately overlooked for potentially being far more different and informal than the established levels from the three selected sources. With broadcast media meanwhile, a contrast was ascertained with the BBC and its desire to remain impartial, and through the programmes chosen to analyse the thesis could challenge that nature via evaluation of investigations and interviews. This commandment also stretched to BBC’s radio coverage (which notably caused controversy in one instance during the period), but this study only focuses on their television output. And as for online sources, the goal in selecting materials originating from that section was to show not only how the internet was being used as a method of spreading information either ignored or openly decried by the mainstream, but also how in some ways the online world became a part of the anti-war movement itself, or at least the segment that were frequenting these critical blogs and forums.

This section also shows the decisions made in establishing a theoretical framework, as well as why opting for a qualitative mode of study was necessary, and how academic research has been made to back this up and show their respective benefits on previous studies performed on Iraq, the media, and the latter’s evolving relationship to conflict and foreign affairs.

## **Case Study 1**

### Introduction – Media reaction to 9/11

It is almost impossible to conduct a study around the occupation of Iraq, particularly one centred around media, without first addressing an event frequently invoked in the proceedings towards, during and following this conflict, that being the tragic attacks on September 11, 2001. 9/11 represents the most prominent event in the last 100 years of

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<sup>38</sup> Monika Bednarek and Helen Caple, *News Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 157-163.

American history, and its short-term and long-term aftermath can be seen within shifts to foreign policies, social issues and cultural relations throughout the globe.

But what this study is focused on is media, and thus addressing the media reaction to 9/11 is what is most relevant to gain an understanding of. The American news response held an understandably strong reaction, that being an almost apocalyptic level of shock and panic not seen at quite the same level since the threat of imminent nuclear annihilation wrought upon by the Cuban Missile Crisis. Even the satirical newspaper *The Onion*'s first response to the attacks, while still filled to the brim with dark humour and shots at the excessive levels of patriotism that was being displayed, is still punctuated by a rather blunt caption on the front cover: "Holy Fucking Shit".<sup>39</sup>

In some ways, this reaction should be expected. 9/11 represented the first major attack on US soil by a foreign entity since Pearl Harbor, and throughout its existence the nation had prided itself on maintaining an almost impenetrable aura of isolationism even when that policy was disbanded, not including wartime periods such as the case with Pearl Harbor. 9/11 showed that America was not invincible, and to a media landscape that would already be dedicated to upholding national and religious values they would potentially be even more persuaded to explicitly display this nationalism to help defend America from this new threat.

Additionally, as touched upon previously, the media becomes inclined towards both influencing and being influenced by government and public opinion. Within the former, the image of an aide informing George W. Bush of the attacks as he read to a group of schoolchildren became one of the more prominent pictures associated with 9/11. It's commonly debated whether the attacks and the surge in patriotism it caused helped Bush, a president commonly derided both during and after his time in office, reach two terms. Or perhaps, for a president who had been in the White House for less than a year it happened at the worst possible time. But regardless, one effect of 9/11 is that it made it inevitable that foreign policy would end up defining much of the Bush administration's legacy.

As for the latter, the sombre response from the media reflected much of the same from the public. The tragic numbers associated with the attacks meant that pretty much everyone in the surrounding area would've known someone who had lost their life on that day, and in a city like New York that is well-known for its closely knit community this scenario would be amplified. In some cases, grief would transform into anger, and this anger would manifest itself as prejudice, as racially motivated attacks on Muslim people and buildings became more frequent in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Displaying the media's potential role in this rise in Islamophobia is just one supplement to interpreting their overall perspective on Iraq.

But this all concerns domestic response. Within the UK media, the specific focus for our material, how did the reaction to one of the nation's allies being attacked in such a

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<sup>39</sup> *The Onion*, 37, no. 34 (September 2001)

shocking fashion differ? Well, in some regards it wasn't too dissimilar from the US response. The front covers of *the Times*<sup>40</sup>, *the Guardian*<sup>41</sup> and *the Independent*<sup>42</sup> had its respective spaces entirely taken over by the same image: the sight of the towers engulfed in flames. The headlines accompanying this depiction are crucial to note as well in terms of displaying the imagery that was already being utilised, the words "war" and "doomsday" being used to describe the events. Again, the message conveyed immediately by these UK outlets doesn't differentiate too much from what we've already explored; this was an unprecedented attack on US soil that shattered the perception of American invincibility, which in turn causes an almost apocalyptic feeling of dread. As previously mentioned, the last time America was attacked to such a degree brought upon their involvement in WW2, so it could be inferred in the short-term that 9/11 would in turn lead to a massive military operation against the entities responsible, which could possibly escalate into a potential WW3, a hypothetical conflict which has commonly been associated with the end of the world.

Beyond the cover headlines, the reaction inside these outlets further contributes to the feeling of panic. *The Times* showed some restraint in its immediate response, such as in one example:

"The cause of democracy is not damaged, unless we choose to let it be damaged"

The overall goal of this column seems to be a plea for the Americans to show restraint in their response to the attack, to avoid escalating the consequences of the situation.<sup>43</sup>

*The Independent* is a lot more visceral in their coverage, displaying more emotive language and imagery, "The most murderous terrorist onslaught in world history" being the headline on Page 2-3.<sup>44</sup> Not only do further articles, such as one describing the aftermath as a 'war zone', invoke this doomsday metaphor, but some areas of this outlet's content show speculation of the events that led to 9/11, one article claiming that:

"Our broken promises... led inevitably to this tragedy."<sup>45</sup>

Finally, *the Guardian* shares *the Independent*'s mood that this attack would soon kickstart a wide conflict, describing 9/11 as "like an apocalypse" and claiming that America was on a "war footing".

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<sup>40</sup> *The Times*, September 12, 2001

<sup>41</sup> *The Guardian*, September 12, 2001

<sup>42</sup> *The Independent*, September 12, 2001

<sup>43</sup> Simon Jenkins, "Democrats should not fight fire with fire", *The Times*, September 12, 2001, pg. 12

<sup>44</sup> Rupert Cornwell, "The most murderous terrorist onslaught in world history", *The Independent*, September 12, 2001, pg. 2-3

<sup>45</sup> Robert Fisk, "The wickedness and awesome cruelty of a crushed and humiliated people", *The Independent*, September 12, 2001, pg. 6

## The March Towards War – “war on terror” and “WMDs”

In the long-term, the focus turned to finding those culpable for the attacks. Al-Qaeda, led by Osama Bin Laden, soon took responsibility, and it became clear that eradicating the multiple splinter cells the group held throughout the Middle East would be how the US might get some retribution for 9/11. Despite the calls for restraint previously mentioned within the UK outlets, the Bush administration wanted to push forward to this goal via the planning of multiple military campaigns, which kickstarted the “war on terror”, a metaphorical conflict with the primary goal being to eliminate hostile groups deemed to be terrorist organizations. This started a massive military operation that saw unprecedented bloodshed in Afghanistan and Libya, but perhaps the primary focus of the ‘war on terror’ throughout its almost two-decade duration was the situation in Iraq. The nation hadn’t any explicit links with Al-Qaeda or any other terror group, but they were one of the few nations to not condemn those responsible for 9/11 and it was strongly suspected by some parts of Bush’s cabinet, such as Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, that there were in fact links between Saddam and the attacks. The Gulf War, in which the US previously came into conflict with Saddam, also played a part in the reasoning behind this theory.

For a short time following the 9/11 attacks, this belief gained more attention and was backed by public opinion but in the field of expertise it was still regarded as flimsy if not outright false, with some critics going as far as to suggest Bush was building a case for war with Iraq without providing any factual evidence.<sup>46</sup> But the apparent “smoking gun” in proving these links came when US and UK intelligence both asserted that Iraq was pursuing a program involving “weapons of mass destruction”. The fear that Saddam might have the capability to sell biological and chemical warfare to terrorist groups, or even utilise them against the US or its allies formed the basis for the Bush administration’s case against Iraq, starting as sanctions before an escalation around the start of 2003 presented an American intention to invade the nation and remove Saddam from power, primarily for the security of the US. This intent was supported by Blair’s government, and as touched upon previously opinion polls in America had shown a large percentage of the public believed Saddam and Iraq were in some way responsible for the 9/11 attacks. But the crux of this thesis revolves around how this invasion was significantly opposed, and from this perspective the justification given was not accepted. The evidence supplied that allegedly supported the theory that Iraq had WMDs was heavily scrutinised, and through commissions held in the aftermath they were mostly disproven. In the view of many of those who were against a conflict with Iraq, a belief was held that Bush and Blair were looking for any excuse to start an invasion.

UK outlets who presented an opposing stance to the government on the Iraq issue, at least before the actual invasion started, presented Bush and his advisors as leading the imminent charge towards Saddam, and Blair showing close solidarity with the US, both

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<sup>46</sup> “Mr. Bush and Mr. Blair have still not produced the evidence to justify war”, *The Independent*, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2002, pg. 14

being criticised within this portrayal. In October 2001, not long after the attacks but long enough for there to be a reflection on the potential course of action by both governments, a *Times* article stated in its headline “The Americans can do without us”.<sup>47</sup> The article itself displays some of the same restraint the outlet was showing in the immediate aftermath a month prior, remarking that during that same period a *Daily Express* headline stating that Bin Laden was planning to “nuke Britain” had been criticised by Downing Street for its exaggeration while a similar, yet somewhat less incendiary piece by *the Times* themselves would allegedly not be met with the same response.<sup>48</sup> This, according to the article, showed that Blair’s government was bending to the will of the Bush administration, stoking up fear and hyperbole within the media landscape rather than call for a calmer and more reasonable rationale. The article summarizes its point as a belief that Blair had many options regarding how to deal with 9/11 and specifically cooperation with the US going forward, and that immediately establishing the nation as America’s closest ally in a potentially imminent military action was a miscalculation that was not properly challenged within Parliament. I believe this shows to some degree what a right-wing aligned perspective may have been towards Blair’s cooperation with America, at least in the early stages of the intermediary period between 9/11 and the Iraq War; criticism directed toward the Labour government for accepting the stance of the Bush administration so readily, but not scrutiny of the actual beliefs voiced by figures such as Rumsfeld (e.g. that Bin Laden had the capability to use nuclear weapons against the US and the UK).

It would be assumed that newspapers verging more on the left of the spectrum would potentially show opposition more to the evidence Blair was providing as a justification for war, rather than attacking his partnership with America. *The Independent* wrote an article which showed an indication of this type of criticism, the basis of which centred in on the belief that the British public couldn’t “trust” the reasoning for war. The evidence is directly called out as “fanciful” and the continued attempts by Britain and America to link Al-Qaeda to the Iraq regime was deemed “desperate”.<sup>49</sup> Overall, *the Independent* are making the statement that Blair’s statement of intent of war was unconvincing, and this possibly shows a clearer willingness to call out the findings associated with the “weapons of mass destruction” that provided much of the discourse leading up to the invasion, albeit while showing some restraint in calling the impending conflict an incorrect judgment.

Broadcast material also displayed the type of media criticism against an impending conflict in Iraq in the months leading up to the invasion. In December 2002 *Panorama* aired two programmes that investigated contrasting stances on the matter, the first examining the reasons behind going to war against Saddam and attempting to topple his regime in Iraq, and the second exploring potential rationale for why that should not be an option. It is in the second programme that similar arguments are used against

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<sup>47</sup> Matthew Parris, “The Americans can do without us”, *The Times*, October 27, 2001, pg. 24

<sup>48</sup> “Editors warned over war speculation”, *BBC News*, September 26, 2001

<sup>49</sup> “Mr. Blair asks us to trust him, we cannot do so”, *The Independent*, February 9, 2003, 1

Blair and Bush that were visible within print media.<sup>50</sup> Some of the arguments stated from this episode include the perception that without the approval of the United Nations that war would be an “unjust cause”, the possibility of unnecessary loss to Iraqi soldiers and citizens, and the common argument that the “war on terror” and the “weapons of mass destruction” were both smokescreens used to gain control of Iraq’s large oil reserves. This argument became the most prominent stance of the anti-war movements and has in hindsight become a common point of debate, and so to see it acknowledged here even briefly, and supported through the context of both the Gulf War and Britain’s previous imperial rule over Iraq (though not directly alluding to the present aggression as an act of imperialism) shows at least some level of reference to these lower-level voices.

A common theme throughout this programme is the idea of Bush being the aggressor in terms of his actions towards starting a conflict with Iraq, which possibly absolves Blair of some of the blame in the arguments against war while still portraying him as blindly following America’s direction. One US expert interviewed within this episode accuses Bush of trying to start WW3, another common argument against the invasion that calls back to the initial reaction to the September 11 attacks and can also be connected to the other conflicts associated with the “war on terror”. The crux of this argument is that this attempt by the Bush administration to eradicate terrorism was only going to cause more retaliation and instability within the Middle East, and potentially some of the government’s advisors desired this effect. There’s also an argument voiced that attempting to link Saddam to Al-Qaeda, which is disputed with the perspective that they were in fact at odds with each other, would in fact make it more likely that they would become allies.

This programme is of great interest in that it clearly presents critical arguments against the invasion of Iraq, to the extent that they at times align with the views of the anti-war movements. However, on certain occasions they’re presented in a way that almost challenges these arguments themselves, rather than challenging the governments, especially concerning the idea that Saddam was “dangerous” and needed to be removed. Additionally, while Bush and his administration are unambiguously shown as leading a risky charge towards war, the term “hawks” being prominently used throughout, Blair is given some leeway in terms of his actions, the criticism he faces mainly focused on the perception that he was blindly following Bush’s stance. What should also be considered is that these arguments are primarily derived from experts, but that the sources of anti-war protesters ranging from campaign organisers to ordinary people are also utilised in a way that does represent this portion of the movement to some extent.

The main takeaway that needs to be made from analysing these sources prior to the February protests is how anti-war movements are portrayed within the media at this stage, if at all. While a glance into broadcast media shows a clear acknowledgement of voices directly opposed to invading Iraq, albeit with a spin that challenges these

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<sup>50</sup> “The case against war”, *Panorama*, December 8, 2002

viewpoints rather than accept them, there seems to be a lack of this within print media from what was indicated, the focus mainly on the relationship between Bush and Blair. This appears to be the primary “criticism” from most of the major UK news outlets at this point, rather than show concern for unnecessary destruction and the evidence surrounding “WMDs”, and even then, these aspects would be tied to Bush as the “sole aggressor”. These news outlets also appear to have overlooked the oil argument voiced so frequently by anti-war movements, and of course some of these newspapers would overlook these criticisms entirely to take the perspective that Saddam was too dangerous to not justify a conflict with Iraq. An example that perfectly summarises this is Carruthers’ assertion that *the Times* favoured the government’s perspective on Iraq directly in spite of public opinion, claiming that a poll had opposition to the war at 75% by January 2003.<sup>51</sup> In a way, this indicates why the events of the following month were so explosive in magnitude.

