MEDIA FRAMING OF GEOSTRATEGIC OUTCOMES OF WAR IN IRAQ

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Abstract

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This study explores how the media in the US covered Iran in the context of Iraq War and influenced ability of the public to understand geopolitical consequences of US policies in the War. By toppling Saddam Hussein's government, the US administration chose to break decades' long policy of containment towards Iran, arguably increasing Iranian geopolitical leverage and creating turbulence on a territory critical for the US security and stability in the Middle East. When Iraq War is concerned, the mainstream media rarely seem to examine tactical outcomes in the light of broader, strategic goals. Success is usually seen as diminishment of violence, reduction of US casualties and the creation of a stable government in Iraq. However, such media discourse fails to point out that the US had not gone to Iraq to quell what it terms to be "sectarian violence," or to reduce US casualties, and hence neglects to hold the government accountable for the possible failure of its strategic policy goals. Nor does such discourse raise questions as to what constitutes a stable Iraqi government and the implications thereof for the regional and global security. This study draws conclusions from a content analysis of The New York Times and NBC coverage of Iran from 2001 to 2008 to examine media framing of Iranian geopolitical gains from the War in Iraq. The central implication of this study is that the coverage that neglects to draw public attention to geopolitical implications of the Iraq War, fails to equip the public with the necessary tools for holding the government accountable for what could be defined as a strategic failure of its policies and hence constrains the ability of the public to exert a change in policy.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The reasons behind President Bush's invasion of Iraq in 2003 were changing over time: from accusations of weapons of mass destruction; to those that linked Saddam Hussein's regime to Al Qaeda; and finally those of hope that a democratized Iraq would spur reform throughout the Middle East (Robinson and Livingston, 2005). For instance The New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman wrote in 2003 that Iraq can "serve as a progressive model to spur reform-educational, religious, economic and political-around the Arab World" (Friedman, 2003). It was hence compelling to track the development of this geopolitical discourse as it gradually became apparent that the Iraq War would not lead to such a positive effect in the region. Throughout the Iraq War, media seem to have focused on its tactical outcomes that tend to be embedded in daily events: reports of violence and casualties. Attributions of responsibility for American losses would typically be placed on Al Qaeda-spurred violence and sectarian fighting. With the Surge policy in 2007[1] promoted by the White House, the problem was framed in terms of lack of US troops. Once the reduction of violence was to a certain extent achieved, and the number of US casualties gradually began to diminish, the success of US efforts in Iraq seems to have been framed in terms of these outcomes. *Whereas this study does not rest on the assumption that the reduction of violence and casualties should not be framed as success, it does make a different point by adding the geopolitical dimension to the discussion.* Instead of examining what is present in media framing of the War, this study seeks to look into an important

aspect of the coverage that might be scarce and crowded out by an overwhelming focus on its tactical outcomes. What was suspected to be missing was the examination of US policies in terms of their strategic intentions and broader goals: what kind of geopolitical effect was achieved by the very toppling of Saddam Hussein's government and what is the nature of the Iraqi Shia government that took its place? Within this context, the aim of this study is to examine how media portrayed Iranian influence in the light of these geostrategic outcomes.

United States intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 and the Iraq War in 2003 have created major turbulence that has benefited Iranian geostrategic position. Numerous authors point out that Iranians have welcomed the collapse of the hostile Sunni government in Iraq as well as the disruption of Taliban-Pakistan-Saudi Arabian alliance, and now perceive Shia revival as a means of preventing the resurgence of Sunni domination (Nasr, 2006, Pelham, 2008). It was the Treaty of Qasr-i-Shirin in 1639 that had established the border between the Ottoman and the Persian Empires, creating a rift between the Sunni and Shia-governed lands. During the Iran-Iraq war in 1980s, Iran had tried to breach the border, while the President Reagan's administration supported Saddam Hussein to prevent that from happening (Galbraith 2008, Khatami, 2004). Yet, with the War in Iraq in 2003 and the establishment of a Shiite government in Baghdad, the United States violated this boundary, opening the door to Iranian influence. Iraqi Sunnis see the rise of Iran as a regional power in the light of its close relationship with the Shiite government in

[1] President George W. Bush's decision to increase US troops in the beginning of 2007 in order to provide greater security to Baghdad and the Al Anbar Province

Iraq. “Everything Iran fought for in the Iran-Iraq war, America gave when it invaded,” Saleh al Mutlaq, the head of Iraqi Front for National Dialog, the second largest Sunni party in the Iraqi parliament, concluded (Sly, 2007). Prince Turki al-Faisal, former director of Saudi intelligence and ambassador to the United States, said that Saudi Arabia had told the United States when it brought a Shiite-dominated government to power after the 2003 invasion, that US “handed Iraq to Iran on a golden plate” (Rubin, 2009).

During 1980s Shia politics in regional countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Pakistan began to change as the Shias started to abandon Arab nationalism to join Shia political movements, many of which received support from Iran to push specifically Shiite agendas (Nasr, 2006). Political events such as the Iran-Iraq war during the 1980s; Saddam Hussein’s oppression of the country’s Shiites in 1991; the rivalry between the Iranians and Saudis, which was triggered by the 1979 Revolution; are all manifestations of this Sunni-Shia division that affects Middle East policies albeit in ways that are often not apparent to those who observe from the outside (Ibid). Establishing a Shiite government in Iraq constitutes a major geopolitical gain for Shiites in each of these countries. Shiites constitute majority population in Lebanon and Bahrain as well as a significant minority in Saudi Arabia, situated in strategically crucial part of the country with major oil reserves (Ibrahim, 2006). Hence, they have all extolled the institution of electoral democracy in Iraq, which would lead to empowerment of Shias in these countries as well (Pelham, 2008, Nasr, 2006). The major implication of this geopolitical shift is that it leads to an anchoring of Shiite interests into national identities, and over time, Iraqi-ness, Bahraini-ness and Lebanese-ness “can come to mean forms of

"Shia-ness" just as Iranian nationalism has long been entwined with Shia identity" (Nasr, 2006, p. 234). This drastic change in leverage of Shiite communities relates to growing Iranian influence (Ibid). What constituted causes traditionally associated with Arab identity and Arab nationalism, such as defending Palestinians and fighting Israel, has now become associated with Shiite identity. Success of Hezbollah in war in Lebanon in 2006 exemplifies this change. The conflict turned Hezbollah's sponsor- Iran- into "regional power broker and custodian of Palestinian cause," leaving Sunni powers that had denounced Hezbollah in this conflict- Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt- on the sidelines (p. 256). The very fact that these powers adopted sectarian tone confirmed that War in Iraq had a rippling effect in the region by influencing balance of power in the Arab-Israeli conflict as well.

The goal of this study was to examine how mainstream media in the US covered these geopolitical implications of the War in Iraq that lead to growing Iranian influence in the region. When Iranian influence in Iraq is concerned, the most common reports coming from the media are the accusations of Iranian support for the insurgency in Iraq, which typically frame Iran as a "meddling force"-the one that obstructs US efforts in Iraq. On the other hand, any discussion that would attribute responsibility for the growing Iranian influence in Iraq and the region to the US government's decision to invade Iraq and establish a Shiite government seemed to be missing. The content analysis of New York Times articles and NBC transcripts starting from September 11 2001, when these geopolitical changes were set in motion, was intended to examine if media captured this

discourse; why this framing might be missing from the coverage; and what are the implications for public accountability and US policy if such framing is wanting.

A brief survey of The New York Times articles from 2009 reveals that Iran still seems to be primarily framed as a "meddling force" in the Iraq War- a culprit obstructing the work of US troops: "Washington must find a way to work with Iran and other Iraq's neighbors to try to limit outside meddling as American troops prepare to go," an editorial notes (The New York Times, May 3). Although the Iranian "meddling in Iraq War,"[2] the notion used to denote primarily Iranian support for the insurgency, is certainly a problematic factor when Iranian influence in Iraq is concerned, this frame seems to crowd out a more complex discussion about long-term, geopolitical benefits that Iran has potentially garnered from the very toppling of Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq, understanding of which this thesis sees as crucial for an accurate assessment of success and failure of the US government's policy.

Another New York Times article from May 2009 could be used to bolster the proposition that reduction of violence is still used in the media as the primary benchmark for policy success: "[…] violence across the country remains at its lowest levels since 2003. Mr. Maliki could be rewarded for those gains when voters go to the polls this winter to choose a new Parliament and prime minister" (Santora, May 19, 2009). Success in Iraq is also often measured in terms of Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki's creation of a stable government, whereby Prime Minister's ties to Iran often remain unexamined. Inter-Shiite relations are

[2] This support involves supply of weapons; speculations of support for Al-Qaeda; as well as efforts to get involved in Iraqi political process and typically obstruct the work of the Iraqi government

often simplified to the distinction between parties that are deemed to be Iran-backed, such as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)[3] and those that are seen as resisting the Iranian influence. The following Washington Post article from February 2009, indicates this view that seems to be prevalent in media reports: "Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's strong performance in Iraqi national elections was also a victory for American goals […] and voters rejected religious parties backed by militias that were perceived as close to Iran" (A12, February 6). Such media discussion simplifies the complexity of inter-Shiite relations in Iraq and fails to capture the complexity of Iranian involvement in Shiite politics in the country; and portrays Iran primarily as a force that stands in the way of a stable Iraqi government. The attribution of responsibility for the rising Iranian influence among the Iraqi Shia is almost never traced to the US government policy of invading Iraq in 2003-which reduces public ability to accurately attribute responsibility for potentially failed policies.

The thesis argues that the coverage that misses geopolitical aspects of the war would undermine the public ability to assess US government's policies in the light of their strategic outcomes. The study seeks to explore if topics that focus on tactical outcomes of the War and lend themselves to procedural frames, such as the reduction of violence and "threat of nuclear Iran," dominate the news environment to the detriment of a sustained discussion on what could be defined as a geopolitical failure in Iraq War. The relevance of this study is predicated on the notion that frames are not just ways of presenting news content-they have implications for processing news and constitute "predictive basis for

[3] Now renamed under ISCI –Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq

observed effects of news formats on citizens" (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997, p. 47). Previous studies have pointed out that the Iraq War coverage has been characterized by a "neglect of more profoundly negative news not rooted in daily events" (Entman, Livingston and Kim, p.701, cf. Livingston and Bennett, 2003). Discussion of geopolitical outcomes would exact that media engage in issue-oriented coverage as exemplified in thematic framing; such discussion is typically missing from the coverage that focuses on daily events- primarily reports of violence, casualties and individual instances or Iranian meddling in Iraqi affairs. Disjointed coverage that neglects certain policy outcomes and does not piece together separate events into a broader picture would also exemplify an instance of "fragmentation media bias" that could further undermine the public ability to understand consequences behind US government policies (Bennett, 2001). Such fragmented coverage, characterized by procedural framing, would fail to "motivate or equip the public to engage in political deliberation," (Entman, 2004) with the implication of further reduction of incentives for keeping the government accountable since the very "paucity of media images themselves may reduce pressure on officials to consider changing problematic policy" (Entman, Livingston and Kim, 2009, p. 701). When seeking theoretical explanations as to why geostrategic framing might be missing from the coverage-one of the implications could be found in the notion of cultural congruence and the idea that most successful frames are the ones that have "the greatest intrinsic capacity to arouse similar responses among most Americans" and "are fully congruent with schemas habitually used by most members of the society." (Entman, 2004, p. 14). Conveying geostrategic frame would require that media reinforce the notion that for decades prior to Iraq War in 2003, the US policy supported the brutal regime of Saddam

Hussein, an idea that is not consistent with the American self-image and its values of promoting democracy around the world, typically associated with the US government policy. An idea of "arrogant, imperialist and decadent American empire" is not easily thinkable neither for journalists, nor for the American public (Ibid). Finally, by looking into type of story as well as sources that are most often quoted when Iranian involvement in Iraq is concerned, this study seeks to shed further light on the debate about media capacity to generate independent frames, and the extent to which journalists influence, or merely reflect the framing contests that take place between the elites and the administration.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Policy Literature and Political Communication Literature

Peter Galbraith gave an apt summary of how a neglect of geostrategic implications of Iranian involvement in Iraq helps frame a government policy failure as success. He observes that the Surge might have helped reduce the violence. Yet, whereas the decline in violence is a "welcome development, […] less violence, however, is not the same as success." (Galbraith, 2008). This conclusion stems from the proposition that the United States did not go to war *for the purpose of ending the sectarian violence,* and that it is now Iran and not the United States that is the most important ally of the ruling Iraqi Shiite parties. One of the most influential Shiite parties in Iraq, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), was founded by Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran in 1982. Before he had returned to Iraq in 2003, Maliki himself had spent more than twenty years in exile in Iran and Syria. This study sought to explore to what extent the discussion in the US media managed to convey these arguably important details behind Iranian involvement in Iraqi politics.

Numerous scholars and policy analysts in the field of international relations have identified various ways in which Iran has increased its geopolitical strength thanks to US involvement in Iraq. They seem to agree on the notion that Saddam Hussein had been used by the United States as a containment tool against a stronger Iran for more than a decade preceding the Iraq War in 2003 (Chubin 2009, Carpenter and Innocent, 2007,

Kemp, 2005). The disruption of the balance of power incurred by the deposition of Saddam Hussein, "the principal strategic counterweight to Iran," increased Iran's influence in the region. They claim "because the region remained divided [back in Saddam Hussein's era] neither side could achieve hegemony and shut out American influence" (Carpenter and Innocent, 2007, p. 68).

Scholars from the Brookings Institution also explained the potentially perilous role of the US support for Shiite opposition in Iraq. The fidelity of Iraqi dissident groups surpassed their ties with Washington *both before and after* [1] the US invasion and both Kurds and Shia groups are inclined to use the support from Tehran to strengthen their positions (Maloney, 2008). This could be considered as a geopolitical winning point and a power increase for Iran, gained from the US involvement. Instead of promoting an Islamic revolution and thus alienating the Iraqi government, Iran has played prudently by supporting the democratic establishment that favors its allies in Iraq. Such strengthening of its own position within Iraq in combination with the support for insurgents has increased its leverage and power with Washington. Iran's financial investments in Iraq present another proof that "Iran has existential interest in ensuring a friendly government in Baghdad" (Ibid). Even earlier reports from Brookings suggested that "the War in Iraq has left next-door Iran the uncontested regional power, which is sure to raise fears that Iran could gain too much influence in Iraq and the rest of the Gulf" (Telhami, 2004).

[1] Emphasis added

Recent political changes in Bahrain can be used to illustrate quite well the rising Shiite influence and the growing geopolitical power of Iran in the region, spurred by the US invasion of Iraq. Bahrain is a predominantly Muslim Shiite nation, ruled by a Sunni minority, similar to the case of Iraq prior to the invasion. The ruling Sunni elite has been accusing Iran of stirring Shiite opposition that has blamed the government of curbing Shiite political rights on a regular basis over the past couple of years (Los Angeles Times, February 22, 2009). In this island country of only 700, 000, Shiites constitute more than 70 percent of the population that have been ruled by Sunni minority since the 18th century. The country gained independence in 1970 and Shiites have participated in every significant coup attempt, which intensified in 1994, leading the government to banish opposition leaders and institute repression (Louer, 2008, Nasr 2006). Policy analysts argue that impoverished Shiite youth of Bahrain are encouraged by Ayatollah al Sistani's support for "one person one vote" that spurred the similarly dispossessed Shiite youth of Iraq, many of which joined the ranks of Moqtada al Sadr, to ask for democratic changes that opened the door to Shiite empowerment (Nasr, 2006 p. 235). Shiite protests in Bahrain in 2005 where the masses asked for the institutionalization of full-fledged democracy are a testament to this encouragement spurred by the US-induced Iraqi example.