#### The February 15<sup>th</sup> protests – an overview and the initial print media response

While this period saw protests by those opposed to the imminent invasion, they weren’t overtly frequent in number and were therefore relatively overlooked by the government. But this changed in February 2003, a month or two before the invasion was initiated, a mass demonstration across Europe forcing the notice of media outlets. The rallies on the 15<sup>th</sup> were notable for the records they set in terms of sheer volume of protesters, millions of people across the continent showing a clear rejection of the motion to invade Iraq. A particular note to compare to similar mass anti-war protests throughout history, especially those during Vietnam, is that these movements only devolved into something slightly resembling violence in very brief spells, and brute force was used by law enforcement extremely sparingly. So not only were these protests against the Iraq War in mass number, but they were also almost entirely peaceful. It comes as no great surprise, then, that some experts opposed to the invasion seemed certain at the time this would end Bush’s plans, his process to depose Saddam thwarted not by the United Nations, but the court of public opinion. Even in *the New York Times* one analyst claimed that the global public had proven themselves one of two major superpowers, the other being the US.<sup>52</sup>

But nonetheless those involved proceeded with the invasion of Iraq, and the words of the public voiced in these anti-war protests seemed to go relatively unheard. One of the main approaches both Britain and America seemed to have in dismissing these rallies was that the previously stated reasons for going to war (both the WMDs and the dangers of Saddam’s aggression) far outweighed the public protests. In some circles this became the basis of a more reactionary phrase, “Saddam’s useful idiots” being utilised by pro-war figures to describe those that were seemingly playing into his hands by opposing the invasion. Overall, while the anti-war protests in February 2003 seemed to not affect the outcome in terms of the invasion, and in turn may have caused apathy in the turnout of future rallies, there’s an argument that the variety of people that publicly

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<sup>51</sup> Carruthers, *Media at War*, 40.

<sup>52</sup> Patrick E. Tyler, “A new power in the streets”, *The New York Times*, February 17, 2003.

displayed their stance on the Iraq War disproved the racially-motivated notion that Iraq and the 'war on terror' were religious-based conflicts centred around Islamic extremism. But the main crux of this section is to explore how the UK media plays into all of this. Was the way they reported, discussed and portrayed the anti-war movements on February 15<sup>th</sup> evident of how they became overlooked by those making the decisions on whether to go to war in Iraq? Or did they show a surprising support of these protests, that in turn was also ignored?

The first area that will be explored is the short-term reaction from UK print media towards the protests. *The Independent* demonstrated their immediate support of the rallies, "Millions march for peace" accompanying a picture that displayed the extent of the quantity of people that attended, a wide shot displaying a sea of the public moving across a street.<sup>53</sup> Within the issue itself, the narrative being pushed by this particular outlet seems to be the Public vs. Blair & Bush, "The People's Protest" a headline above comments from people of various different walks of life an example of this angle of criticism towards the British government for both aiding the US and themselves working towards what was perceived to be an unnecessary conflict with Iraq.<sup>54</sup> What also becomes clear from *the Independent's* coverage is that outside of showing a civilian opposition to the war, they appear focused to support these arguments through more famous voices. In amongst the praise of all the civilians that had gone out and protested were mentions of the presence of the Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy, connecting the government's fiercest critics from within Parliament to the rallies. An accompanying panel from comedian Jeremy Hardy which positively noted the bluntness in the message the protestors sent (referring to signs rejecting the idea of war entirely rather than making their approval conditional of the UN's response) also shows the intent from this outlet to display a celebrity endorsement of anti-war opposition.<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, from an academic lens there is scepticism towards the extent to which *the Independent* supported these movements. Carruthers seems to hold the belief that they "gave notably short shrift to those who protested the war". This was in the context of the conflict in Afghanistan, based on a comment made by one of the outlet's most prominent journalists in Robert Fisk. The implication for the wider "war on terror" is that while individual editors held an anti-war stance, it did not carry through the overall scope of the different print outlets.<sup>56</sup> *Selling War* also makes the suggestion that the outlet was rather supportive of a "humanitarian" occupation of Iraq, or in simply sending military intervention to another nation causing global tensions.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, *the Independent's* clear support of the February 15<sup>th</sup> protests, at least in its immediate aftermath, isn't a great surprise. They were and, in some respects, still are a centre-left outlet, and in this regard would be more aligned to the view of the Liberal

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<sup>53</sup> "Millions march for peace", *The Independent*, February 16, 2003

<sup>54</sup> "The people's protest", *The Independent*, February 16, 2003, pg. 2

<sup>55</sup> Jeremy Hardy, "Unlikely, yes, but not naive", *The Independent*, February 16, 2003, pg. 3

<sup>56</sup> Carruthers, *Media at War*, 26.

<sup>57</sup> Seethaler, *Selling War*, 252-253.

Democrats, who as mentioned previously were clear in their opposition of Blair's Iraq policy. But how does this perspective fare in comparison to a more conservative outlet, such as *the Times*? Did they hold a more pro-war stance in the face of the protests? Or by having a natural inclination to support the party in opposition, were they even more critical of Blair's actions?

The truth lies in examining the language used in the aftermath of the protests, and in this regard the evidence suggests a fiercer rejection of the protestors' ideals. One opinion piece written on February 17<sup>th</sup> is titled "In all honesty, they were Saddam's useful idiots", using a familiar phrase to brand those who went out to the protest the war as indirect accomplices in Saddam's "dangerous" regime.<sup>58</sup> Amongst the many incendiary statements it makes, one stands out in particular:

"Any demonstration is bound to contain people with underlying anger, in this demonstration there seemed to be an ugly vein of anti-Americanism which had little to do with peace."

Overall, this article operates in a significant amount of moral grandstanding, and in this it presents a potential facet of *the Times*' perspective: a critical view that portrays the goals of the anti-war movements as harmful to global peace, in that it would boost Saddam's power more than damage Bush and Blair's collective reputation.

However, there is also evidence that presents a contradictory argument, that *the Times* weren't as critical towards the display of invasion opposition as one might think, at least in terms of the perception that it was anti-American. Far from it, one opinion piece published via the outlet exactly a month before the rallies suitably entitled "The United States of America has gone mad" shows a clear opposition to the "historical madness" brought upon by the Bush administration.<sup>59</sup> With this phrasing the pursuit to invade Iraq is perceived as having the potential to be America's greatest blunder in foreign policy, placed amongst events of infamy such as McCarthy, the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam. The imminent conflict in the Middle East is described as a planned action that Bin Laden made inevitable, and criticism is levelled against the US government – to the extent of throwing scepticism on Bush's electoral chances without an attack that caused a large percentage of the public to show their support towards a war. It should be noted that the author of this article, John le Carre, was a respected novelist who, while fiscally conservative to some extent, held numerous anti-war and pro-democratic stances particularly later in his life. Perhaps the respect he had garnered by this point in time gave *the Times* assurance to voice his criticism of the war as a prospect, especially in how he believed Blair had manipulated events in his favour.

This article presents a perspective somewhat like those expressed by UK media outlets in the months leading up to the protests, and to a smaller extent the anti-war movements' messages. So, what causes *the Times* to have a clearly distinct reaction

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<sup>58</sup> William Rees-Mogg, "In all honesty, they were still Saddam's useful idiots", *The Times*, February 17, 2003, pg. 18

<sup>59</sup> John Le Carre, "The United States of America has gone mad", *The Times*, January 15, 2003, pg.20

once the public made their stance on Iraq clear? Was there more criticism of Blair than labelling him a well-meaning but foolish ally of Bush, which was the length the mainstream media was willing to go to? Are there clear motivations beyond WMDs and a liberated Iraq for a sudden priority to remove a dangerous regime? And why is “Anti-Americanism” invoked as a talking point?

Perhaps the answer is that *the Times*’ true consensus towards the protests was between these extremes, existing as a general state of apathy towards the supposed will of the people. The strongest evidence supporting this perspective is the headline of the first issue since the February 15<sup>th</sup> rallies, which in comparison to *the Independent*’s portrayal of the magnitude of the anti-war movements, displays a US warning to Iraq of imminent invasion, the protests of two days prior reduced to a mere mention at the start of an article in which they are portrayed as “failing to sway” the war effort. Through this perspective, *the Times* were making a clear indication to show full focus towards what they believed to be an inevitable war, and the resultant indifference towards the protests, despite their strong support by news outlets on the left of the political spectrum, explains the accusatory article that was analysed.<sup>60</sup>

Of course, we can also look at this in a methodological view, in how the Hallin’s Spheres theorem can interpret this perspective. From this viewpoint, we can ascertain that *the Times* seemed to be an outlier in terms of how they critiqued the protests. That’s not to suggest there wasn’t any criticism within more liberal outlets, nor does it dismiss the counter-suggestion that support for the rallies was what deviated from the consensus. But it’s evident that there was a direct branding of the protestors that seems to be irregular, at least for the broadsheets.

So far, it can be summated that a centre-left newspaper was, at least initially, supportive of the protests and willing to attack Blair for his continued determination to invade Iraq, while a centre-right outlet defended the government while alleging the protestors were inadvertently aiding Saddam’s regime. But to paint a full picture, how does a left-wing paper, namely *the Guardian*, react in the same situation? In the British political system, it would be anticipated that they’d have the most support behind Labour, but also that they’d potentially have a strong anti-war stance. Is their perspective less critical than *the Independent*, or is it diametrically opposed to *the Times*’ argument?

Analysing their immediate reaction suggests that *the Guardian* did indeed show a clear acknowledgement that the protests were an effective showing of public opinion, albeit in a more subtle manner than *the Independent*’s coverage.<sup>61</sup> Rather than explicitly show the extent of the rallies and outright call for a cancellation of the plan to invade Iraq, this outlet instead determines that the protests in their quantity places great pressure on Blair and his cabinet to fully justify the motion, while still noting the indication that the

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<sup>60</sup> James Bone, Roland Watson and Philip Webster, “Trench Warfare Over Iraq’s Destiny”, *The Times*, February 15, 2003

<sup>61</sup> Madeline Bunting, “We are the people”, *The Guardian*, February 17, 2003

protests ultimately would have no effect on deterring the prime minister, utilising the words of one source who posited that backing down at that current stage would critically damage the credibility of the UK. There are no images of either the protestors who marched or the ministers that largely rejected the message sent. It comes across as quite a formal approach to the events, which might be intentional to come across as the “balanced” perspective.

The actual coverage of the protests does of course show through imagery the scope of the protests, and in this *the Guardian*’s overall perspective can be ascertained even further. While there is minor criticism over some of the major figures involved being ineffectual, as well as the rallies perhaps having the feeling of a carnival atmosphere rather than an anti-war cry, but the perception that this was an unprecedented display of public opinion in Britain is sharply conveyed. There’s even an article that contains a musing on the perspectives of other news outlets, specifically regarding the precise amount of people attending that day, noting that the anti-war *Mirror* listed millions while a *Telegraph* supportive of the government counted 500,000.<sup>62</sup>

An opinion piece further into the issue provides the clearest evidence that *the Guardian* at the very least accepts that the protests were damning against the possibility of the Iraq War being “justified” in the eyes of the British public, if not outright stating it as a clear indication that Blair could not continue his mission to remove Saddam from power. It’s suggested that if the protests were overwhelmed by a certain type of emotion – for example, anger – that diluted the overall message, the government might have been able to disregard the movements. But this possibility was ruled out partially through the simplistic imagery that was used, such as “No to War”, and as a result Blair instead turned to using morality-based motivations to justify the war. But this in turn is also noted as having a major flaw, namely the ability to convince the public that the suffering Saddam had the potential to cause was greater than a war to dispose of him. And the overall conclusion this article arrives at is that this war caused an unprecedented protest movement, and that this increased in magnitude once images of civilian casualties were globally shared. This conclusion also ends quite provocatively, making the implication that the Iraq debacle would be the prime minister’s “tragic end”.<sup>63</sup> As an aside, the title of the opinion piece – “We are the people” – can be brought together with *the Independent*’s similar article title to suggest that the media were portraying public opinion as a collective monolith placed firmly against the support for war, something reflected in the imagery of masses of people rallying as part of the anti-war movement.

To conclude the exploration of this outlet’s initial reaction to the protests, it’s clear that they do show a perspective supportive of the rallies, but it’s done so in a direction that appears more detached than *the Independent*’s coverage, which in certain aspects felt like it was attempting to associate with the anti-war effort, rather than merely acknowledging the damage done to the reputation of Blair’s government. But this

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<sup>62</sup> John Vidal, “They stood up to be counted - and found nobody could agree on totals”, *The Guardian*, February 17, 2003, pg. 3

<sup>63</sup> Madeleine Bunting, “We are the people”, *The Guardian*, February 17, 2003, pg. 21

approach also allows *the Guardian* to largely avoid mention of the groups organised against the Iraq invasion, such as the Anti-War Coalition and provides a route to distance the newspaper from the message conveyed if convenient (for example, if the focus shifts to covering the conflict itself rather than its public confidence). The question is if this indeed happens in the months following the protests where the invasion was commenced despite the public pressure, or if there continues to be mention of anti-war movements or a push to “stop the war”.

#### The aftermath – a lack of focus and a degree of apathy

Within *the Guardian*, there is some evidence that suggests there was still a concerted effort to appeal a British withdrawal from any matters regarding Iraq or at least minimise the level of chaos caused. An article in March, a month after the protests, is titled “Bring Our Boys Home”, and in some respects explores how the perspective on support for war had already changed in some areas.<sup>64</sup> It talks about how Charles Kennedy, the Liberal Democrat leader who had been highly critical of the calls to invade Iraq before it began and indeed during the mass protests, had thrown a patriotic weight behind the troops once the conflict got underway. This appears to encapsulate the overall argument of the article that those in “high places”, particularly in Parliament had become swept in a “political doublethink” and a compulsion to support the war through supporting the troops. Comparisons must be drawn to the American discourse surrounding the first Gulf War, and the argument from anti-war stances.

In this scenario, the article argues the justification is turned on its head, and that a natural inclination to back UK troops wherever they are deployed must cause a support for said campaigns. This perspective is viewed as “perverse”, and the article explains this view by asserting that the “cynical irrelevance” of the actions of the UN and the public had been noted by global figures who had long planned this conflict, and this was already known by those who now supported the Iraq War. In this, it is inferred that they strongly believed this war was unjust “until it happened”, and that the motion of it happening doesn’t suddenly provide it just cause. Overall, this article’s use of “our boys”, both in the idea of backing them and bringing them home, calls to light a popular framing in the UK media war narrative; portraying those sent to Iraq almost like athletes requiring the full support of the public to achieve their goals, rather than soldiers who were likely to be exposed to the horrors of war.