Unlike in Bahrain, Shiites in Saudi Arabia constitute a minority, yet one geographically located in a critical part of the country with major oil resources (Ibrahim, 2006, Nasr, 2006). Saudi leaders have often openly stated that the US invasion has handed over Iraq to Iran and bolstered Iranian regional influence by enabling Iran to spur unrest among

regional Shiites in other countries (Nasr, 2006). During Iran-Iraq war and prior to the US invasion of 2003, the coalition comprised of Sunni-led Baathists, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait prevented Shiite regime in Iran from becoming a regional power. During the Iran-Iraq, war it was part of Saudi Arabian ruling elite's propaganda to emphasize Khomeini's Shiite identity on the one hand, as opposed to Sunnism of the other side (Nasr, 2006, p. 154). Yet, after the 2003 invasion, this role is fulfilled by violent Sunni extremists that spurred sectarian violence in Iraq, and were in fact serving the national interests of the above mentioned Sunni-ruled countries, even though the governments were officially aligned with the United States and President George W. Bush's War on Terror (Nasr, 2006, p. 242). The conflict hence has the potential to evolve into a greater struggle between the Sunni Arab establishment of the old order and the emerging Shiite power- with Saudi Arabia dominant influence on the one side, and Iran as a representative of emerging Shiite power on the other.

Disruption of the regional balance of power is also visible in the realignment in financial and political support for Iraq. The Sunni-led oil rich states have recently declined support for Iraq's debt relief (Yaphe, 2008). Sunni-led Gulf regimes were once the main source for more than 80 billion dollars in loans supplied to help Iraq defeat Iran; yet they now oppose assistance to Iraq since they fear Iranian influence (Yaphe, 2008). As a matter of fact, it was President Ahmadinejad who, during his visit to Iraq in early 2008, made generous offers to Iraqi development, which constitutes further evidence of geopolitical realignment of traditional alliances.

Officials in President Bush's administration and neoconservative scholars seem to have been so focused on removing Saddam Hussein from power "that they largely overlooked wider geopolitical ramifications of his removal" (Carpenter and Innocent, 2007, p. 70). Iran's two *strategic goals,* aimed at increasing its power are: to weaken the possibility of US intervention through support for insurgency; and to deepen political and economic influence over Iraqi Shiites (p. 71). Some scholars also argue that once Western powers leave, "Iran will be left to benefit from the mess that they have created." (Lowe and Spencer, 2006, p. 10) Recent Western policies have encouraged those more strategically-oriented actors in Iranian foreign policy to constructively engage with regional players and prepare "political terrain for later," which is, according to their view, already evident in Iranian policy towards Iraq (Ibid). These scholars also agree that Iran's biggest leverage, "assisted, if not per se caused by the US invasion," is its ability to "further destabilize the already chaotic public space in Iraq" (p. 18). Hence, the policy literature seems to agree on the notion that growing Iranian influence in the country has been enabled through the US-induced establishment of a Shiite government in Iraq.

However, inter-Shiite divisions in Iraq add another layer to the complexity of Iranian involvement in Iraq. Iranian simultaneous support for opposing Shiite factions in Iraq often seems contradictory and hence exacts a degree of examination as well. If we perceive Iran's core strategic gains in its support and strong ties *with a stable Iraqi government*, then the speculation of Iranian support for Moqtada Al-Sadr's JAM (Jaish-Al-Mahdi Army) that first supported and yet later on fought against Prime Minister Maliki's government would seem inconsistent with Iranian long-term goal. Yet, policy analysts point out that Iranian

regime may believe it *also* has strategic interest in supporting the Iraqi insurgency in order to keep the US forces in Iraq in a quagmire and hence render an attack on Iran –triggered by Iranian nuclear threat- unlikely (Crisis Group Report, 2005). "It is plausible that Iran might provide some weapons to the Mahdi Army and some of its factions," Galbraith observes. (p. 84). Some policy institutes deem that Iran is playing *on multiple, often contradictory fronts*, to ensure its power grip in Iraq. American Enterprise Institute (AEI) reported that Iran had consistently supplied weapons and its own advisers to multiple resistance groups in Iraq—both Sunni and Shia (Rubin, 2007).

Most importantly, these seemingly incongruent Iranian tactical efforts could be seen as aspects of a broader strategy aimed at ensuring Iranian long term interests in Iraq, which entail the preservation of Iraq's territorial integrity, and avoidance of chaotic instability; encouragement of a Shiite-dominated, friendly government; and keeping the U.S. preoccupied (Crisis Group Report, 2005). In order to achieve this, Iranian strategy has been focused on the following: "encouraging electoral democracy (as a means of producing Shiite rule); promoting a degree of chaos but of a manageable kind; and investing in a wide array of diverse, often competing Iraqi actors -to minimize risks in any conceivable outcome (Ibid). Content analysis will also explore if the idea that all Iranian seemingly discrepant efforts might be part of a broad strategy, enabled through the US involvement in Iraq, is at all conveyed in the media coverage.

A common accusation leveled at Iran is that the elite units of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-Al Quds- are directly involved in attacking US troops. This type of "name calling" and direct attribution of responsibility to Al Quds and individual leaders

was expected to be more common in the network news than in The New York Times articles. The discussion concerning Al Quds would typically revolve around whether they are operating in Iraq with or without direct sanction of the highest level individuals within the Iranian government. The facts behind the very accusation that they are operating in Iraq in the first place, as put forth in a frame often stemming from the administration, are rarely questioned. Yet, regional policy experts often make a different point. For instance, London-based Center for the Study of Terrorism reported that Iranian policy in Iraq is not about dispatching Al Quds, but about "giving proper training and support to Iran's natural allies in Iraq in order to influence their political positioning in post-occupation Iraq. The Iranians are far too smart […] to challenge American power in Iraq directly." (RFE/RL, Feb. 16, 2007).

In 2006, one of the most influential British think-tanks –The Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House- published a report that outlined the strategic errors made by President Bush's administration that left Iran in control of the cards in the Middle East. The study reports that "most states [in the Middle East] desire to maintain good relations with Iran or, where the relationship is less strong, to avoid antagonization" (p. 25). The report concludes that "if Iran were seriously threatened by outside forces [regarding nuclear issues], it has the potential to inflame the region yet further" (Ibid). This idea should also be borne in mind in the context of content analysis yet to be presented in this thesis. If the threat of nuclear Iran is expected to be the most frequent frame, then is the Iranian nuclear empowerment examined in the light of Iraq War? Have the media paid attention to ways in which Iranian nuclear ambitions and aspirations

towards regional influence might have been bolstered by the Iraq invasion? Quantitative content and descriptive analysis that follow, seek to shed some light on this issue as well.

The report raises another interesting issue that illustrates the potential long-term benefits that Iran has garnered through US involvement in Iraq- and that is the possibility of creating "an expansive "Region of the Center and the South -a super province including Najaf and Karbala," which is of special interest to 'geopolitically-savvy Iranians." The writers of the report cited ISCI's power in this southern Iraqi region, claiming that ISCI was the Iraqi Shia party most susceptible to Iranian influence.[2] They conclude that "maintaining influence in southern Iraq is of paramount importance to Tehran" (p. 19). However, more importantly, these authors introduce the caveat that "virtually *every Iraqi Shia party now* [3] has strong links with Tehran" (Ibid.). They claimed that this was the case even with the parties deemed nationalist –such as Mahdi Army.