While *the Guardian* took a critical respective of its media peers, there is also evidence to suggest that they also overlooked the opposition to the Iraq campaign as the conflict continued and transitioned from a mission to remove Saddam from power to an apparent need to liberate Iraq and protect it from insurgencies emerging from the power vacuum. Many factors should be considered for this idea that anti-war protests became overlooked; a general sense of apathy once it became clear that the February 15<sup>th</sup> rallies had done little to affect the UK’s determination would almost certainly have affected future turnout and thus reduced their priority in the eyes of the news outlets. The idea of

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<sup>64</sup> Paul Foot, “Bring Our Boys Home”, *The Guardian*, March 19, 2003

there being a general disillusionment with war over time is also present, as the public would be naturally more inclined to seek entertainment over rallying against distressing scenes. *Pockets of Resistance* seems to suggest it was mostly the media shifting its focus to the military operations, using statistics as evidence to suggest the frequency of print stories centred on battle ranged from around 40-50% (with the higher percentages being the pro-war outlets).<sup>65</sup> And in another statistic, their study suggests most of these stories were supportive of the war effort, something closely matched by broadcast media.<sup>66</sup>

However, this apathy argument only regards evidence that these news outlets were simply overlooking the protests after 2003, whether it was actively or passively. It falls short when there's an indication that said outlets became more critical of anti-war movements against what was happening in Iraq. This can indeed be found in *the Guardian's* coverage over time, such as one article from 2004. While the writer doesn't display any potential revisionism on what this outlet's previous consensus was, maintaining that they still supported the message that Iraq was a large 'misjudgement', the issue that now presented itself was the way it affected the Labour Party's electoral stability.<sup>67</sup> At this point in time, local elections were about to be held, and there was speculation that the situation in Iraq would make it a damaging night for Labour, assumptions that were to some extent proven correct. This article argues that this speculation was being capitalised on by political rivals, from main parties such as the Liberal Democrats to fringe figures such as the outspoken George Galloway. It also argues that this "protest vote", believed to be fuelled by an ill-guided bout of anger, would do nothing to help Iraq and only create more division in the British political sphere. While this article appears to sympathise with those who attended the February 15<sup>th</sup> rallies, it clearly takes priority with protecting from their criticism the reputation of Labour, and to a lesser extent Blair. This shows a clear movement towards supporting the government over supporting the activism.

#### Broadcast media – The "bipartisan" BBC and Jeremy Paxman

The difference in print media between the UK and the US can be attributed to the presence of a spectrum (Murdoch-owned outlets such as *the Times* would hold perspectives aligned with the American mainstream,<sup>68</sup> while *the Independent* and *the Guardian* had stances that would be on the fringes)<sup>69</sup>, but with their broadcast counterparts it's more so the presence of a political slant itself. The most prominent news channels in the UK, BBC News and Sky News (as well as the majority that are a tier below, such as ITV and Channel 4), seek to maintain a centrist stance. The BBC's particular perspective of neutrality can be traced back to decades of conflict, such as during the Falklands War where there was an editorial line to refrain from referring to the

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<sup>65</sup> Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance*, 84.

<sup>66</sup> Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance*, 86.

<sup>67</sup> John Denham, "Ill-focused protest is too destructive", *The Guardian*, 3 June, 2004

<sup>68</sup> Anthony R. DiMaggio, *When Media Goes to War: Hegemonic discourse, public opinion & the limits of dissent* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010), 192.

<sup>69</sup> DiMaggio, *When Media Goes to War*, 128.

UK military efforts as “we” or “us”.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps the historical regulation of British television throughout its decades of existence also contributes to it mostly having a lack of political bias. But the issue with being presented as a centrist outlet is attracting detractors from both political wings, making equal accusations of bias towards their opposition. This indeed has been a criticism the BBC has faced over the last few decades and utilising them as a sample of how the UK’s televised reporting arm responded to the February 15<sup>th</sup> protests brings that issue to light.

Immediate responses from the BBC to the rallies isn’t too dissimilar from the print media perspectives previously explored. A clear display of how vast they were but also signalling the government’s steadfastness to continue with the Iraq campaign.<sup>71</sup> Certainly, their news site can draw comparisons to *the Independent*’s line of coverage, in terms of how they provided a route for the public to write in and explain their experience of the protests. The deviation in this comparison, however, stems from the need to retain this centrist perception, and there appears to be an indication that the BBC wanted to show that public support for the war and/or opposition to the February 15<sup>th</sup> rallies was just as frequent. Overall, from judging the initial response the BBC appeared to have a somewhat positive reaction to the protests, or at the very least were willing to engage in the discourse surrounding the topic.

But to look further into this debate to get a stronger idea of this stance, two BBC programmes can be considered. The first is *Newsnight*, their premier nighttime discussion show which has become known for interviews with politicians and the idea of holding these figures accountable for a certain topic. The second is *Panorama*, an investigative programme which by 2003 had become occupied with tackling the multitude of issues surrounding the Iraq policy. As such, one should anticipate both programmes would have a stance on Iraq near February 15<sup>th</sup> that would put Blair under additional pressure to change course on the decision to invade Iraq. And as seen before with *Panorama*, they had already opted to at least display the voices of anti-war movements in prominence a few months beforehand.

One of the largest displays of how *Newsnight* tackled the Iraq issue during this period was in a Thursday programme broadcast just nine days before the events on February 15<sup>th</sup>.<sup>72</sup> The entirety of the 50-minute special was dedicated to a live interview with Tony Blair, conducted by Jeremy Paxman. With the atmosphere of this event met with a live audience of voters who almost certainly held the Iraq crisis as a major issue, one would anticipate that Blair faced great pressure throughout the following hour. And, indeed, the perception seems to be that he did. Within the first few minutes of the interview Paxman almost immediately pokes holes in Blair’s ‘case for war’, questioning whether the possibility of a danger “some time in the future” fully justified entering conflict now, and finding a contradiction with the claim that weapons inspectors were “thrown out”

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<sup>70</sup> Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance*, 45.

<sup>71</sup> “Million march against Iraq war”, *BBC News*, 16 February, 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2765041.stm>

<sup>72</sup> *Newsnight*, February 6, 2003

rather than “withdrawn”. Quite consistently throughout the interview Paxman and Blair can both be shown interrupting the other, and the overall atmosphere of the transcript can come off as argumentative.

Beyond the interviewer himself, the audience members given time to make their stance known don’t do much to alleviate the criticism towards the prime minister. The prevailing consensus amongst those offered to speak is that there wasn’t sufficient evidence to justify war, and that the little evidence that was offered was laughable. And the attempt by Blair to shift the focus from WMDs to Saddam’s “barbaric” regime was only met with more pressure from the audience, with one member even going as far to say that Bush shared some of the attributes that in Blair’s view made Saddam dangerous. Again, this atmosphere holds some degree of sharp hostility towards Blair, as strongly evidenced by one member’s joking comments:

“I agree with something that the Rt. Hon Member for Texas North said a few minutes ago... isn’t it strange, Mr. Vice President...”

Paxman noticeably responds to these jabs by mentioning similar comments made by Nelson Mandela, as well as the growing media perception that Blair was a “poodle”.

Overall, this entire interview is a damning affair for the Prime Minister and surely generated so much pressure that in another scenario Blair might have had no choice but to resign. Paxman continuously hounds his interviewee throughout, forcing him into a highly defensive/dismissive stance, and even when he quite explicitly spins a talking point (for example, when discussing the situation in North Korea or the possibility of Pakistan also having ties to terrorism) it still comes across as exposing a hole in the argument for war. The crowd play a part in the outcome of this interview as well, most of them firmly in the anti-war crowd. But it’s less so the perspective that they were completely opposed to conflict, and more the idea that they didn’t “trust” the argument, on two different fronts. 1); they didn’t trust that the evidence was not misleading them from another motivation, and 2); they didn’t trust that the campaign in Iraq wouldn’t escalate into a wider conflict.

While the outcome of this tense cross-examination of the case for war was exact to the actions taken by the public a few days later, in that the government inevitably marched forward with the invasion of Iraq, it still appears to hold a striking legacy across UK broadcast media, in relation to the need for the medium to be independent of Parliament. In 2023, the BBC would mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Iraq War through multiple programmes and editorials. One article on their website reflects on the initial force of UK and US troops against Saddam, and how its aftermath plunged Iraq into ‘decades of chaos’.<sup>73</sup> A 10-episode podcast also treads along the same path, with more focus placed upon the WMD debate and the actions of Bush and Blair.<sup>74</sup> Andrew Marr, one of the BBC’s leading political correspondents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, made the action of

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<sup>73</sup> Jeremy Bowen, “Iraq war 20 years on: How invasion plunged country into decades of chaos” *BBC News*, March 20, 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-64976144>

<sup>74</sup> “Shock & War: Iraq 20 Years On”, *BBC Sounds*, March 13, 2023

apologising for his coverage that depicted politicians as having “gleeful” reactions to seeing a giant statue of Saddam toppled in Iraq’s capital. But while all these articles were perhaps bouts of hindsight timed around a historical event, the same can’t be said for how this interview was looked at. For example, Roger Mosey, who spearheaded BBC’s televised news reporting in 2003, made the assertion that it was a perfect example of impartiality, claiming that it would have been a lot harder to convey if any production members involved were “known Labour or Conservative supporters”. This again wraps back to the maintaining of the BBC’s centrist political stance.

#### Panorama – Further criticism and indication of “protester fatigue”?

The *Panorama* I’ve selected as an example of BBC’s investigative work around this time explicitly proves my assertion that in this time where invasion seemed imminent, Blair was under pressure to such a large extent his political career was in jeopardy. The special they broadcast on 23 March 2003, just three days after the invasion got underway, was titled “Blair’s War” and its description specifically brings to focus the opposition not only from within the government, but from anti-war movements that one would’ve assumed at this point to have faded from the mainstream sphere of relevancy.<sup>75</sup> The title holds great significance in indicating the potential direction this programme takes on the Iraq issue, and is aided by the description also making note of how a Prime Minister previously criticised for allegedly relying on focus groups now determined to be in opposition to millions of demonstrations and a large number of the House of Commons. And this description appears to be in line with the general approach *Panorama* takes at the start of this special, presenting the following transmission as a deconstruction of Blair’s character and his reasoning for being so determined to depose Saddam’s regime. And from the opening minutes, where an opinion is voiced by a journalist that Blair’s agreement with Bush’s foreign policy made him a ‘conventional’ Republican, it’s clear that it wouldn’t pull many punches either.

It’s clear to witness here the rift in the Labour Party, bringing to light this idea that Blair was drifting further to the right of the political spectrum. But this is just one facet of this programme’s topics, and what is more relevant to this thesis is how they interpreted anti-war movements. As stated by the narrator, activism against the war was becoming rampant, but protests based within the left wing had been easily discounted by Blair in the past. However, it was soon becoming too rampant, and it’s claimed that the popularity of “street politics” was overcoming a significant percentage of the public. However, *Panorama* takes an interesting spin on this issue by displaying the problems within these demonstrations, particularly the Stop the War Coalition. It’s stated that in such an organised national campaign being built on top of a desire to prevent war in the Middle East, it showed a great desperation to “win the argument” regarding Iraq, and this desperation not only led to “grandiose claims” over challenging Blair’s government, but also resulted in this specific movement attempting to spread its appeal from the left wing towards the Prime Minister’s main voter base.

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<sup>75</sup> “Blair’s War”, *Panorama*, March 23, 2003

However, this programme notes the diversity of those marching against Blair's plan as an effective strategy. Left-wing protesters already critical of the government couldn't be dismissed as the "loony left", those leaning more towards the centre of the political spectrum couldn't be called "bleeding heart liberals" and the presence of Muslim organisations didn't allow for the entire rallying contingent to be labelled as "fundamentalists". Even the military veterans who supported the protest are shown as crucial to conveying the multitude of resistance Blair was facing to his policy. But *Panorama* doesn't go so far as to completely side against the Prime Minister. It is noted that he publicly stated that he was hesitant to go to war without the express permission of the UN, believing it to be politically crucial. Where this is significant is in how it also stated that Bush did not take the same stance. According to this programme, the US believed that going to war against the wishes of their closest allies was a likely option, and one they would not hesitate to take.

From an initial glance, this seems like sparing some of Blair's blushes and indicating that he wasn't as 'hawkish' as those at the protests may well have claimed. But looking beyond the surface this is an even deeper criticism of the way he had handled the situation. Not only does it bring up those familiar accusations of being America's "lapdog", but it also infers the argument that seeking this UN resolution so explicitly was a shroud for the military preparations ahead of an imminent campaign in Iraq. And in effectively making the resolution a "minimum requirement" for war in the eyes of some, it offered a conduit for those in public and political opposition to fight against him once more. Case in point, a motion regarding the conditional actions of the UN (and whether conflict would be allowed without them) saw the largest rebellion within Labour during their time as the majority party, and the motion was only passed through those in opposition. And this mood would surely worsen once it became clear that the UN would not approve of any military intervention in Iraq.

France's public veto sent shockwaves throughout Britain and America's respective leaderships, though both saw quite different reactions. The US response is quite infamous, a petty anger travelling across the country to such an extent that there were calls to rename "French Fries" to "Freedom Fries", as wartime cultural stereotypes became rife. But in the UK, the reaction was a lot more divisive. Blair was now facing the largest threat to his premiership yet as his strategy had become undone. But in this gamble, he seemingly managed to maintain enough political momentum to remain in office. His closest allies in Parliament rallied behind him, and the House of Commons ultimately approved initiating the Iraq War. *Panorama* notes, in a kind of sombre tone, that anti-war protests, while still loud, were dwindling in numbers, while opinion polls on Iraq were starting to become more positive, two indicators that would surely become more evident in the months following this special. The concluding argument to be made is that, while Blair may have gotten his war, it required him taking an enormous political risk that created fault lines of division within the country and his own party.

To conclude this area of media, the BBC, while still determined to uphold its bipartisan stance, does appear to be somewhat critical of the Prime Minister around this time.

Paxman's interview with Blair on *Newsnight* shows a sharp antagonism towards the apparent contradictions surrounding what was said about Iraq, and the studio audience almost feels like a Greek chorus of mockery. And in some ways, this contributed to later antagonism between the BBC and the government regarding Iraq, such as the pressure brought on by Alastair Campbell as well as the Hutton inquiry. The *Panorama* special is also significant in terms of how it critiques Blair and highlights the pressure he was putting himself under, but it also shows a slight centrist stance in conveying the supposed issues within the anti-war movements themselves. But one important thing to note is, just like in print media, the broadcast news also shifted away from this focus on anti-war towards the war reporting itself once the invasion truly got underway. While these examples of the television show signs of being a revolutionary medium it may have once been referred to as in decades previous, it is far from having the same impact that the American coverage during the conflict in Vietnam may have once had.

#### The internet facet – growing presence and 'concern' of mainstream?

In finding the largest extent of support for these protests during this time, we must look away from the mainstream and turn to a form of media that was still in its relative niche, and this is where the internet becomes significant in this study. Even from the moment of its conception and launch to the public the idea of an electronic global web was somewhat entwined with the contingencies of war and their consequences, having been developed amidst Cold War tensions to ensure a connection remained in place in the possibility of nuclear armageddon. Therefore, as the internet evolved throughout the 90s and early 2000s and lost its infamous dial-up processing that had crippled its accessibility, it was unsurprising that mainstream reporting would soon establish a presence. Today when the internet is arguably the most popular source for obtaining information, almost every facet of news media maintains a website to an equal degree of relevance, and much of these outlets' revenue now comes from online traffic. But at the turn of the century when these sites were established, most of the information that was sourced from the internet was instead coming from forums and blogs, and as such during these protests they presented an alternative view, and more importantly one that the government were mostly unable to regulate.

For how we can look at academia to demonstrate the potential effects of this facet, *Citizen Media and Public Spaces* provides a viewpoint through its analysis of "citizen media". It establishes this concept as a variety of ways that the public can convey their own journalism, such as tweets or posts referencing certain conflicts or videos and photos depicting the front lines of these wars, using the innovations of mobile phones and handheld cameras. In other words, this source signals that the advancement of technology allows for independent journalism to be broadcast, and the foremost contributor to this development is the internet.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Mona Baker and Bolette B. Blaagaard, eds. *Citizen Media and Public Spaces* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 15-16.

As this section goes on to explain, the internet's role in citizen media is that it holds the "potential" to be a "democratic space" in terms of voicing political and social perspectives, although it is acknowledged that there are limitations in geographical access and generation gaps that prevent this freedom of "citizen media" to be fully realised.<sup>77</sup> But in the context of how this concept of citizen media was used in analysing the perception of Iraq, one example of Blair being photographed taking a selfie amidst a backdrop of "Iraq's destruction" displays how independent imagery could fully shape these alternative perspectives.<sup>78</sup>

Anti-war movements utilising the internet was an area that sections of the mainstream found intriguing enough to investigate, and in this analysis, we may get some indication of how it was used. *The Times* wrote an article on February 14<sup>th</sup> about how protesters was using modern technology to help mobilise ahead of the mass rallies the following day.<sup>79</sup> The "irony" of how the original intent of Cold War research had been turned on its head for peace-related use, and in multiple ways the article displays how the new medium was improving the convenience and visibility associated with organising these rallies, which was particularly recognised by those who were veterans of these anti-war movements. Protest groups in the UK could communicate with their American counterparts, and an e-mail chain was a much simpler tool to organise intricacies than a multitude of letters. From this article, it's clear that to at least a minimal extent, there was some interest in discovering just how this new facet of media was responding to the war, namely in the exploration of anti-war organising. But as mentioned previously, the *Times* held a perspective primarily aligned against the protests on February 15<sup>th</sup>, and as such there is another element that seems critical of this new movement, using language such as "hijack" to describe the way they had utilised the power of the web for their own purposes. However, there's nothing additional to suggest that the outlet was particularly highlighting the dangers of the internet, the focus on being "curious" of its potential remaining throughout.

#### Indymedia – rallying cries and scathing opposition

Blogs were a key facet within the internet in terms of producing an alternative perspective to the invasion. Not only did they provide a constant update on what was happening both around the oncoming conflict and within anti-war demonstrations, but they were linked to other blogs and prominent figures critical of the Iraq campaign that supports the idea of this wider anti-war network across an insurgent medium. The first example of these types of sites that can inform this line of reasoning is Indymedia, which had formed four years prior and was specifically styled as an open network of activists and journalists. A report update from February 6<sup>th</sup> shows a clear alignment with the mass rallies in Europe taking place nine days after, the headline of "F15 Taking Off" seems to imply a relation towards the largest organisers behind the upcoming

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<sup>77</sup> Baker & Blaagaard, eds. *Citizen Media*, 19-20.

<sup>78</sup> Baker & Blaagaard, eds. *Citizen Media*, 35-36.

<sup>79</sup> Dominic Kennedy & Ben Hoyle, "Protesters use internet as weapon to stop a war", *The Times*, February 14, 2003, pg. 13

demonstrations.<sup>80</sup> The government's appeal that conflict with Iraq was necessary is regarded as the "Bush/Blair war machine", and the speculation that it would be the "largest global protest yet" proved largely correct. While this already shows clear antagonism towards Blair, previous articles show another aspect Indymedia were displaying opposition towards; namely the mainstream themselves. A previous article shows sympathy for the oppressed people of Iraq, making the claim that the "corporate media" was conflating Saddam with the public, while at the same time supporting the works of independent journalists in reporting about the daily life of the citizens of Iraq during a time of great instability that would only increase in its destruction.<sup>81</sup>

These articles encapsulate the mood of the internet at a time where the protests were imminent but looking at months further back show further sympathy towards the most prominent of anti-war organisers. An article detailing the reports of inspectors searching for the apparent WMDs is complimented with a demonstrator holding a flyer reading "You're either with us or against us" while wearing a mask of a skull wearing the hat of Uncle Sam, as well as the claim that the US were reviewing potential avenues of deploying nuclear force in Iraq.<sup>82</sup> And by the time the mass rallies occurred, the frequency of updates increases exponentially as Indymedia set themselves on reporting on every region where protests were happening, both by claiming the quantity of demonstrators attending<sup>83</sup> and noting specific details, such as areas where police violence occurred.<sup>84</sup> For the UK, there isn't a huge amount of reporting compared to other regions like America, but there is a mention within an update regarding the anti-war movement needing to take "direct action", that allegedly UK organisers were confident that they could shut the country down to prevent Blair's involvement in the invasion.<sup>85</sup>

The area that brings the most promise in terms of gauging the presence of the internet in the Iraq debate is in the long-term aftermath of the February 15<sup>th</sup> protests, where mainstream coverage of anti-war movements was almost certainly overlooked in favour of focusing on the actual conflict. And within Indymedia, there remains an avid support. An update created in March, on the day the US initiated the invasion of Iraq, a sombre mood can be gleaned from what is described as the "greatest moral tragedy of a generation", an "unprecedented diplomatic failure" and a "profound crime against democracy".<sup>86</sup> Within this report, there's a clear indication towards considering Bush as the greatest dangers to civilian life in Iraq and world safety in general. And in some respects, it seems that apathy is converted into anger for use in future updates. One comments on a perceived "media blackout" regarding current coverage, accusing the US mainstream of serving as blatant mouthpieces for the White House and the

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<sup>80</sup> "F15 taking off", *Indymedia*, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2003

<sup>81</sup> "Independent Reporting Continues from Iraq", *Indymedia*, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2003

<sup>82</sup> "Crunch time at the United Nations", *Indymedia*, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003

<sup>83</sup> "Millions March Worldwide to Denounce Bush's War Plans", *Indymedia*, February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2003

<sup>84</sup> "F15: Police Violence Mars Day of Peace", *Indymedia*, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2003

<sup>85</sup> "Beyond F15: Anti-War Movement Turns to Direct Action", *Indymedia*, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2003

<sup>86</sup> "A War of Lies – and of American Shame", *Indymedia*, March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2003

Pentagon as seemingly evidenced by how the presentation of protests had been manipulated.<sup>87</sup> In this regard the idea of the mainstream media shifting their focus once the conflict started is utilised by this blog as an example of government control over the news, the clear antagonism by this niche within the internet world being exemplified once again.

A later update sheds further light on how these internet blogs were associating the mainstream media in their overall criticism of the campaign. This came in the first week of April, where reports of protests in Manchester and London allegedly centred in on media institutions, from newspapers such as *the Times*, to broadcasting corporations like the BBC. Again, the language is particularly important to note here, this update again referring to the mainstream's apparent "pro-war bias" and the framing of how the protesters were dealt with as being "painfully removed".<sup>88</sup> It again displays a level of anger the internet held towards the "traditional" outlets, beyond accusations of leaning towards "corporate" or having a government bias – they were now the "enemy", just as guilty of starting this conflict with Iraq as Bush and Blair.

To round out this facet of studying the internet's perspective, it's clear its status at this time of being a relatively new method of spreading information allowed an insurgency to grow because of the Iraq debate in late 2002 and early 2003, which can be seen in Indymedia. Not only was this outlet staunchly anti-war, to the extent that they were evidently helping organise arrangements for the February 15<sup>th</sup> rallies, but there was clearly animosity shown within towards what was believed to be a bias mainstream, a feeling that doesn't appear to be entirely reciprocated. Quantifying the specific reasons why this antagonism was present can be up to debate, whether it was a proof-based crusade to "save" journalism or was simply a determined distrust against the corporate machine. Either way, all this emotion immediately places this specific part of the study on a completely polarising end of the spectrum.

#### Medialens – an "anti-war network", less media antagonism?

Medialens provides an alternative perspective not in terms of its support for the anti-war movements, which remains at a close level, but rather the way it voices this stance. Instead of supplying constant updates from protests and the state of the mainstream media, almost becoming established as an internet hub built against the campaign in Iraq, Medialens' method of supplying information involved linking towards other sources and outlets. Another deviation from Indymedia is how the blog presents itself, focusing more on media analysis and scrutiny of mainstream coverage than serving as a collective from freelance journalism. An example of this within the context of 2003 is an article regarding the US "going mad", the same *Times* article that was previously referenced.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, this shows there was an initial appreciation that the mainstream was producing material critical of the agenda, or at the very least that there

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<sup>87</sup> "Resistance Continues in Spite of US Media Blackout", *Indymedia*, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2003

<sup>88</sup> "Activists Target Pro-War Media", *Indymedia*, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2003

<sup>89</sup> John le Carre, "The United States of America Has Gone Mad", *Medialens*, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2003

wasn't the same outright animosity that was found within Indymedia's content. In addition, what this method of serving as a conduit for this information does is display the content of prominent anti-war figures.

An example of one of these figures is Noam Chomsky, who can be found cited in two different Medialens articles regarding Iraq and preceding the mass protests. One is advertised as an interview with Chomsky regarding the American plan for war, dated back to August 2002.<sup>90</sup> In this report, he opens with the belief that, while in agreement that Saddam was as much of a monster as the mainstream was claiming, his reach did not spread far enough internationally for there to be a clear and present danger. But Chomsky also adds that America can be held to blame for a majority of his evil actions on a domestic scale, both in the initial funding of his warpath through the Middle East and in not harshly sanctioning these crimes once this support ceased, to the extent that even Congressional criticism was potentially interpreted as a step too far. It's a point Chomsky repeats throughout and forms the basis for one of his main arguments against invading Iraq: that the threat level of Saddam had in fact diminished in a post-9/11 world, and that the US and UK were aware of his criminal activities in the years prior, and in a brief period supported these transgressions, meant that war was not justifiable.

Chomsky also has a section in this report that focuses on anti-war protests in the US, and namely the perception that they were virtually non-existent. Not only does he make an evidence-based argument that contradicts this perception, believing that much like the UK there were anti-war movements with "no historical precedent", but this perception was perpetuated by the elite class, as in Chomsky's view there was a widespread judgment that the dissent tradition had mostly died out. To support this stance Chomsky draws back to Vietnam, and the arguments made by this social class against continuing the war – that in sharp comparison to the public who viewed it as "fundamentally immoral", it was instead a costly "mistake" that should be dealt with in a matter of pragmatism.

While these two articles from Chomsky mostly focus on an American perspective, they still provide an increased indication of what the perspective may have been like outside of the mainstream, and in particular the type of arguments Medialens was supporting. Within the text there is a sharp scepticism towards the Bush and Blair governments, which escalates into heavy criticism, especially in relation to the WMDs vs. Oil argument – which in both Chomsky voices a level of worry. While the media aspect takes a slight backseat, there is evidence to show slight antagonism towards the mainstream, though not to the same level as other internet material. This can be shown in Chomsky positing the idea of a "propaganda offensive" regarding Iraq, and the concept of higher social classes underestimating the extent of support for anti-war movements, perhaps even after the largest protests had ceased.

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<sup>90</sup> Noam Chomsky and Michael Albert, "Interview with Noam Chomsky about US Warplans", *Medialens*, August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2002

What can be demonstrated by Medialens after the invasion got underway is a greater determination to hold the mainstream accountable, along with a greater criticism against the related governments. Starting with the latter, this relates to the UK in terms of one article detailing the history of the nation's "defiance of the UN".<sup>91</sup> It starts with a sharp accusation against Britain, labelling it an "outlaw state", and from there lists numerous apparent examples where international and human rights laws were violated, the majority of these falling under Blair's government. The primary argument of this article is to signal that these violations are an attempt to reshape the laws set by the UN, to "facilitate future aggression".

While it's apparent this is an article heavily opposed against a major party in the Iraq invasion, it's when a look is taken at Medialens-hosted reports focused on the media and Iraq where things become more complicated. Much of the same discourse comes up with the US facet, a linked article titled "The Disinformation Age" investigates the way the mainstream was "enabling" the lies originating from Bush's government, and the methods the honest journalists within this mainstream sphere needed to adopt to combat these techniques.<sup>92</sup> But one article regarding the UK media presents a very intriguing scenario, specifically the apparent existence of internal strife within the BBC over the Iraq coverage.<sup>93</sup> Dissent was allegedly being restricted by the foremost executives due to pressure by Parliament, which was causing anger amongst journalists that believed they were not properly representing the public view. While these two articles hold different stances on different nations, they both contain a similar theme – an existence of "honest journalism" that needed to be set free from the control of higher-ups and the government.

In concluding the portion on Medialens, we return to another report regarding Chomsky, this one depicted after the invasion began.<sup>94</sup> Within the context of a Q&A, he continues his interpretation of Bush and his reasoning for war, placing it in the spectrum of misjudgement on one end and plain aggression on the other. As for the media, Chomsky continues to be dismissive of the mainstream as bias, stating the minimal coverage he saw as "cheerleading for the home team". He establishes the concept of superpatriotism in how the war was being interpreted while also signalling the flaws with this technique, stating that the Bush administration was the "most feared" and "most hated". This Q&A in my perspective sums up the overall attitude the internet had to the mainstream discourse, a demonising resistance towards the main "perpetrators" in Bush and Blair, while most media is presented in a distrustful light. An example of this in practice can be seen in a summary of a 2007 *Guardian* article on Iran's potential involvement in the Iraq conflict, which the group designates as "the single worst piece of journalism".<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Mark Curtis, "Britain's Defiance of the UN: The long history", *Medialens*, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2003

<sup>92</sup> Dennis Hans, "The Disinformation Age", *Medialens*, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2003

<sup>93</sup> David Miller, "Dissent under pressure on the BBC", *Medialens*, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2003

<sup>94</sup> Noam Chomsky, "Chomsky on War", *Medialens*, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2003

<sup>95</sup> DiMaggio, *When Media Goes to War*, 155.

## Summary

To summarise this section and the overall case study on the February 15<sup>th</sup> protests, what becomes clear is that there were lines of dissent within the mainstream, even before taking the growing presence of the internet into account. A primary reason for this polarised coverage is the political spectrum, right-wing outlets like *the Times* who had a stance that at the very least sympathised with the motivation for war and dismissed protesters as “Saddam’s useful idiots”, juxtaposed by more left-leaning papers such as *the Independent* that were openly presenting the mass rallies as a major problem for Blair. This is complimented with a BBC that was exhausting its best efforts to appear centrist, and with this bipartisan stance enraged both sides of the political coin. Time itself plays another major factor; the coverage let alone support for anti-war movements fading from the mainstream as the events of the actual Iraq War became a far bigger priority for the news cycle. Indeed, once the invasion got underway those same anti-war broadsheets such as *the Independent* seemingly changed tact to “supporting our troops”.<sup>96</sup>

But when we look at the internet, another clear contradiction presents itself, one that appears one-sided in its antagonism. Online blogs were building through multiple methods an alternative perspective, one that is highly sympathetic to anti-war movements and the plights of the common people in both the UK and battle-torn Iraq, one that was extraordinarily critical of Bush and Blair to an extent that more traditional media wouldn’t dare to reach, accusations ranging from sheer incompetence to a portrayal of both leaders as warmongers with imperial mindsets. And these blogs were showing a clear distrust of the mainstream, allegations of bias that in no uncertain terms depicted them as the propaganda arm of their respective governments. The few apparent moments where the mainstream of the period recognised this new medium, the reaction usually seemed to be one of trepidation, either in how the government struggled to regulate the internet, or its potential to spread misinformation. This displayed worry strengthens the belief that the internet’s presence in this war can’t truly be compared to the television during Vietnam, because it created a completely different presence in the media sphere; one where those anti-war organisers and their supporters would form a stronger voice.