Other scholars deem that Iran does not have an interest in creating a Shiite state in southern Iraq, which would destabilize the country. "[…] the present situation is easier for Iran than it would be if it faced hostile Kurdish and Sunni states and a problematic Shiite state […] Iran is not in favor of dislocating Iraq and hopes instead to realize its interests in a unified Iraq." (Sahib, 2008, p. 309) Following this line of argument, Iranian strategic goal seems to be a stable Iraq, malleable to its influence. Iranian officials themselves seem to discuss Iranian interest in stable Iraq in a quite open and straight-forward manner. For instance, Iran's deputy foreign minister Abbas Araghchi raised the rhetorical question in a statement

[2] One should, however, bear in mind that ISCI lost heavily in Iraqi Provincial Council elections in January 2009.

for the Financial Times: "Why should we undermine a government in Iraq that we support more than anybody else?" (May 10, 2007).

Cultural dynamism of the new Iraq is another example of growing Iranian regional influence that is often not framed as such. Hundreds of thousands of Iranian pilgrims who travel to Iraq reinforce investments, social and economic ties between the two countries (Nasr, 2006). In her testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in the summer of 2008, Judith Yaphe, Distinguished Research Fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University drew attention to gains that mainstream media, as the analysis will show, *do report but fail to frame as Iranian gains*: an influx of Iranian businessmen, diplomats, security personnel and intelligence operatives along the 900 mile-long border between the two countries. Perhaps the most striking idea behind growing Iranian influence is that it has funded "virtually every Shia candidate standing for election to the National Assembly [and that] it expects, in return, a compliant government in Baghdad willing to accede to its vision of the New Iraq" (Ibid.)

The author, however, must point out that this thesis does not seek to adopt any preferred policy prescription towards Iran; the goal is merely to draw attention to the fact that the success of the US government policy in Iraq and the media coverage thereof merits to be assessed in the geopolitical light as well.

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[3] Emphasis added

Political Communication Literature

This study draws on framing theories and attribution of responsibility theories. Prior to focusing on framing theory, the literature review will, however, provide an overview of media bias theories since certain types thereof are particularly pertinent to the explanation of the nature of media coverage that this thesis seeks to explore. Literature review will also briefly touch upon inter-media agenda setting theory, providing rationale for the media sources chosen for the content analysis.

Agenda setting, priming and framing theories could be clustered under the broader concept of media bias, as some researchers suggest (Entman 2007, Niven 2002). When discussing the notion of "media bias" some of the potential biases in the United States media have been categorized in the following manner: news that distorts reality (distortion bias); news that favors one over another side of political reality-content bias; and motivations behind journalists' actions that produce decision-making bias (Entman 2007, Scheufele 2000). Most of the studies in the field of media bias have focused on discovering systematic bias towards or against some political issues or sides of political spectrum within a society. Some recent research on media bias indicates that media outlets tend to accord more attention to stories and aspects of stories that favor the democratic or liberal political standpoints and are hence labeled as having "liberal bias" (Ansolabehere, Lessem and Snyder 2004). Yet, despite these accusations of "liberal bias" in the American media, a great number of studies that focused on the concept of bias during presidential and other

types of elections, for instance, failed to find consistent evidence for either liberal or conservative, or Democratic and Republican media bias (Niven, 2002, Kuypers, 2002).

Lance Bennett (2001) described four types of media biases, all of which are relevant for this study's content analysis. Personalization is the first type and it refers to the idea that complex social, economic and political factors are neglected in the media coverage in favor of "dramatic, personal tragedy-oriented" coverage (p. 35). This first type of bias is touted as a typical feature of the American news media. Dramatization, the second type of bias, which describes the tendency towards actor-oriented stories and focus on the narrative as opposed to heavy issue-analysis, is also deemed to be inherent in American reporting. Bennett also explains that "there is bias in placing so much news focus on the largely emotional questions of, "who is in charge" and "will the order be restored" to the detriment of substantive discussion about issues behind the policies (Ibid). Descriptive content analysis will pay particular attention to examining the prevalence of such news and implications of such coverage. These tendencies are all germane to the analysis of The New York Times and NBC media coverage of Iran. The former could be exemplified in the focus of the coverage on visible political personalities, such as Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; and the latter through the portrayal of visually compelling images and simple news reports that focus on violence and the Iranian support for insurgency, for instance. The most relevant type of bias for this thesis is the third type of bias- "fragmentation bias"- that Bennett describes *as "isolation of stories from each other and from their larger contexts so that information in the news becomes fragmented and hard to assemble into a big picture"*

(p. 37).[1] Media coverage of the Iraq War abounds in coverage of "near daily but disconnected reports of mounting costs," coupled with "a neglect of more profoundly negative news not rooted in daily events." (Entman, Livingston, and Kim, 2009 p. 701 cf. Bennett and Livingston, 2003). One of the propositions of this thesis is that Iranian geostrategic gains exemplify these more profoundly negative news that are usually not rooted in daily events and are hence outnumbered by topics such as Iranian support for insurgency-a topic typically rooted in a daily event and bolstered by the administration officials. Fragmentation bias is hence particularly important for the main argument of this thesis-the hypothetical failure to piece together a coherent frame of Iran that would convey the geostrategic leverage that this country has gained as an unintended consequence of the US efforts in Iraq. Finally, the fourth type of bias, "authority-disorder bias," refers to journalists' tendency to default to official sources "in many political news dramas," especially when the information is scarce or of questionable veracity (Bennett, 2001 p. 38). This last type of bias is particularly relevant for the portrayal of Iranian support for insurgency, where journalists barely questioned the veracity of Administration's claims (Entman, Livingston and Kim, 2009).

In its strictest definition, framing is described as the selection of certain content and the attribution of salience to some information and aspects of the content over others (Entman, 1993). Three broader theoretical approaches to framing could be discerned in literature: constructivist, which primarily sees frames are benign; critical, which relates to the concept of hegemony, and cognitive, which explores psychological influence on the audience, and

[1] Emphasis added

is also the line of framing research that thesis primarily draws on (D'Angelo 2002). Selection and salience are the most important aspects of framing for this study, for "framing includes not only what is made prominent *but also what is left out,*[2] treated as secondary, tertiary, or less" (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997, p. 45). This study hence seeks to explore that which is missing in the framing of a country and its involvement in the War in Iraq. Most importantly, "framing provides a way to think about events," (Ibid.) and this is the broad theme that this thesis is embedded in-how the media coverage of Iran might have influenced the way the public thinks about the country.

Pan and Kosicki's discourse analysis sought to describe devices that journalists have at their disposal when framing news. They explain that news texts operate on four broad organizing structures: syntactical, thematic, scripts and rhetorical structures (1993). Syntactical structures refer to typical story elements such as headline, lead, episode, background and closure. Thematic structures represent a particular thesis that defines the problem-for instance Iran is a nuclear rather than contained threat; scripts are habitual story lines that create narrative tension e.g. "candidates doing better than expected in the primaries"; finally, rhetorical devices include stylistic symbols that would convey the character of the account, e.g. objectivity. When thinking about framing Iranian geopolitical gains from the Iraq War, the most important aspect of the news story for this study then is the "thematic structure," which contains problem definition. In this context it is very important to point out that "both small wording changes and larger contextual cues can generate significantly different textual interpretations" (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997, p.