And in closing, a perfect example of how the internet were placing themselves as directly opposed to the mainstream media can be found in a Medialens article made in 2023, that discussed the BBC’s own set of reports commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the invasion. Where the BBC’s retrospectives analysed the changing media atmosphere regarding Iraq and recollected the way they had challenged Blair, this internet perspective believed the retrospectives to be further proof of media complicity in the blood shed by the war of decades prior, a continued subservience to the government that was displaying revisionism when approaching how they had previously

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<sup>96</sup> Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance*, 155-156.

averted the opportunity to resist Parliament's narrative.<sup>97</sup> An example used by this article of a failed attempt is in Paxman's *Newsnight* interview, and through analysing this material it displays that the frequent criticism from Indymedia and Medialens, while highly justified in doing so, created this element of distrust towards the mainstream that could not be permeated by any amount of "grilling" towards the government.

Fully summarising the empirical implications of this case study, the qualitative data gathered from print outlets showed differing political slants regarding their perspective on the conflict and the protests, while the BBC showed they were willing to criticise Blair's foreign policy but not to a high degree. And the internet's impact on the findings of the study can be clearly ascertained, as they provided commentary on the anti-war movements that was not found within the mainstream.

## Case Study 2

### Introduction

Throughout the previous sections, analysis was made of a sample of how various forms of media interpreted the most significant flashpoints in the Iraq crisis, from the atmosphere after 9/11; the scrutiny against the Iraq War evidence; the public anti-war movements and protests; and the start of actual war reporting. This gives us a rough timeline of how the media coverage unfolded regarding how it portrayed anti-war movements, a general acknowledgement of their existence before 15<sup>th</sup> February, a flurry of attention around said date, before quickly dying down as war reporting took the focus. That's not to mention the polarising stances of the mainline British news media outlets, as well as the outside perspective taken by the Internet.

But what happens if we take this framing, and shift it into the context of a different time? More specifically, this is about changing the focus from 2003, where the media was debating and following the Iraq War's causes and beginning, forward to 2011, where now it had to deal with the conflict's ending and consequences. A primary reason for why this year holds such relevance in terms of the news sphere is because by this stage it had become clear that, like certain political analysts and government figures as well as members of the public and internet bloggers had warned, Bush and Blair's collective decision to invade Iraq had proven to be a relatively costly miscalculation.

Additionally, prior historiography backs up this line of thought as an effective method of evaluating the media output of the period. *News Values* demonstrates how integral the "values" of both print and broadcast media are to the form of its journalistic content, and the types of changes it has undergone throughout previous years. In one instance, it uses an example holding relevance to this study (the Gilligan affair) to portray the sort of trends and controversies that could be viewed within 21<sup>st</sup> century UK journalism.<sup>98</sup> *News*

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<sup>97</sup> "The Dwindling Band of Media Obsessives' – Endless War & Media Complicity", *Medialens*, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2003

<sup>98</sup> Paul Brighton and Dennis Foy, *News Values*, 2007, London: Sage, 57-58.

*Culture* also examines this area, discussing how “news frames” allow outlets to determine what information can be seen as “legitimate” and “appropriate”.<sup>99</sup>

### Contextual understanding

There are multiple pieces of context that crucially highlight the importance of this year to the study. When looking at the campaign in Iraq, the stage involving the removal of Saddam from power was completed in swift fashion, quickly overwhelming the nation’s military forces by the end of 2003. Subject to a trial that seemed in nature a foregone conclusion, Saddam was ultimately convicted of war crimes and executed. But despite this, the US and the UK’s presence in Iraq proved to be more of an extended process than it might have appeared, and that the two governments had promised. Saddam’s vacancy left a power vacuum and combined with the Western occupation of major Iraq cities this continued the hostilities within the country. But it wasn’t just in this maintained conflict where there was an increasing dissent. Domestically, there were mounting public scandals regarding Iraq that was calling into question the governments’ true motivations for initiating the invasion. In the UK, this mainly regarded the continued scepticism of the existence of WMDs. A good portion of this can be traced back to a flashpoint that did occur in 2003 but was not overtly alluded to in the prior case study, that being the Hutton Inquiry. This inquest, which centred over the suicide of a government expert shortly after they supplied evidence to the BBC regarding the evidence of WMDs, specifically the belief that the government had knowingly exaggerated the claims made. What the outcome of this inquiry caused in its aftermath, beyond potentially fracturing the BBC’s reputation with Parliament as well as bringing to light a greater need for the privacy of media sources and whistleblowers, is creating an even greater distrust by the public towards the apparent existence of these dangerous weapons, especially when the US-led occupation continued to not provide this proof. In addition to all of this, *Pockets of Resistance* acknowledged that the incident showed the BBC could remain independent under what was extreme political pressure, dealing with both an inquiry regarded as a “whitewash” for the government and prior situations that had led the Labour Party to regard the corporation as a “friend of Baghdad”.<sup>100</sup>

But beyond the main questions regarding WMDs, there were other scandals that sharply impacted Blair and Bush’s standings during this wartime/occupation period, a critical one being the Abu Ghraib incident. In 2004, CBS published the results of an investigation they had made into the maximum-security jail that the US military were using to house prisoners of war through images that depicted gruesome scenes.<sup>101</sup> It was alleged that those captured were subjected to extreme levels of torture and demeaning actions, with these humiliations ranging from serious physical harm to in some cases sexual abuse. These pictures were met with outrage from the wider community, particularly within humanitarian groups such as the Red Cross that alleged that the US had violated human rights doctrines and made the claim that it was

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<sup>99</sup> Stuart Allan, *News Culture*, 2010, Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill, 99.

<sup>100</sup> Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance*, 74.

<sup>101</sup> Rebecca Leung, “Abuse at Abu Ghraib”, *CBS News*, 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2004

indicative of a systemic issue of brutality throughout America's detention centres. Overall, one of the primary effects the Abu Ghraib scandal had was that it reaffirmed the anti-war belief that America was taking advantage of the framing they had used to justify the invasion to commit war crimes. But apart from that, the way this information reached these media outlets signalled another method damaging to the standing of the Iraq campaign, this being the documentation leaking that was becoming prominent within the internet. Through sites such as WikiLeaks, the release of sensitive government files related to the war was a sign of heavy resistance even after the invasion was a thing of the past, and the next few years saw focus by both countries to litigate those responsible.

Eventually, years after the initial conflict movement and the dethroning of Saddam, the process for withdrawing UK and US troops from Iraq began. But even this was a prolonged series of events. The US announced they would imminently begin the departure of troops from the region in 2008, and even then, this was after a short period where the Iraqi government supported by the allied forces pushed for said troops to withdraw. But it wasn't until 2011 that this process was complete, which in some ways speaks to how unstable the nation still was. In summary, 2011 represents a year where the Iraq war could no longer be considered an active conflict, or at least one that the US and UK were fighting. But there is further relevant context beyond the conflict by this point in time.

Within the political sphere, there were government upheavals in both Britain and America that could be viewed as a domestic effect of the Iraq War's controversies. Bush reached his maximum term limit at the start of 2009, and the election saw the Republicans defeated by the youthful Obama, seemingly a candidate representative for the American public's desire for 'change', as accentuated by one of his major campaign slogans. And in the UK, Blair would ultimately step down from the political stage in 2007 as Labour's reputation suffered in the wake of the invasion, and the 2010 election saw a Conservative government take office, remaining in place for the next 14 years. And there was further unrest across the Middle East, which to some extent displays an unwanted impact of the 'war on terror'. Afghanistan, a conflict in tandem to Iraq, had so much instability that an US military presence remained in the region until 2021, creating a series of events that was a devastating embarrassment for America. Bin Laden, who apart from Saddam was a main antagonist on the stage set by the 'war on terror', was found and killed by US troops in April 2011 after an extensive and highly publicised manhunt, an event which bought great goodwill to the Obama administration and a factor in his earning of a second term in 2012. This can be considered another reason why this year is so relevant to the discussion surrounding Iraq and the 'war on terror', but the idea that it marked the definite end of the metaphorical battle with terrorism is damaged somewhat by the continued fighting in the Middle East in areas like Syria, which combined with the emergence of new terrorist organisations such as ISIS developed further criticism for Obama's foreign policy.

And of course, one of the major ways media would be affected by this shift in time is in the development of technologies. The use of the internet to access news was gaining popularity, and innovations in gadgets such as the mobile phone bolstered this accessibility. But as these traditional outlets began to rely on the online world more and more, this would in some parts impact the political spectrum. This is not to say that there was not a right-wing presence within the internet before, indeed there were blogs and sites in 2003 that were wholly supportive of the governments' decisions to invade Iraq, perhaps due to conservative bias or a military factor. But there are sites that emerged at the turn of the 2010s, such as Breitbart or InfoWars, that may have had an influence on the overall landscape regarding Iraq.

This in some way represents the general direction of this specific case study. Through two different viewpoints it will be explored how the depiction of anti-war movements had changed and to some degree the factors behind these shifts. In the mainstream mediums of print and broadcast, this means looking at whether in the reflections of Iraq as a conflict as it began to be looked at as in the past, which would have certainly had articles and programmes referring to the decision to invade as a "mistake", whether anti-war movements were referred to in these materials and in what ways. Additionally, it involves seeing how both the framing of the 'war on terror' and the heavy public resistance to the Iraq campaign affected the reporting on contemporary conflicts such as in Libya, whether explicitly or subtly. Meanwhile, for the internet it requires seeing what information the same blogs were distributing. Had the support for anti-war movements and public protest died down in the eight-year interim? And if they had done so in some way, what were the potential reasons for this decay in the need for online activist journalism?

### The Times

To place this case study on an equal footing with the previous one, the same materials must be analysed in a precisely similar manner. Within looking through print media, this means that the same newspapers of *the Times*, *the Independent* and *the Guardian* must be examined, while keeping in mind the contextual political developments concerning their place on the spectrum. For *the Times*, which as previously mentioned were more inclined to support a Conservative party that was at this stage now in government, there was a larger desire to directly lay the blame for any criticism of Iraq primarily on the now former Prime Minister in Blair. In some ways this was simply done through the articles demonstrating the aftermath of the conflict, one that focused on the official government inquiry accentuating in its headline the idea that Blair had "misled" MPs on evidence regarding Iraq, and more specifically the extent of the war's "legality".<sup>102</sup> This is accentuated by the article's main image, a burning caricature of Blair that was shown in public demonstrations when the inquiry first began over a year prior, strengthening the perception that *the Times* here were making Blair a lone primary figure in the coverage

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<sup>102</sup> David Brown, "Blair misled MPs on Iraq, says Goldsmith", *The Times*, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011, pg. 3

of Iraq going forward – and in doing so a conduit for a large part of the negative reflection.

Although when it comes to opinion pieces, the articles where criticism would arrive explicitly and harshly rather than indirectly through framing devices, there was significantly more restraint on how Blair was blamed on the failures involving Iraq. One example comes from an article that was reacting to the inquiry, and specifically asserting that they were taking catharsis from their unrelenting blame for the former Prime Minister, believing that holding him solely responsible would damage the reputation of Britain's political and military system.<sup>103</sup> It is rather telling that the overall message of the article is to make the claim that the inquiry should not focus the efforts required in judging the culpability for needless death and destruction on just one person, but perhaps a faceless entity instead, the British armed forces being the recommended substitute. But beyond the goal of this article to alleviate at least of some of Blair's guilt in the legacy of Iraq, what is intriguing is the language used in how this article determines the inquiry's intent, or at least what it should be:

“But there is a different, more productive way to judge the inquiry's success: from a military perspective, it needs to expose the many things the Ministry of Defence got wrong... Its value will be not to focus on whether we should have gone, but what we did when we got there.”

This passage, where it almost pleads for the inquiry to shift their focus, has connotations of the media's own change in course once the invasion of Iraq began, leaning towards the questions of “How is the war going?” rather than “Should this war have started in the first place?” Even in this article, this mantra is being to some extent deliberately pushed forward, almost trying to cloud perceptions of what the stances were back in 2003. But the existence of general criticism within this article towards the government's actions does show a marked difference from what we saw of *the Times* at the end of that period. With our theoretical model this ties into what was a general reluctance by UK outlets to directly confront Blair's morality, although again the evidence of some means it isn't within the sphere of deviance.

In terms of how Iraq was invoked in the face of present conflicts, it was done so in another interesting way in that it wasn't used as a warning for further instability in the Middle East, but rather as a template for how the West should approach said instability. One article in March that regarded the conflict in Libya makes this clear, the headline stating that “Gaddafi makes me glad we toppled Saddam”.<sup>104</sup> The main message one can infer from this is that the existence of another tyrannical head of state within the region justified the previous removal of another. But the actual goal of the article is to suggest a surge of democracy throughout the Middle East, which uses examples of Egypt and Tunisia but ultimately centres on this phenomenon spreading from what had happened in Iraq. Not only does this article show the belief that Saddam's overthrowing

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<sup>103</sup> Paul Gibson, “Chilcot should target the military, not Blair”, *The Times*, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, pg. 22

<sup>104</sup> Jack Straw, “Gaddafi makes me glad we toppled Saddam”, *The Times*, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, pg. 21

deterred Gaddafi from his own plans for WMDs, but it also suggests the US and UK had succeeded in their plan to make Iraq a free nation, despite the insurgencies and ethnic conflicts that continued to cause casualties. Again, rather than call to light the scepticism over the evidence surrounding Iraq in the prelude to invasion, it takes an opposing stance completely and seems to present the war as a net positive for the region:

“I do say that but for the change in Iraq that began in 2003, the region would be a much more dangerous place. Its example shows that even with a terrible, benighted past, democracy may flourish.”

But in this article’s case, the bias of the author, Jack Straw, must come under high consideration, as he was Blair’s Foreign Secretary from 2001-06. This fact is added as a footnote at the end of the article, almost an admission that this perspective was an attempt by one of the major figures in sending UK troops to Iraq in 2003 to justify their actions in the present context. Nonetheless, by contrast to the previous article it almost appears that this outlet was somewhat unwilling to completely do away with the “useful idiots” approach to those against the Iraq War.

Another article comparing the situation in Libya to Iraq took a different, almost contrasting approach, in that it argued that there was no chance of the conflict suffering from a similar aftermath.<sup>105</sup> The basis of this stance is built from the idea that while Iraq had democracy “thrust upon them”, in Libya it was “achieved” by the nation’s people. In doing so, this prevented a repeat of “the humiliation of an American occupying administration” and was seemingly also avoiding the sectarian religious conflicts that had run rampant following Saddam’s upheaval. While the article’s main point of discussion does argue for Western aid, it insists it have the purpose of helping what is deemed a “government in waiting” in making Libya a democratic state, rather than forcibly uphold these freedoms themselves. With this article, while it still seems maybe too optimistic about the situation in Libya, it certainly holds a more negative perception towards what had happened in Iraq, viewing it as an undoubtedly cautionary tale in British foreign policy.