[2] Emphasis added by the author of this thesis

46). *This notion was used as one of the rationales for taking the entire story as a unit of analysis- rather than coding by paragraph. Geostrategic frame might not be contained in the wording of a sole paragraph; rather, the problem definition could sometimes be inferred only from the context of the entire story. This idea was also taken into account when the parameters for defining the frame were devised. They are described later on in the methodology chapter. The author thus sought to refrain from a strict verbal definition of what would constitute a "geostrategic" frame that this study analyzes. It can be an idea inferred from the larger contextual cues of the story, or specific wording changes-as explained above.*

This study draws on Entman's definition of framing, whereby he separates framing into substantive and procedural (Entman, 2004). According to his primary definition, substantive frames perform at least two of the following functions, when covering political issues and events. They need to "define effects and conditions as problematic; identify causes; convey a moral judgment and endorse remedies or improvements" (Entman, p. 5, 1993). The two most important framing functions are problem definition, which tends to determine the rest of the frame; as well as the remedy, because it directly leads to support or opposition for a certain policy (Ibid). News frames highlight certain aspects of news and downplay others through selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997, p.77 cf. Tankard et. al, 1991).

In domestic politics in the United States, concepts similar to procedural frames are sometimes referred to as "game" or "horserace" frames (Cappella and Jameson, 1997, Patterson, 1994). Other scholars describe similar notions under the label of "episodic"

frames (Iyengar, 1994). These scholars seem to agree that procedural framing pervades the US media. Foreign news is often characterized by procedural framing as well (Entman, 2004) and past studies of the Iraq War have shown that procedural framing has permeated much of the coverage (Entman, Livingston and Kim, 2009).

The focus and function of procedural frames are much narrower than that of substantive frames. These frames tend to focus on legitimacy of political actors based on the technique they are using, success or their representativeness (Entman, 2004). They also evaluate behavior of different political actors and attribute political motives to those involved. On the other hand, "substantive assertions are those clearly relevant to audience members' understanding and acceptance of a policy" (Entman, 2004, p. 79). The crucial aspect behind procedural framing that this study relies on is the idea that it fails to "motivate or equip the public to engage in political deliberation." (Entman, 2004, p. 6). When discussing procedural framing, Entman also notes that journalists in the United States have a strong tendency to define news as "action described and predicted, rather than ideas analyzed." (Entman, 2004 p. 74, cf. Gans, 1979, Mermin, 1999). In respect to their influence on public opinion, this thesis views procedural frames as similar to what Jamieson and Cappella have described as "strategic frames," in domestic politics. These frames draw audience's attention to the motivation of the people depicted in the news. They argue that strategic news activate cynical attributions and "cynical response to politicians, politics, governance, campaigns and policy formation," whereas what they call "issue frames," "may depress cynical reactions that lead to public disengagement or at least fail to activate them." (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997, p. 139). *When this idea is applied to foreign news and the*

case of Iran: one of the implications of this study then is that a potential dominance of frames that focus on individual foreign actors and their motivation instead of providing a coherent issue-based discussion about Iranian stakes in Iraq, would act as a contributing factor to a similar lack of engagement from the public. As explained further, the coverage of Iranian involvement seems to be procedural in nature- focusing on success or failure of US pressure on Iranian establishment and providing a lot of attention to visible personalities such as President Ahmadinejad or the Supreme leader Khamenei, without an effort to piece together Iranian involvement in Iraq into a coherent picture. Hence- the implication that the public might be left without adequate tools to hold the government responsible for its policies in Iraq.

Another concept that this study views as conceptually similar to procedural framing and pays particular attention to are "episodic frames" (Iyengar, 1994, p.14). Relevant aspect behind episodic news is that it is defined as an "event-oriented" report that "depicts public issues in terms of concrete instances" (Ibid). On the other hand, "thematic frames" place issues in "more general or abstract context" taking the form of "backgrounder" report "directed at general outcomes and conditions." Although Iyengar applied these concepts to network news reporting, they conceptually relate to procedural framing and are used in this thesis to refer to The New York Times coverage as well.

Episodic or procedural vs. thematic or substantive framing are chosen as explanatory notions used for this study because of their implications for the people's capacity to attribute responsibility for certain policies. "Attribution of responsibility theories" pertain to the field of social psychology and look into ways in which the public attributes

responsibility to individuals and issues for certain policies. Most Americans do not possess enough information about political events and issues (Iyengar, 1994, Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). In an effort to understand the multitude of political information that they receive on a daily basis, "individuals simplify political issues by reducing them to questions of responsibility [and hence] the paramount task of public opinion research is to determine how people attribute responsibility for political issues" (Iyengar, 1994, p. 8).

Episodic news frames focus on "specific episodes, individual perpetrators, victims or other actors at the expense of more general, thematic information […] and depict concrete events that illustrate issues while thematic framing presents collective or general evidence" (p.5, Iyengar, 1994). The dominance of the episodic frames in TV news had been established in numerous studies (Gitlin, 1980, Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). For example TV news depicting protests would focus on specific events taking place during the protest, rather than issues that led to the protests. Concerning Iran hostage crisis in 1979, the issue was reduced to one story: freeing of the hostages, and hence neglecting the discourse on complexities of Iranian politics, historical background and larger context behind the hostage crisis. Data analysis that follows this literature review seeks to explore if the coverage of Iranian involvement in Iran follows the same, simplified pattern, predominantly by focusing on Iranian support for insurgency and Iranian nuclear threat.

Thematic frames, on the other hand, place issues in more general and abstract context, providing more background information for the story. In order to frame Iran as a geopolitical winner from the War in Iraq, an article/news story was expected to rely on more complex information about Iranian political interests, Iraqi situation on the ground, or

historical background information, among other issues, to present Iran-Iraq relations. Hence, framing Iran as a geostrategic winner from the War in Iraq was expected to illustrate an instance of substantive or thematic framing.

The crucial implication behind episodic framing is that it triggers attributions of responsibility where both cause and treatment of problems are directed at individuals rather than the society and situations. Such framing tends to make particular acts or characteristics of particular individuals more accessible, while thematic reporting helps viewers to think about political issues in terms of societal and political outcomes." (Iyengar, 1994, p. 134). Episodic news also "short-circuits the public's ability to assess responsibly the conditions created by policy decisions [and] encourages acceptance of foreign policy solutions to problems misunderstood as the consequence of 'evildoers'- overly simplistic individualized problem origins" (Livingston, 2007 p. 50 cf. Iyengar, 1991). Coverage of Iranian involvement in Iraq seems to be what Iyengar defines as "non-interpretative" (Iyengar, 1994, p. 32). –piece of news is merely announced and not thoroughly examined in the light of problem definition, cause and moral judgment. Since numerous news reports cite Iranian support for violence in Iraq, often tying the country to support for terrorism, it becomes important to look into how individual acts of violence are covered: if they contain background information and issue-oriented discussion, as exemplified in thematic framing; or if they are reduced to individual acts of violence without attempt to provide context in which it occurs, as exemplified in episodic framing. Different types of coverage would trigger different attributions of responsibility. Non-interpretative, episodic coverage typically attributes responsibility to Iran or visible individuals within the Iranian regime

and leaves out an issue-oriented, thematic discussion that would explain how the US policy had opened the door to Iranian involvement in Iraq in the first place, and consequently, fails to explain the rippling effect of such involvement on the geo-political balance in the region.

When attempting to answer the question as to why such issue-oriented, thematic coverage might be missing in reporting on Iraq War, a common explanation lies in the fact that professional norms and commercial pressures often lead to cursory, entertainment-oriented coverage malleable to officials' influence (Patterson, 2000, Kalb 1998, Patterson, 1993; Frank 1991). Daily routines that interactions among reporters and news sources are comprised of, bestow power on sources to define political reality and shape the dominant discourse (Sigal, 1973). The implication of such coverage is that media tend to repeat prior mistakes and habitually default to officials as primary sources, leading to prevalence of positive framing of government's policies. This notion will also be explored in quantitative analysis section.

Another theoretical reference that should be made when attempting to answer the question as to why the geostrategic frame might be missing in the coverage is the notion of cultural congruence. The concept refers to the notion that most successful frames are the ones that have "the greatest intrinsic capacity to arouse similar responses among most Americans" and "are fully congruent with schemas habitually used by most members of the society." (Entman, 2004, p. 14). Conveying geostrategic frame would require that media reinforce the notion that for decades prior to Iraq War in 2003, the US policy supported the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein, an idea that is not consistent with the American self-image and

its values of promoting democracy around the world, typically associated with the US government policy. Although this study does not seek to test the cascade model (Entman, 2004) and hence an elaborate explanation thereof will be left out, certain implications of the model should be referred to nonetheless. The cascade model suggests that the media should provide enough information independent of the executive branch that citizens can construct their own counter fames on issues (Entman, 2004, p. 17). Scattered parcels of information are not enough; what citizens need instead is a culturally resonant frame with sufficient magnitude to construct a sensible alternative to the administration line. Hence, this study also seeks to explore the magnitude, as tested through frequency and prominence of the geostrategic frame- arguably not a culturally congruent one.

This study is also predicated on the notion that political participation of the public does influence the advancement of certain policies, and citizen participation in liberal democracies serves as a check on the tendency of those in power to use their position for their own gain often by means of manipulating public opinion (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996, cf. Page and Shapiro, 1992). "For citizens to engage in politics in a way that is personally and collectively constructive, however, they must have resources to do so [and] the central resource for democratic participation is political information." (Delii Carpini and Keeter, 1996, p. 5) In the similar vein, this thesis draws on the notion that media can limit the influence of public opinion on US foreign policy by creating what is termed "an accountability gap, whereby news coverage disconnects policy outcomes from the larger strategic picture and from officials responsible" (Entman, Livingston and Kim, 2009, p. 689). This proposition then also relates to media bias concepts referred to earlier (Bennett,

2001) in the following manner: if the coverage abounds in news pieces that are removed from larger historical and political context; if news reports focus on event-driven, isolated instances of violence or "Iranian meddling," without delving into background of these individual events, focusing on dramatic news where responsibility is typically attached to visible political actors such as Ayatollah Khamenei, President Ahmadinejad or the not-clearly defined collective notion of "Iranians," then such coverage would result in a *fragmented* picture of Iranian involvement-where the most striking Iranian gains are lost in the midst of prominence of event-driven reports. Perhaps the most important consequence of this type of coverage is the reduction of incentives "for American officials to learn from and correct their errors by changing flawed policies," and the fact that the very "paucity of media images themselves may reduce pressure on officials to consider changing problematic policy" (Entman, Livingston and Kim, 2009, p. 689).

To develop a sustainable counter-frame, researchers argue that it is not enough for media to provide "scattered morsels" of critical information that does not necessarily concur with the administration line, but when they present a coherent counter frame "that attains sufficient magnitude to gain wide understanding as a sensible alternative to the White House interpretation" (Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston, 2007, p.89, cf. Entman, 2004). These scholars point out that it is not enough to convey just "bits and pieces of alternative perspectives" (p. 90). Researchers admit that this is "a high standard," but "if the ultimate concern is with public opinion and democratic accountability, anything less in the daily news stream may constitute a single message environment that produces a compliant rather than informed public" (Ibid). This study proposes that by not drawing attention to the

Iranian geopolitical gains as an important implication of the US involvement in Iraq, the mainstream media would also contribute to the creation of a message environment conducive to such effect. However, the author needs to point out that this study does *not* examine "framing contests" by comparing the prevalence of one frame over the other; instead, it focuses on the examination of frequency of one frame only: Iranian geopolitical gains from the Iraq War.

This series of Iraq War studies showed that the mainstream media "provided the administration line much greater visibility, detail and coherence," when the administration denounced Iran for supplying Iraqis with weapons to fight the US mission, and framed Iran as a "meddler in Iraq War," in February 2007. The content analysis conducted as part of this thesis, seeks to explore the extent to which the support for insurgency dominated the coverage; however the primary focus of this thesis' analysis is on exploring the frequency of geostrategic frame. Should the presence of geostrategic frame prove scarce in the coverage, relative to the portrayal of Iran as a meddling force in Iraq, then a conclusion could be drawn that the prevalence of "meddling frame" crowds out the discussion about Iranian geopolitical gains.

Previous studies have already shown that Iraq War coverage abounds with ominous predictions that Iranian weapons and terrorists will present a threat to US home front, should the US troops leave Iraq; the coverage is also characterized by a "neglect of more profoundly negative news *not rooted in daily events*"[3] (p. 701, Entman, Livingston and Kim, 2009 cf. Livingston and Bennett, 2003). This is the reason why this study also

examines the relationship between the "story type" and the occurrence of the geostrategic frame. It was expected that features, characterized by their "timeless quality" (Bennett and Livingston, 2003) as well as editorials and columns, with their benefit of greater independence from official sources, would provide more space for discussion that does not necessarily toe the administration line. To this end, the study will provide a discussion of most frequently cited sources for the most important frames of Iran.

By focusing on Iranian support for insurgency and other topics that easily lend themselves to procedural framing, the media potentially missed the broader issue behind Iranian involvement in Iraqi politics, enabled by the US invasion of Iraq. Hence, the coverage that reports only tactical successes, such as reduction of violence and casualties, and fails to report potential larger geopolitical failure of US policy, would open the door to positive framing that sees US government's policies as victory and political success. To convey an important narrative that would equip the public with tools to hold the government accountable on issues such as Iraq War, more is necessary than an "occasional alarm bell" (Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston, 2007, p. 41). And hence, even if the geostrategic frame might appear occasionally, data analysis will test the proposition that this occasional blip might have been a far cry from a coherent and sustainable frame.

The implications of this study primarily rely on the notion that framing can affect public opinion, which was proven in numerous studies (Kinder and Sanders 1990, Nelson and Kinder 1996). Framing effects are also found in people's knowledge, attitudes and behavior (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). Potential reasons behind the effectiveness of framing could

[3] Emphasis added

be explained in several ways. Firstly, because people are not well informed regarding most of the politically and socially relevant issues and their cognitive activity is not high enough when complex problems are concerned (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996, Zaller 1992, Kahneman, Slovic and Tversky, 1982). Iyengar's line of research on attribution of responsibility proved framing effects on a great variety of issues that involved people with multiple levels of sophistication, and hence supported the thesis that framing effects are by no means limited to the "ignorant or naïve" (Iyengar, 1994 p. 13). Research has shown that "unobtrusive alterations in the wording and form of survey questions produce dramatic variations in opinions" (Ibid.)

Researchers also argue that people are "limited capacity processors" or "cognitive misers, "which makes them particularly susceptible to framing (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). For an attitude change and a change in public opinion, the priority given to one aspect of an issue over another needs to be changed (Iyengar and Kinder 1982, Kinder and Sanders 1990). For instance, when prompted to state an opinion, people are not capable of processing all the information they might store in their memory. Instead, they would refer to information and those aspects of information which are considered to be the most accessible and easy to retrieve at the given time. This line of argument is relevant for this thesis because it infers that the absence of geostrategic frame and the prevalence of nuclear one, among others, would prime the public to perceive Iran primarily as a nuclear threat and disregard the Iranian geostrategic gains from Iraq War when assessing the effectiveness of US government policies in the Iraq.

Finally, one must acknowledge that news cannot be assumed to inevitably influence public's attitudes, knowledge and behavior (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). Even if framing effects are present and significant, the effects of personal experience or influence from others can obstruct or have a counter effect on the influence of framing (Ibid. cf. Kinder and O'Sears, 1981). The author must also point out that this thesis *does not set out to test* the influence of geostrategic framing on public opinion. The content analysis allows the author to make conclusions solely about the nature of the coverage; influence on public opinion *can only be inferred* on the basis of previous studies and available public opinion polls.