To finish this section on *the Times*, we look at one article centred on an anti-war protest within the nation, which said article takes a primarily negative stance toward.<sup>106</sup> It regards the case of squatters residing near the Houses of Parliament, the rationale consisting of numerous conflict-related issues that all justified a “right to protest”. The almost jovial tone of the article seems to cloud an exasperated response to these dwellings, making the claim that these actions were “plainly” undemocratic, while also seeming to regard them as a simple distraction. Although this doesn’t regard a singular conflict that was met with a strong public resistance, it does perhaps provide a glimpse to what the response was to anti-war movements by 2011: they were mostly overlooked and regarded as mere annoyance, something not too dissimilar from the outlook *the*

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<sup>105</sup> Malcolm Rifkind, “There’s no chance of Libya being another Iraq”, *The Times*, August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011, pg. 31

<sup>106</sup> Daniel Finkelstein, “For rent: one anti-war flat, superb views”, *The Times*, January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011, pg. 21

*Times* had adopted in 2003. It also shows in the sense of a media study how the criticism for anti-war movements remained in the sphere of consensus for *the Times*, although its generalisation suggests it had become an even more unpopular stance to hold.

### *The Independent*

With *the Independent*, it seems their coverage of Iraq by 2011 would be more active, or at least more willing to directly criticise the major figures that had been involved. This becomes apparent in one article detailing how UK and US government agencies had handled Saddam's actions far before 2003, where in 1990 he started a sudden occupation of Kuwait that would ultimately kickstart the Gulf War.<sup>107</sup> This article focuses on how Western intelligence experts had failed to foresee the event, which raised serious questions over if the US had indirectly approved of the invasion by not making the probability of a military response explicit. But this article's argument is one defensive of said experts, arguing that they could not anticipate that Iraq would act completely contrary to their own benefit. The article doesn't go as far to suggest that Saddam was an incompetent leader, but just that his various military flaws caused him to make a mistake with dire consequences. But what is reaffirmed in the article's concluding paragraph is that the US and the UK's dealings with Saddam before 1990, such as during the Iran-Iraq conflict, aided his growth in danger and military strength, and from the backdrop of the Iraq War this blame seems quite poignant. According to the paragraph's final sentence, "If he was a monster, they created him."

A following article referring to general trouble in the Middle East continues this blame, relating to poor social and economic situations throughout the region since Britain and America had promised to provide a democratic revolution.<sup>108</sup> Even directly confronting this presented agenda brings new issues to light, providing an example of one democratic election that the US had allegedly tried to overturn due to its outcome being something they wished to avoid. And it's also noted how the regimes within the Middle East that were now facing great instability had been established by the West as "moderate" and "anti-fundamentalist" allies. It can be shown clearly here that the criticism of Bush and Blair for how they handled Iraq does continue, perhaps indirectly through its butterfly effect on the rest of the region. And this becomes more evident through *the Independent's* coverage of the same inquiry that was referenced in *the Times'* material.

For starters, the headline regarding the inquiry and the forthcoming cross-examination of Blair specially takes notice that it would be a "grilling" and that the former Prime Minister would almost certainly face allegations of having misled members of the panel with certain evidence.<sup>109</sup> Unlike *the Times*, there's no implication that the inquiry's

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<sup>107</sup> Patrick Cockburn, "Beware your enemy's stupidity", *The Independent*, 5<sup>th</sup> January 2011, pg. 3

<sup>108</sup> Patrick Cockburn, "Troubles like these are brewing all over the Middle East", *The Independent*, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2011, pg. 4-5

<sup>109</sup> Brian Brady, "Chilcot to grill Blair on how he 'misled' Iraq war inquiry", *The Independent*, January 16<sup>th</sup> 2011, pg. 12

priorities were skewed, or that focusing on Blair would not provide substantial information. It instead states rather plainly the “grave doubts” that was held over Blair’s claims not only before the invasion, but even in recent months, and in doing so even supports this with evidence. Specifically, these concerns were voiced over the statements made over the legal advice Blair had received regarding starting the Iraq War and its timing. And of course, the issue of WMDs and the failure of the UK government of finding any proof of their existence comes into play here, the article believing it “undermined the case for war” while also showing proof that:

“[Blair] repeatedly used the ISG report<sup>110</sup>... to support his actions.”

Although this article is merely stating the inquiry’s direction, it seems quite evident that it is placing pressure on Blair, at best accusing him of misrepresenting the truth, while at worst believing he did so willingly. It also references certain evidence examined by the inquiry that implicated the US’ role in these apparent lines, suggesting that Bush pushed Blair towards starting the invasion without a second UN resolution, plunging the war’s legality into risk.

There is more evidence of *the Independent* displaying criticism of Blair in 2011, mainly through the concept of him facing “further pressure” via the inquiry. Another article showing an example of this specifically utilises an account that claims that several of Blair’s public statements regarding the invasion’s legality were contradictory to the advice he was given by experts.<sup>111</sup> And the limits imposed on the inquiry are reported by the outlet, stating that certain messages between Blair and Bush were refused publication and remained private to the panel, who reacted with frustration to not receiving the “significant” documents that they believed would help their “transparency”.<sup>112</sup> And when we look more in depth to the articles that are allowed to have a much clearer stance on the inquiry’s events, we can see a slightly more diversified landscape, but one that nonetheless does not try to hide Blair’s blame. One article makes a remark on the sheer length of the Iraq scandal, comparing it to a “dripping tap” that was continuing to haunt the former Prime Minister even after his departure from the political scene.<sup>113</sup> Another perspective regards the idea of Blair taking the action of apologising or accepting responsibility for the losses in Iraq,<sup>114</sup> and though it does so with a slightly negative slant, responding to his claims at the inquiry that doing so would do little to alter his depiction as a “callous brute” by mentioning how he supported conflict with Iran under circumstances similar to Iraq, there is at least an acknowledgement of his rationale:

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<sup>110</sup> A report in 2004 from the Iraq Survey Group, which found no evidence of WMDs.

<sup>111</sup> Michael Savage, “Blair did not reflect legal advice on Iraq war – Goldsmith”, *The Independent*, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011, pg. 1

<sup>112</sup> Michael Savage, “Chilcot reveals anger at refusal to release key documents”, *The Independent*, January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011, pg. 2

<sup>113</sup> Matthew Norman, “Truth will out for Coulson and Blair, but don’t hold your breath”, *The Independent*, January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011, pg. 5

<sup>114</sup> Andrew Grice, “Damaged but undaunted, ex-PM returns for one more grilling on Iraq”, *The Independent*, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011, pg. 6-7

“Earlier hopes among Blair allies that history would be kinder to him on Iraq show no sign of coming good. Privately, Mr. Blair knows that people have long since made up their mind about Iraq and are unlikely to change their view now.”

And the stance taken on Blair’s performance at the inquiry itself is a clearly critical one, speaking of a “torrid” session that failed to silence those who wanted Blair to face justice.<sup>115</sup> The imagery becomes integral here in interpreting just how *the Independent* were dissecting the events of the inquiry in a way that painted Blair in a negative light. In one aspect, it gives focus to his body language during the hearing, with him making exaggerated hand gestures to accentuate his evidence and defences (a particularly scathing opinion piece on the same page compares these movements to the actions of a slippery “eel”).<sup>116</sup> And in another, an image is shown of protesters gathered outside the inquiry building, holding signs alleging Blair of being a liar or a war criminal. This article also pays significant attention to the raw emotion conveyed by the hearing’s crowd, noting that Blair was frequently heckled by the families of those who had lost their life in Iraq. Overall, this criticism against Blair manifests itself to a much fiercer extent than it had in 2003. And it’s a fierce pursuit that seemed to have been recognised by the former Prime Minister, as upon his departure from the political scene he singled out the outlet within a general branding of the UK press as a “feral beast”.<sup>117</sup>

After the inquiry was wrapped up, the coverage on Iraq began to slow down to some extent, although the developing situation in Libya does involve some articles that acknowledge the similarities of the two conflicts. Bin Laden’s death, and the departure of the final British troops from the occupied Iraq regions do bring a degree of attention to the subject, however. But the former does so more as a warning towards the US administration. With Bin Laden’s death, one article decrees that it should also mark the demise of the “war on terror” rhetoric in its entirety, noting the danger and abuse it had wrought on Muslims living in America.<sup>118</sup> It calls this metaphorical conflict “unwinnable” in its nature, comparing it to both the “war on drugs” and the consequences prohibition had on the nation. As for the effects of the withdrawals from Iraq, the coverage here seems to become less active over time, and more reflective overall of the errors in the conflict: something along the lines of “this cannot be repeated again” becomes a common thread throughout, especially when linked to the rest of the Middle East. But there is still anger present, particularly in the inquiry’s aftermath, with one article calling the entire process a “charade”<sup>119</sup> and others remarked on the limitations placed upon the documents by secrecy laws. The tenth-year anniversary of the 9/11 attacks also wrought upon a series of retrospective articles that seems to regard the political legacy it left with high contempt, one article describing the decision to invade Iraq as:

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<sup>115</sup> Michael Savage & Terri Judd, “‘Your lies killed my son...’ Blair fails to pacify critics in torrid inquiry session”, *The Independent*, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, pg. 8-9

<sup>116</sup> Simon Carr, “You can catch an eel by the tail, but it can still bite you in the face”, *The Independent*, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, pg. 9

<sup>117</sup> DiMaggio, *When Media Goes to War*, 52.

<sup>118</sup> Rupert Cornwell, “America must end its 9/11 mindset”, *The Independent*, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011, pg. 3

<sup>119</sup> Adrian Hamilton, “The charade of public inquiries”, *The Independent*, August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, pg. 5

“For Iraq turned out to be one of the greatest foreign policy mistakes of the past 70 years, ranking with the invasion of Suez in 1956.”<sup>120</sup>

And again, in these hindsight critiques of Blair’s Cabinet, the same common themes run rampant throughout: that the former Prime Minister blatantly flouted international and human rights laws to join Bush in a foreign conflict, and that doing so permanently scarred his reputation and that of his party.

What we’ve learned from this abundance of material gathered from *the Independent’s* archives is that not only was there a continued willingness to criticise the government responsible for the events in 2003, but also unlike *the Times* there was more overall coverage of the happenings in Iraq and the general consequences of the conflict. But what it isn’t displayed that is like this other outlet is the comparable lack of mentions towards anti-war movements. It is seemingly as if, while the Iraq War is referred to in a hindsight perspective as an undeniable “mistake”, said perspective largely overlooks the unprecedented protests that had taken place before this invasion. But this is not to suggest that anti-war opposition is completely ignored by *the Independent* in 2011.

Even though the largest anti-Iraq demonstrations had occurred eight years prior, and there was potentially a lack of desire for public protest to the conflict now a clear timeline for withdrawal was being carried out, there was still an indication that social activism held a strong public support. And in one of *the Independent’s* articles referencing these protests these memories of 2003 are explicitly invoked, stating that one demonstration regarding government budget and job cuts would be the largest since the “anti-Iraq war marches”.<sup>121</sup> It’s only a very brief mention and is neither an endorsement nor a condemnation of their rationale in doing so, but it nonetheless provides an acknowledgement of the events. What should also be noted from this article is the organisers insistence that the protests should be “peaceful”, the apparent belief presented here that public demonstrations were being infiltrated and overtaken by extremist groups to cause violence and dissent. But on the other hand, *the Independent* itself argues a deceleration in anti-war rhetoric, at least in the US.<sup>122</sup> What is argued is that there was a general decline in America’s foreign reporting, causing a void in information that simply wasn’t being filled by the rise in digital media. In addition, the article argues the perception that the mainstream outlets held an “independent spirit” did not match up to reality, stating that in recent years they had merely followed public opinion regarding anti-war matters rather than precede them. And this too appeared to require the importance of politicians “on the same side of the fence”, and according to this article with the Democrats in office anti-war movements were becoming increasingly ineffective as a result.

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<sup>120</sup> Andreas Whittam Smith, “Our legacy of 9/11 was a dictatorial and dysfunctional government”, *The Independent*, September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2011, pg. 33

<sup>121</sup> Nigel Morris, “London braced for day of protest that could attract up to 250,000”, *The Independent*, March 26, 2011, pg. 8

<sup>122</sup> Patrick Cockburn, “The night I shot at Donald Trump”, *The Independent*, May 8, 2011, pg. 35

But regardless of what message this article is trying to convey, it is still quite apparent that although they are looked back on rarely by 2011, the anti-war protests were still being viewed in a positive light. This can be best seen in an article remarking on the death of Brian Haw, a prominent anti-war protester who had initiated a camp outside Parliament, the very same one that *the Times* had responded to with a barely concealed disdain.<sup>123</sup> What can be gathered from *the Independent's* own perspective is a respectful tribute, but one that also conveys the anger of anti-war protesters that resurfaces in the wake of his death. Retelling the account of one campaigner displays a continued contempt for Blair's actions in 2003, branding him a "liar" and a "psychopath". This source even goes as far as to make the claim that certain politicians were "clapping their hands and opening the champagne" in response to the news. Although this article does give attention to the internal disputes within this specific anti-war movement, as well as the sacrifices Haws made to continue his protest, it also shows that these actions were acknowledged within the local and social communities.

### *The Guardian*

Given how much vaster and more critical *the Independent's* coverage of Iraq was by 2011, it would be reasonable to infer that *the Guardian*, an outlet already established in this thesis as leaning further left, to continue this trend. And from an initial glance, this appears to be the case. An example of how Iraq's legacy was shown in this newspaper's materials, particularly regarding the perception that it was a failure, can be viewed in how it presents a Ministry of Defence report believed to be hugely damning on the UK's military efforts.<sup>124</sup> From how the document's language is interpreted, it suggests that the British armed forces were woefully "ill-prepared" for the invasion and failed to adapt to certain situations such as the insurgencies after Saddam's dethroning. Additionally, a common theme appears yet again in one of these reflective articles, that being passages in this report stating that the government had failed to provide an explanation for an "unpopular war", linking this to damage to the reputation of the military. By this stage, it only adds to what appears to be a growing consensus, that being an accepted fact that the Iraq War was deeply "unpopular" with the public. It's a consensus reinforced by another aspect *the Guardian* brings into play regarding this report, namely that it had been suppressed by defence chiefs due to the extent of its critical nature, and that only after a year of dispute and legal red tape could the documents be disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act. The focus the outlet places on this point, to the extent of displaying it in the headline and specifically noting that a "*Guardian* reader" helped put an end to the cover-up, applies another dimension to this sphere of consensus that did not appear separately: that even at the tail end of this conflict the government were actively hiding certain information that detailed failings, further angering military personnel and public opinion.

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<sup>123</sup> Rob Hastings, "Death of Brian Haw prompts rallying to the peace cause", *The Independent*, June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011, pg. 5

<sup>124</sup> Richard Norton-Taylor, "Suppressed MoD report on Iraq war damns military for being ill-prepared", *The Guardian*, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Other articles continue to highlight the embarrassment that was seemingly becoming commonly associated with Blair and his foreign policy involving Iraq. One article, for example, concerns one of the apparent whistleblowers involved in leaking the information about WMDs, and specifically that their evidence was almost entirely myth.<sup>125</sup> This example only mentions America's involvement in receiving said information, but it does not shy away from stressing that they were "duped" into believing these "fabrications", an assumption that can be stretched to how the UK processed this false evidence. Focusing on the Chilcot inquiry, another article makes clear the mass confusion that spread through Blair's cabinet before the invasion, stating that even in January 2003 there was no indication of the purpose or goals of the forthcoming military campaign, signalling "a lack of political cohesion at the top."<sup>126</sup> Another shows that just days before the invasion started, the Foreign Secretary Jack Straw held a private meeting with Blair where he stressed that there was "one last chance to avoid war", the interpretation being that Straw was offering him the chance to avoid his inevitable resignation.<sup>127</sup> And one final article regarding said inquiry remarks on the long delay the findings went through before release, the apparent reasoning being doubts cast over the evidence gathered.<sup>128</sup> And this article also notes that while Blair would face criticism in the inquiry's results, it would not be as damning as some people might have expected or hoped.