This study briefly refers to inter-media agenda setting to provide the rationale for using The New York Times and NBC as prime examples of "Mainstream Press" in the United States and hence the basis for its content analysis (Bennett, Livingston and Lawrence, 2007, p. 57). The concept of "intermedia agenda setting" refers to those instances when media agenda is influenced by other media (Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998; Reese and Danielian, 1989). Agenda setting research has demonstrated that the New York Times plays the agenda setting role for the rest of the US media especially for national issues (Golan et. al., 2008, Dearing and Rogers, 1996). The New York Times was hence chosen because of its influence on broader media landscape in the United States and was considered to be representative of US media coverage. Inter-media aspect of agenda-setting has traditionally looked into the relationship between newspapers and news agencies, and researchers have also established the link between newspapers and television networks (McCombs and Shaw, 1976). It was also established that television network news follow each other's leads

to determine the salience of news stories (Reese et. al., 1994). NBC was hence considered to be an appropriate choice that would be indicative of broader network news coverage of the issue. Quantitative content as well as descriptive analysis will point to some of the similarities in New York Times and NBC coverage.

This thesis rests on the argument that Iran has achieved long term geopolitical gains from the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003. This first part of the argument was elaborated on in the previous chapter that provides the policy overview of this topic. *The central hypothesis of this thesis is the proposition that the mainstream media in the United States have underreported Iranian geopolitical gains from the War in Iraq.* This hypothesis was tested by tracking the frequency and appearance of the frame over time, to be further explained in the methodology chapter of this thesis.

The second hypothesis tests the proposition that procedural or episodic frames (as previously defined in the literature review) dominate the media discourse when Iran is concerned to the detriment of substantive or thematic framing that would capture the frame of Iranian geostrategic gains. It was expected that topics that lend themselves to procedural framing, such as Iranian nuclear threat and Iranian support for insurgency in Iraq dominate the media landscape and thus crowd out a sustained discussion of Iranian geostrategic gains. This hypothesis will be elaborated on in the methodology chapter, and tested via quantitative content analysis.

The third hypothesis proposes that the geostrategic frame is more likely to appear in stories that provide more space for an issue-oriented, or thematic discussion of Iranian gains from

the War in Iraq-such as feature stories; as well as stories that are less dependent on official sources for cues-such as editorials and columns. Hence the expectation was to find more cases of geostrategic frame in feature stories, editorials and columns. Quantitative content analysis tests this proposition; and descriptive analysis sheds additional light on the nature of the story that is likely to capture the complexity behind Iranian involvement in Iraq. One of the propositions of this thesis is that discussion of Iranian geostrategic gains exemplifies an instance of "more profoundly negative news" that are "not rooted in daily events" and are hence outnumbered by Iranian support for insurgency-a piece of news typically rooted in daily events and reported in hard news stories (Entman, Livingston and Kim, 2009 cf. Bennett and Livingston, 2003).

The final hypothesis proposes that topics that lend themselves to episodic framing are more pervasive in network news than in The New York Times coverage, resulting in lower frequency of geostrategic frame in NBC coverage relative to The New York Times. Episodic news is "defined by the availability of pictures and drama, and usually lacks thematic context and political or historical perspective" (Livingston, 2007, p. 50). Because of the visual nature of television as a medium, it was expected that NBC would contain more stories triggered by dramatic, and visually compelling daily incidents-such as acts of violence. This hypothesis also stems from studies that have shown that traditional news has been repackaged into various entertainment-oriented programs, making them more susceptible to this type of coverage (Baum, 2003, Patterson, 2000, Kalb 1998). It was also expected that NBC would contain more stories that focus on the "who is in charge" and "will the order be restored" aspect of policy-making, as exemplified through types of media

biases referred to earlier in the literature review, rather than on issue-oriented questions such as "why is this a problem" and "what are the alternative explanations beyond the official ones?" (Bennett, 2001, p. 38). These "procedural" frames (Entman, 2004) were typically exemplified in stories whose topic of the Iran-Iraq link (Variable V) was "Congressional debate or action in the US regarding Iran and Iraq" and "discussion within US presidential campaign." Hence, to test this hypothesis, quantitative content analysis will also look into the frequency of these topics in NBC relative to The New York Times; and descriptive analysis will exemplify articles and news stories that illustrate this point.

Conveying a sustainable geostrategic frame that would also capture the complex nature of Iranian involvement in Iraq is expected to require a frequent issue-oriented discussion and would thus present an instance of thematic framing. Hence, one of the implications of the missing frame and prevalence of topics that focus on reduction of violence is the confirmation of the broader hypothesis that the war coverage remains to a great extent procedural in nature. Another central implication of failure to discuss geopolitical outcomes of the war in Iraq is the confirmation of "fragmentation bias," (Bennett, 2003) which disconnects tactical policy outcomes from the larger strategic picture, thus reducing the public ability to hold the government accountable for its policies. The methodology chapter that follows provides a detailed explanation of how the research was operationalized and the hypotheses tested. The author must point out once again, however, that this study does not proceed to explore the influence on public opinion via surveys or experiments. The influence of hitherto described framing on public opinion can only be inferred from the

previous studies[4] that had proven the influence on framing on public opinion as well as from studies that demonstrated how certain coverage fails to trigger response from public opinion that could produce an effect on policy.[5]

[4] Referred to in the literature review
[5] Also elaborated on the in the literature review

Chapter 3: Methodology

To explore these hypotheses, the study relies on a quantitative content analysis and a descriptive analysis of The New York Times articles and NBC news transcripts, as appropriate examples of the US media agenda setters. A random sample was chosen from the population of The New York Times articles and NBC news transcripts from September 11, 2001 until October 3, 2008, when the Lexis-Nexis database search was conducted. The goal was to track how the geopolitical discourse was shaped starting from 9/11- prior, during and after the April 2003 invasion. The methodological principle was to take ten percent from each population when drawing a representative sample. The population was retrieved using the search term "Iran!" The idea was to retrieve a population of all the stories that dealt with Iran in this period of time and refrain from limiting the search using Lexis-Nexis tools as much as possible. The coding completed for this thesis was part of a larger study that will examine the overall nature of the Iran coverage, and this was another rationale for using as broad term as possible for the database search. The number of stories in the population differed for each year, and the random sample reflects this idea as well- since one of the goals of the analysis would be to observe any potential chronological changes in the frequency of the frame analyzed. The sample included editorials and columns, and the rationale behind this decision will be elaborated on later in this chapter.

Our coding scheme[1] was designed to capture the idea that some of the stories dealt with Iran only; some stories dealt with Iran in relation to Iraq (variable V: "topic of the Iran-Iraq link"); and some stories contained both. This is why the analysis that follows provides a

graph that outlines the percentage of stories that discuss Iran in the context of Iraq-which is the pool of stories that this thesis is primarily interested in.

The justification behind using the entire article/news transcript as a unit of analysis was made in the literature review chapter and relies on the fact that the primary goal of this study was to observe the presence and frequency of a frame that was suspected to be scarce in the coverage. The textual unit was not relevant in the sense that the idea behind Iranian gains from the War in Iraq could be captured in a sentence, paragraph, or within the context of the entire article.

The crucial variable for this study is located under section marked as "V" in the coding scheme (also labeled red in the coding scheme)-"the topic of the Iran-Iraq link." Under variable V, the category we were looking for was "focus on Iran's strategic gains due to Iraq War." Stories that would discuss Iranian geostrategic gains from the War in Iraq would be labeled under this category. Also, an article that under "topic of the Iran-Iraq link" discusses Iranian strategic gains from the War in Iraq would also frame Iran as a "strategic benefactor from the Iraq War"- under variable XI (also marked red in the coding scheme).