*The Guardian's* approach to anti-war movements by 2011 seems to be relatively like *the Independent's* – specifically, it was an aspect that appeared to be seldom mentioned, but when it was the reference was in a positive and respectful light. Regarding the topic of Brian Haw's death, the headline of one article makes the claim that he "sacrificed his life for peace",<sup>129</sup> a statement perhaps slightly exaggerated in nature but one that strengthens another stance taken by this article:

"Brian did not stop the Iraq war, but he will be remembered as a man who stood against it and put his life at the disposal of those who were against that hideous operation."

How this article chooses to show tribute to Haw is by presenting him as "the real alternative" to what was being said in Parliament, in a literal sense: it was almost impossible for every MP walking into to not notice the presence of his camp and the messages he was delivering. It also notes the government's continuous efforts to put an end to his stubborn protest, at one point even passing legislation that outlawed the action of demonstrating where he was located, but the resultant legal battle went Haw's

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<sup>125</sup> Martin Chulov and Helen Pidd, "Defector admits to WMD lies that triggered Iraq war", *The Guardian*, February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011

<sup>126</sup> Richard Norton-Taylor, "Iraq war inquiry: Top admiral told 'regime change not the goal' by Blair", *The Guardian*, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011

<sup>127</sup> Richard Norton-Taylor, "Tony Blair had way out of Iraq invasion, Chilcot inquiry told", *The Guardian*, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011

<sup>128</sup> Jamie Doward, "Iraq war inquiry report faces long delay as doubts on evidence persist", *The Guardian*, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011

<sup>129</sup> Tony Benn, "Brian Haw sacrificed his life for peace", *The Guardian*, June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011

way. Even in mentioning how he was harassed by the authorities and placed under threat by local councils, this is presented as Haw bravely persevering to uphold his principles. The entire article shows a great regard for him, frequently praising his “determination” while the author notes his positive personal relationship with Haw, noting that he would be “sadly missed”. But it shows that at the very least the most prominent of anti-Iraq demonstrators, those who “kept alive a flicker of hope”, are referenced in great respect, though the moments when these movements were alluded to are few and far between. And at a minimum it holds more regard by this stage than the campaign that had been so strongly rejected.

### The BBC

By 2011, the BBC had a stronger reliance on the online news landscape, but not necessarily to where it held priority over their typical broadcasting works. As can be evidenced in a sample of their online articles regarding Iraq, the material is rather formal and generalised, only focusing on the most major developments such as the declaration to intend to and the eventual withdrawal of US and UK occupation. In one case BBC’s website posted their original coverage of the invasion’s start, perhaps a case of the outlet letting their prior reporting speak for itself in terms of showing how the Iraq conflict had played out and was perceived.<sup>130</sup> But through the same parts of the BBC’s broadcasting arm that showed the most incisive coverage of Iraq back in 2003, that being *Panorama* and *Newsnight*, there was a more directed perspective found within.

In February, *Panorama* broadcast a special entitled “Forgotten Heroes”, which specifically focuses on the British soldiers that fought in the Iraq campaign.<sup>131</sup> On one hand, as can be interpreted both from the title and the synopsis, this programme holds the services of these men in high regard, and it’s also important to note that the main subject and “host” of this documentary was an army colonel whose pre-invasion speech earned acclaim with President Bush. But through this perspective it openly shows the problems a lot of these soldiers had faced and were facing since returning to civilian life. It displays the struggles in finding employment and housing, and how in some cases this translated into legal troubles. It also goes in depth about the internal demons of Iraq veterans, the effects of PTSD and the toll it took on the families of those returning from war given honest and clear coverage.

As for *Newsnight*, their focus on Iraq in 2011 was usually limited to reaction and debate, rather than any further interview specials. This can be attributed to two factors, the first and foremost being that the major figures most associated with the invasion had either faded from or left the political sphere entirely, and the new “relevant” names would perhaps have little to do with a strong line of questioning regarding Iraq. There might not be a lot of interest in doing a similar special involving the situation with David Cameron, for instance. But additionally, the animosity that had grown between the BBC and the

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<sup>130</sup> “2003: Invasion of Iraq”, *BBC News*, 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2011, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-middle-east-14666720>

<sup>131</sup> “Forgotten Heroes”, *BBC Panorama*, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2011

government relating to how they had approached Iraq, partially a result of that special in 2003, may also have affected the willingness to have a major politician publicly interrogated in such a way. Nonetheless, *Newsnight*'s coverage still displays an inquisitive approach to the events. One special, produced in the wake of Bin Laden's death, held a tone not of celebration and praise, but something instead held in doubt and worry.<sup>132</sup> Using the accounts of those involved in the 7/7 London bombings as a scope, *Newsnight* displays their intention to evaluate and discuss the potential fear that Bin Laden's death would lead to a heightened risk of terrorist attacks in the UK. This shows that the BBC were presenting an area of caution with this turn of events, raising the possibility that it could see acts of vengeance. The other bullet points in the programme itinerary run along an inquisitive theme, speculating on the shockwaves this would send throughout the Arab region and how it might shake up the multiple political infrastructures regardless of the extent of their stability, while also judging how it might boost the prospects of President Obama earning a second term in office. But most interestingly of all, this programme delves into an apparent confrontation in the Prime Minister's cabinet, where at one stage it was apparently stated it was not a place for a "Jeremy Paxman interview". It's an occurrence that's perhaps tangentially related to what *Newsnight* were focusing on with Iraq, but it in some way reinforces what was previously mentioned about the government having a visibly frosty relationship with the BBC.

#### The internet

As evidenced, a lot of this material contained a negative outlook regarding Iraq. But this did not correlate to much coverage concerning anti-war movements, the potential impact they may have had in foretelling the invasion's consequences went overlooked for the most part. Although, on the rare occasions where either the February 2003 protests or other prominent anti-war movements were referred to, their significance is acknowledged and through the perspective of left-wing outlets there contains a certain extent of direct praise for how they battled against what was seen as an injustice by the government. But just like how in 2003 it was important to incorporate how the internet was routinely bashing the media for downplaying the impact these movements might have had; it is just as critical to evaluate the internet's response to this type of media outlook as well as their own unique perspective on what was happening in Iraq by 2011. Because as previously alluded to, we can't simply measure the idea that online sites were either less or more critical of the mainstream than before, as there are other contextual factors in play that may have potentially affected the presence of anti-war movements within.

The first of these factors comes in the form of regulation. As mentioned in the 2003 section regarding the internet, a large part of how the medium had so much freedom in terms of the information spread was because of the lack of government regulation, and how the attempts to enforce this type of law were largely unsuccessful. But by the late 2000s into the turn of the following decade, there were signs of a renewed push to apply

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<sup>132</sup> *BBC Newsnight*, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011

legislative control onto the world wide web. A significant amount of the motivation for this can be directly tied to anti-Iraq sentiment on the internet, as sites such as WikiLeaks took to the effort of leaking sensitive government information. The documents released were specifically tied to ensuing controversies regarding the handling of the Iraq campaign, such as the Abu Ghraib incident. These types of flashpoints would strengthen the belief that governing bodies had to take some control over the flow of the internet's information, to prevent a similar occurrence in a future conflict.

Another factor as to why the popularity of anti-war movements on the internet may have faded can be attributed to a rise in right-wing outlets. As previously mentioned, there was signs of a conservative presence in 2003, with certain blogs holding a pro-war stance directly opposed to what was studied during that period. The context behind the perspective of these blogs has already been noted, as well as why their presence in the early 2000s was relatively minimised. But by 2011, there are indications that this presence was beginning to grow. A portion of this stems from the general rise of traditional outlets in the online news landscape, perhaps promoting more reactionary right-wing voices such as the Daily Mail and Fox News along with it. But there was also a marked growth in the number of online-based news platforms with an evident hard-right bias, such as InfoWars and Breitbart. Both examples originate from the US, and as such they adopt certain methods found in American conservative political media throughout the Bush administration and even before, such as the "shock jock" concept. And they both have come under frequent controversies for their statements and language, the infamous host of InfoWars Alex Jones recently found liable for long-standing comments made about the Columbine school shooting to name one example. While these types of internet outlets might not necessarily have mainstream acceptance on account of bigotry and conspiracy, it does show to some extent that the political landscape of the online world had changed significantly by the early 2010s.

So overall, we can see marked shifts to the internet in the interim period that may signal a change in how it was viewed and utilised. That doesn't necessarily mean anti-war movements were completely or mostly ignored in comparison to their support in 2003, but it does indicate that those aligned blogs might have lost support themselves in the online interest.

### Indymedia & Medialens

Firstly, Indymedia by this period must be focused on, and what provides a good backdrop for the ensuing coverage of 2011 is the last update of the year prior, which concerns WikiLeaks and the attempts of governments to "repress" the site.<sup>133</sup> In this case, the antagonism shown towards the actions of the mainstream and those in power back in 2003 is still just as prominent here, accusing these governments of throwing

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<sup>133</sup> "Governments and Corporations Attempt to Repress WikiLeaks: Holding Up Mirrors", *Indymedia*, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010

“the freedom of the whole internet at stake” for WikiLeaks “holding a mirror”. As this update states regarding their attempts to censor and prosecute the site:

“The governments clearly don’t like to see the ugliness of their own depravity, which is usually hidden from view by the press. Will we allow WikiLeaks and Julian Assange to be destroyed for daring to tell the world the truth about wars and the criminal deeds of government around the world?”

Such bold accusations showed the level of animosity by Indymedia had remained and provides an indication that the articles regarding Iraq in 2011 would be just as critical of the media and the government. But what is also noticeable quickly is that there was a significant drop-off in the frequency of updates. Compared to the constant flow of information by the time of the mass anti-war protests, articles were few and far between with a six-month gap between two of them. In fact, there is scarce articles focusing on Iraq if any at all, not even on major flashpoints such as Bin Laden’s death. It seems as if though Indymedia’s anger with the mainstream was still present, their overall attention and popularity had waned considerably.

Comparably, Medialens provides at least some substantial content discussing Iraq. It, too, focuses on the government pressure on WikiLeaks – the headline of one blog article stating that they were “in the crosshairs”.<sup>134</sup> It discusses various points from which the website was being attacked and attempts to convey how in a certain way these methods were previously utilised by the media during the prelude to Iraq, if not a criticism that they were also guilty of committing. The calls around this time for an end to violent political rhetoric that could cause tragic consequences were framed with the language certain outlets had been using regarding Iraq, and how they had received little backlash, but also how that same language was still being used regarding the leader of WikiLeaks Julian Assange. A passage from a rather incendiary article in *the Washington Times* is utilised:

“We should treat Mr. Assange the same way as other high-value terrorist targets: kill him.”

This specific section of the article also displays reprimanding for the internet as well as the mainstream, noting the increasing frequency of online articles along the lines of “5 reasons the CIA should have already killed Julian Assange.” Moving on, regarding the sexual assault charges levied against Assange around this time (charges Indymedia placed serious doubt upon in their update), Medialens compares how this would make bringing WikiLeaks to justice appealing to feminists, to how the movement was utilised to boost the “war in terror”. One piece of framing in the case for invading Afghanistan, the Taliban’s abusive treatment of women, were staunchly supported by leading figures such as Hilary Clinton as a suitable justification for the war. Medialens asserts a similar method here, the media using Assange’s potential sex offences as a justification to punish WikiLeaks for the damage done to the Iraq campaign (this also in some apparent

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<sup>134</sup> “Collateral Damage – WikiLeaks in the Crosshairs”, *Medialens*, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011

cases led outlets to taking an extreme stance regarding those who opposed this prosecution, branding them as likely misogynists).

Finally, Medialens directly confronts *the Guardian* regarding an article exploring a treason case in Zimbabwe centred around confidential US diplomat talks that were leaked by WikiLeaks, the article implicating the website as “having blood on their hands”. But this article displays that these discussions were in fact released by *the Guardian* first, and that the outlet sheepishly made an amendment to this in the aftermath. Medialens conclude with the statement that:

“The mainstream media has [once again] distorted and deceived to manufacture, isolate and target a threat for destruction. Certainly, WikiLeaks is embarrassing the powers that be much more effectively than mainstream journalism.”

And they also make claims that the mainstream was just as liable of releasing sensitive government information, and that the prosecution of WikiLeaks and Assange who in this article’s view were “engaging in journalistic activity” would have “collateral damage” for the mainstream journalists in question.

A Q&A session further into the year shows further evidence that the contempt towards the mainstream was still held, although perhaps to a slightly lesser extent.<sup>135</sup> One question posits a claim that the media were becoming more critical after their experience with Iraq, a statement refuted by this article that believes the media in the US were continuing their “structural role” in boosting the government’s demonising and posing of certain territories as threats to the West. And regarding the UK media, Medialens offer the belief that while the right-wing press was commonly interpreted as a method of “propaganda” the acceptance of their liberal counterparts was an acceptance of the status quo and a persuasion “to be complacent”. It uses as an example how while the former would continue to uphold the justification that it was right to invade Iraq because Saddam was a “lethal tyrant”, and the latter would at least acknowledge that the entire conflict was a giant mistake, neither would consider the idea that any war crimes or other criminal infringements were committed throughout its duration.

Also, unlike Indymedia, Medialens do provide explicit and substantial coverage of Bin Laden’s death.<sup>136</sup> It’s interestingly like BBC *Newsnight*’s reaction in that there’s a lot of scepticism involved in interpreting the potential consequences, but to a far larger extent. A lot of this specific article’s fear comes from how the US public were responding, the heights the patriotic fervour were reaching causing frustration in terms to how it was associated with the Iraq conflict. The article’s title is taken from a diatribe of quotes used as a supportive base, “You cannot kill an ideology from a gun” providing the assertion that responding to the instability in the Middle East with violence would do

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<sup>135</sup> “Ten Years of Media Lens – Some Questions & Answers”, *Medialens*, April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011

<sup>136</sup> “You Cannot Kill An Ideology With A Gun”, *Medialens*, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011

nothing to fix the problems, and the killing of Bin Laden would only achieve in making these issues worse.

But it is this supportive base that provides the overall argument of the article, a rebuttal to claims that the extent of celebrations of what had happened were in any way justified on the account of “morality”, stating that the patriotism present was in fact a disguised nationalism (in that it was presenting America as morally superior through how it was allowed to glorify the killing of their enemy while it would be globally abhorred the other way around) and that it disregarded the plights of those in Iraq as well as the thoughts of Americans who opposed murder as retribution (such as extrajudicial killing and capital punishment). The article explains further on how the perception by certain sections of the media that President Obama had turned from a “wimp” into a “warrior president” in the wake of Bin Laden’s death was a very worrying glorification, a theme that wouldn’t be seen out of place at the height of the Bush administration during the “war on terror”. It provides the idea that America wanted to be seen as a feared, dominant world power, rather than “weak” and “defenceless” like it might have been viewed as by enemies in 9/11’s immediate aftermath.

As evidenced, one example of a web blog supportive of anti-war movements continued to be persistent in its criticism of the mainstream media for its coverage of Iraq, both in its current duration and in 2003, as well as how this reporting was used as a template in other foreign conflicts and as a tool to curb the popularity of war protests. But at a direct contrast, the other example that this thesis has used shows a dramatic downturn in the level of content produced, far less than even after the noise surrounding the anti-war demonstrations in February 2003 had died down. It’s clear that Indymedia by this point had a greatly minimised focus, a potential consequence of both a waning interest in the content it was promoting as well as right-wing internet sites likelier to support endeavours such as the Iraq campaign through propaganda and possibly conspiracy. These two opposites in terms of fortune demonstrate the presence of anti-war movements on the internet by 2011, that while there will still outlets flying the flag of journalist activism and holding the mainstream responsible, particularly in matters such as the WikiLeaks case, there is evidence to suggest they weren’t as appealing as they were at the “peak” of the “war on terror”.

### Summary

Adding on to this conclusion, this to some extent conveys how the media overall approached Iraq by 2011. While this thesis has discussed and demonstrated at length about how prominent Iraq’s legacy was in terms of shaping foreign policy and the relationship of government and media, and this much can be shown in how it is portrayed within this period, there is also an acknowledgement that Iraq “was” a conflict, or at least one that was effectively soon to be referred in the past tense. More contemporary wars, such as those in Afghanistan and Libya, took an understandably larger focus, and with both the death of Bin Laden as well as a downplaying of “war on terror” rhetoric it would seem apparent that the language involved in conveying these conflicts would be less charged, for the most part. In addition, the idea of Iraq being “in

the far past” seemingly allowed mainstream outlets to shape certain parts of the Iraq War, either in how it admitted it was a “mistake” (with Blair and Bush reluctantly painted as scapegoats) or in some cases defending the conflict entirely. As for anti-war movements, there is an equal lack of focus in their coverage to 2003, although there is evidence of both a reverence of their efforts in that year as well as an acceptance of some of their stances (for example, the BBC questioning whether the killing of Bin Laden would lead to more dire consequences).

To summarise what this case study finds in terms of its data, there is a clearer consensus that the Iraq War was “wrong” or a “mistake” in some form, with the potential errors carrying a certain viewpoint or narrative (e.g. some outlets focusing on military shortcomings instead of what could be perceived as human rights violations). But there is little acknowledgement of these media outlets’ own perspectives back in 2003 that could have been contradicted by their current approach, and so it could be argued the coverage within this case study carries an air of hindsight compared to headlines involving a conflict that hadn’t yet gotten underway. The same can be said for anti-war movements to some extent, and in this regard the evaluation of online sources within this chapter shows a sudden lack of coverage from the same outputs. Either the relevance of these online blogs had faded by 2011, or the gathering of anti-war perspectives via their sites had become less readily accessible by this point in time.

## **Conclusion**

In the introduction to this thesis, we established several goals for how the information found informs some of the debates surrounding Iraq/UK media. Looking at the mainstream, we wanted to determine initially how established print and broadcast outlets had presented the most apparent motivations for war (such as the idea that Saddam was too dangerous to not overthrow, along with the alleged evidence that he was prepared to use devastating warfare) both before and after conflict broke out, and then if any criticisms of these frameworks were made directly to the Prime Minister. There’s also the matter of how these mainstream outlets portrayed anti-war movements if they did at all, with a focus on their most notable flashpoint in the February 15<sup>th</sup> protests. Extending into 2011, the contextual changes caused by the war itself presented interest in investigating whether the level of negativity surrounding the UK’s decisions, as well as perhaps any acknowledgement that these anti-war groups were ‘right’ in any way, were affected somewhat. With the internet it was about interpreting how they may have provided a voice for anti-war figures where the mainstream had either neglected or opposed them, especially after the Iraq War started. Whereas in 2011 there was an expectation that the UK media may have been more critical of the government of the time, with the internet we were instead questioning if their anti-war presence was greatly diminished because of multiple factors. And in the gulf between this emergent medium compared to the more established mainstream, there lied the possibility of animosity between the two. By comparing the findings to the perceptions held in the introduction, we can find the most important answers that this thesis presents.

With the analysis of print media, we were able to see a diversified political spectrum that oversaw numerous altering events between 2003 and 2011. With *the Times*, a centre-right outlet which saw their favoured party in the Conservatives go from firmly the opposition to governing within a coalition, was almost completely unwavering in its support for the invasion beyond some hesitation at an early point in the 2003 case study. This strong endorsement of a Labour-led policy, even with hindsight by 2011 when they were no longer the governing party, as well as the type of language used in downplaying the opposition to the war (“Saddam’s useful idiots” would seem more fitting in a tabloid, for instance) perhaps shows a hawkish stance adopted by *the Times* and the Conservatives in general, although a fervent critic of Blair’s premiership might alternatively view this as a shining example of his pushing of Labour towards the centre of the political spectrum.

Conversely, as a centre-left newspaper *the Independent* were more inclined to support the Liberal Democrat party, who made up the other half of the coalition by 2011, although it might be argued their role in government for that five-year term was somewhat diminished by the Conservatives. With the Lib Dems’ consistent anti-war stance, the outlet was naturally more critical in the lead-up to the invasion, even though its position on the political spectrum meant they would have been far more supportive of Labour than *the Times* in other policies. Openly placing Blair under fire and supplanting this idea that there was a threat of revolt within his cabinet over the Iraq policy, as well as vocally supporting the February 15<sup>th</sup> protests and strengthening that support through prominent left-wing figures only further serves the idea that *the Independent* was a firmly anti-war newspaper. But that doesn’t mean it escaped criticism of being too loyal to the government, as though it continued to remain opposed to the war, even becoming fiercer in its criticism in the postmortem, when the invasion actually got underway it seemed the outlet’s focus on war reporting was an abandonment of these groups, seeing their demonstrations as unnecessary to support now their primary directive had failed. Or perhaps alternatively, it was another reflection of the Lib Dems’ approach to Iraq, that they were unwilling to continue resisting efforts to remove Saddam if it meant directly opposing the plights of Britain’s armed forces.

As for *the Guardian*, a Labour-aligned news outlet would naturally face a dilemma over whether to throw their support behind their Iraq policy. This in some way can be reflected in the output, presenting an opinion wholly supportive of the protests and critical of some of Blair and Bush’s warmongering, but was still restrained in how persistent they were in this criticism. Like *the Independent*, this is a stance that is to some extent reflective of how certain *Guardian* journalists felt about the prospect of invasion, considering themselves anti-war and yet holding issue with how anti-war groups were conducting themselves. Additionally, there were those who ultimately went on to support Labour’s stance, whether begrudgingly or not. It makes more sense why *the Guardian* was a frequent target of anti-war internet blogs, as an outlet with the reputation of being one of Britain’s most left-wing newspapers showing a growing alignment towards supporting the war effort may have made them more suitable for general criticism. In addition, this developing shift was again reflective of Labour’s shift

towards the centre and the media's support of them doing so, this idea that those *Guardian* journalists already held or were shifting towards a "Blairite" stance.

But what picture does this paint of the UK news media in relation to how they approached Iraq? Academic materials that we explored throughout can help us towards this understanding. *Pockets of Resistance* operated on roughly the same lines of attempting to gauge the level of bias present within the media, and with how they immediately identified the presence of the internet as major shifts for news outlets their relevance to this summary becomes clear. What they presented was that there was a great contradiction between different media about the approach to Iraq, one so significant that the precedent of war reporting was altered, which with what we analysed about the political media spectrum and the shifting perspectives within, it does seem to align with the material sampled. But rather than there being a simple lack of consensus, it was also a sign that a previous consensus was slowly decaying. The Iraq War was the first major British conflict to show a major resistance towards its deployment by parts of the UK media, a true reflection of how popular an anti-war stance had become by the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Anti-war movements were existent amidst previous arenas of conflict such as WW2 and the Falklands, but for the most part they would have been shunned by newspapers. The fact that at one point of time there was almost a consensus that the UK moving to invade Iraq would be a mistake, along with the support for these demonstrators being as strong as it had been before, displays a growing media attitude towards war that we might see reflected in conflicts following Iraq, even if this perspective wasn't considered by the facet of activist journalism.

The BBC's analysis was intriguing because of their determination to maintain its integrity through impartiality, something that the newspapers were not forced to abide to. We can see how the programmes in 2003 were open in their coverage, *Panorama's* special on the framing around Iraq giving a voice to anti-war movements even if it was resistant to explicitly support them, while the *Newsnight* Blair interview was notable in how Paxman exposed him to the audience's criticism, even if anti-war groups believed the opposite was happening. This shifts in 2011, as both become more formal and only minimally inquisitive in content surrounding the Iraq topic. It can't be overstated how devastating an effect the Hutton inquiry had on the BBC's reputation and their relationship with the government, even if they took the brunt of the blame that should have been shared amongst other involved parties. In some way it spooked the corporation in being even more ineffectual in their coverage, which would naturally attract more criticism from those antagonistic to the mainstream. This is not to say the BBC weren't in any way negative towards the US and UK regarding their foreign policies (a *Newsnight* special on Bin Laden's death focused heavily on the potentially dire consequences, for example) but it does seem as if the issues of Iraq and particularly WMDs were silently pushed to one side, the military withdrawal around this time a suitable excuse to divert attention to other topics.

Carruthers' study on the television and its relationship to conflict gives us a good outline from which we can compare findings. One of the major points that can be taken from

her sections on the 'war on terror' show how the media was used to present government interpretation as fact to the British public. Some of the examples used of this behaviour include the evidence surrounding WMDs (which Carruthers notes the UK newspaper landscape was implicit in doing) and from a strictly American right-wing output, the misplaced idea that Saddam was directly responsible for 9/11. Although this shows more focus in Carruthers' study on the US side of media, it in some way shows that the perception of the television as this 'revolutionary' medium was no longer the case, and the BBC's lack of incisive coverage on Iraq by 2011 is proof of that.

The internet blogs became a matter of interest for the most part because of just how antagonistic they had become towards the mainstream. The intended expectation was that there would be some obvious animosity present, in the form of perhaps accusing print and broadcast outlets of not doing enough to criticise Blair and Bush's actions or give a supportive perspective on anti-war movements. But what was instead seen was a significant barrage of criticism, one that almost reaches the same levels of the governments in the first place. Indymedia and Medialens both, either explicitly or implicitly through the words of other prominent anti-war figures, allege the media of being the "propaganda arm" of the UK government, presenting all outlets as subservient to Blair's "tyrannical" and "warmongering" foreign policy. This stance might be viewed as a little too extreme and firmly in a sphere of deviancy, but from the perspective of anti-war groups any minor support from the mainstream decaying as the conflict grew closer was a sign of this partnership (not to mention, there's evidence, mostly from *the Times*, of newspapers decrying the protests as indirect support for Saddam or giving a direct perspective to figures such as Jack Straw). As a result of this, the mainstream took just as much of the blame as the government for the situation in Iraq, to the extent that one of these blogs advocate for anti-war demonstrations outside news media headquarters.

But in 2011 there was another effect whose extent was quite unexpected: that being the decay of updates regarding Iraq. In the introduction it was established that the internet may naturally lose its appetite for popularising anti-war content as time went on and outlined numerous factors for why that might be the case. But through analysing the data we could find an example that strongly reaffirmed this perspective (the apparent ghost town that Medialens had become, as updates on even more contemporary conflicts had become sparse) and by contrast an example that battled against the argument (Indymedia still showing the consistent and scathing criticism of the mainstream and the promotion of war, even if the frequency had noticeably decreased). Through this we can interpret that some of the reasons presented (rise of a conservative internet presence, integration of mainstream outlets, legislation) did have some kind of effect on the anti-war blogs, but it's awkward to truly quantify. Particularly with that conservative presence it was already something that *could* be marked in 2003 (e.g. military blogs heavily in support of the government's position on Iraq), so whether it was something that grew due to the birth of more reactionary content or there was still a minimal effect (especially if one considers social media was not more politicised until a few years after) remains up in the air somewhat.

This is the right time to consider the true effectiveness of the Hallin's Spheres theorem as a methodological framework. For the mainstream print and broadcast installations, it was useful in showing us how different topics were interpreted on different ends of the political media spectrum, and how some were 'floating' between different spheres (the oil issue, for example, was floating between the spheres of deviance and legitimate debate during 2003). For the internet, it was more difficult to use the theorem to truly unearth what different blogs held as a consensus or commonly disregarded. While there are some topics, such as this idea that the UK and US were deliberately misleading the public into a war for their own governments' gain, that seem agreed on, there may be others such as the stance on Saddam and Iraq itself that appear obscured. Not to mention the idea of criticism against the anti-war movement, something pursued willingly by *the Times* but apparently moved to the side with these blogs. We do know there were indications of disagreements between the different groups, something that involved Medialens and Indymedia, so again there is obscurity. This all harks back to what was established in the introduction as potential limitations of the theorem, that being the existence of a fractured media landscape. With the mainstream media this presents itself clearly, the previous argument that this was one of the first conflicts where they showed a clear anti-war stance in some respects meaning that it was difficult for certain consensus to form. But with the vastness of the internet, it was even harder to quantify these spheres, to truly gauge just how popular the anti-war perspective truly was.

To fully understand the true extent of the internet's impact on the Iraq War, we must again look at Carruthers' comment, where she stated that it was comparable to TV and Vietnam and dubbed the conflict the "YouTube War". This provided much of the basis of this thesis, a motivation to examine whether this statement heralding the internet as this 'revolutionary' medium was truthful. And in 2003, the evidence seems to point towards this being the case. It can't be denied how strongly the internet boosted anti-war voices and became a vehicle for "activist journalism" in terms of how easily demonstrations were able to be organised. How useful the internet became in terms of promoting an anti-war perspective was even picked up by the mainstream, this new wave of online media being approached with a worry of how it could be "abused".

So, what causes the decay in 2011? Rather than it being related to any of the issues raised as possible factors against the internet, nor it being the stance that its position as a 'renegade' medium dropped, just like the television but at a much higher rate, it can be believed that the answer is that the mainstream was brought into them, instead of the other way around. It was acknowledged before that over time, the internet became the most essential news medium (something the television couldn't really stake a claim to at its peak of popularity) and between 2003 and 2011 is where that starts to form. Nowadays, virtually every UK print outlet has a website deemed a bigger priority due to their higher rates of traffic, and almost anyone from around the world can watch BBC News on their device. Originally, anti-war blogs like Indymedia and Medialens operated in a niche, a medium in its relative infancy whose true power wasn't yet realised. Now, activist journalism is in a way overshadowed by their mainstream counterparts, and as

a result their presence has been largely diminished. This is not to say that the other factors raised do not have massive effects on how we view the online world today (for example, one of the modern discussions surrounding the internet is the issue of fake news, a consequence of those right-wing outlets gaining prominence). But it shows just how much the internet evolved and developed in its position as an anti-war front, both during and after the Iraq War.

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