However, one needs to point out that an article that discusses Iranian strategic gains from the Iraq War (under variable V- "topic of the Iran-Iraq link") might also discuss Iran separately from Iraq at greater length and with greater prominence (for instance within the first three paragraphs), and hence the prevalent (dominant) frame for the whole article could be different from "Iran as strategic benefactor of Iraq war." For instance, there were numerous cases where an article would discuss Iranian geostrategic gains, but only

[1] Please refer to the coding scheme sample in the Appendix section

tangentially, and the dominant frame of Iran for that article would be "Iran as a nuclear threat."

In order for an article/news transcript to actually frame Iran as a "geostrategic benefactor from the Iraq War" the article would need to define the problem in terms of these gains (one of the essential four framing functions) and it would also discuss the cause (yet another of the four essential frame functions) of Iranian strategic gains in the light of the US intervention in Iraq. An article/news transcript is considered to frame Iran as a "strategic benefactor of Iraq war" if it discusses any of the strategic geopolitical gains that were described in detail in the policy analysis section of this thesis. The author sought to refrain from a narrow verbal definition of the frame-an expression of an assessment that Iran has been geopolitically strengthened by the War in Iraq, or an article that would even include an implication of such gains was deemed to frame Iran as a geostrategic benefactor from the War in Iraq. To convey the frame of Iran as a geostrategic benefactor, the article/transcript would typically define the problem (problem definition, PD) in any way that conveys the idea that Iranian gains from establishing a Shia-government, friendly to Iran and/or malleable to Iranian influence is harmful for US interests and could present a perilous geopolitical shift in the region, triggered by the very invasion.

The frame of Iran as geopolitical winner from the War, however, needs to be differentiated from the frame of Iran as "a meddling force in Iraq."[2] Iran as a meddling force in Iraq is typically a White House frame that portrays short-term Iranian benefits from supporting the insurgency or violence in Iraq; and from obstructing the work of Iraqi government. This

[2] Variable XI, category two in the coding scheme

frame is usually used by officials to justify the lingering presence of the United States in Iraq (Entman, Livingston and Kim, 2009). The "geostrategic frame," on the other hand, would be expected to go against the White House line because it would imply that the very invasion was a failure that led to potentially unprecedented regional turbulence. The geostrategic frame would confer the idea that the very establishment of Shiite government is a potential failure for US policy in and of itself.

The primary way of testing the hypothesis that the geostrategic frame might be scarce in the coverage is to track its frequency-which was captured in the quantitative analysis; as well as its appearance over time-to test the sustainability aspect of the hypothesis.

The way to test the second hypothesis and its implications about procedural framing was to examine the frequency and prominence of the geostrategic frame *relative to the frame of Iran as a nuclear threat*- a frame pervasive in hard news stories and typically procedural in nature; *as well as relative to the frame of Iran as a "meddler in the Iraq War"* (category under variable XI in the code sheet). Stories that focused on "Iranian support for the insurgency" (category under variable V) as well as "Iranian involvement in Iraqi political affairs" (another category under variable V) would typically frame Iran as a "meddler in the Iraq War." Hence, to test this hypothesis we explored if there was a conspicuously greater frequency of the "meddling frame" relative to the geostrategic frame. Similar argument applies for the comparison in frequency with the nuclear frame. Stories that describe Iran as a nuclear threat tend to focus *on the very process of persuading* the Iranian regime to abandon the pursuit of weapons, often focusing on motivations of individual political actors, or the deliberation process within the international community. It is in this sense that

stories dealing with Iranian nuclear threat tend to be procedural as well. Again, the study hypothesizes that an overwhelming presence of such a procedural framing would detract from the attention to Iranian geostrategic gains from the Iraq War.

The third hypothesis tested the assumption that the geostrategic frame was more likely to appear in stories that a) provided ample space for an elaborate discussion of Iran's role in the War in Iraq; b) and were less dependent on administration's sources for cues. The hypothesis tests the proposition that geostrategic frame presents an instance of issue-oriented or thematic framing, that would tend to examine Iranian tactical efforts in Iraq in the light of their strategic goals; as well as the proposition that in order to convey the geostrategic frame, reporting would be less reliant on administration's sources for cues. Stories about Iranian involvement in Iraq that do not question official sources often result in framing Iran as a "meddling force." The coding scheme, therefore, divided stories into: 1) hard news stories; 2) features; 3) news analyses; 4) editorials; 5) New York Times columnists' stories; 6) letters to the editor and 7) guest columns. Hard news were defined as news of an event or process that occurred within the news cycle of the publication-the story would be anchored to a particular time; features were singled out by their "timeless quality" in the sense that they could be published a week or a month later without detracting from the meaning of the article-"they are not anchored to precise time frame" and are often defined as "news that can wait for another day " (Livingston and Bennett 2003, p. 374); news analyses were labeled as such by the Lexis Nexis service; and, finally, editorials would voice the official position of the Times and are unsigned. We also sought to make a distinction between the guest columns and those written by the New York Times regulars.

However, for stories in the NBC sample this type of differentiation could not apply so we used Lexis-Nexis service to capture whether each story pertained to one of the following programs: Today Show, Dateline, Nightly News, Nightline, and Meet the Press (were each assigned a separate code, and all other programs were assigned a common number and were coded under "other").

The final hypothesis that procedural framing is more likely to occur in NBC coverage to the detriment of the geostrategic frame was also tested via quantitative content analysis. This hypothesis is embedded in the idea that television coverage is expected to be more susceptible to episodic framing; more focused on personalities and dramatic events than the newspaper coverage. This proposition was operationalized in the following manner: it was expected that under "Variable V" –substance of the Iran-Iraq link- NBC would have a greater percentage of stories that are typically procedural in nature, such as "US Congressional debate or action in the US regarding Iran and Iraq," (category five) as well as the "Discussion in the US Presidential campaign," (category six) both of which tend to focus on the very process of deliberation regarding Iranian influence and do not delve into more intricate facts behind Iranian involvement. Hence, we expected to find: i) fewer stories with geostrategic frame in the NBC relative to The New York Times coverage; ii) the frequency of "categories five and six" under "Variable V" were expected to be higher in the NBC coverage relative to The New York Times.

Descriptive analysis seeks to add nuance to the quantitative content analysis by providing more detailed description of the stories encountered during the coding process. The primary goal of descriptive analysis when hypotheses-testing is concerned is to explain what topics

and frames pervade media environment regarding Iranian involvement in Iraq to the detriment of the geostrategic frame. The study hypothesizes that the coverage of Iranian involvement in Iraq abounds in stories of Iranian support for insurgency and Iranian involvement in Iraqi political affairs: both of which do not convey the idea that Iran has made geopolitical gains from the US invasion; typically stem from the White House and frame Iran as "meddling force" in the Iraq War (Entman, Livingston and Kim, 2009). If stories cover instances of Iranian involvement in a disjointed manner, which does not explain the complex nature of Iranian stakes in Iraq-then such coverage would present another instance of "fragmentation bias," (Bennett, 2001) as well as "procedural framing," (Entman, 2004) which does not equip the public with informational tools to keep the government accountable, ultimately leaving the government without incentives to correct potentially flawed policies. By depicting the nature of individual stories that frame Iran as a "meddling force" and "nuclear threat," descriptive analysis seeks to shed additional light on the proposition that these stories exemplify procedural framing, by failing to focus on substantive issues behind topics they are discussing. Descriptive analysis also compares the details behind The New York Times and NBC coverage, exploring the proposition that network coverage appears to be even more fragmented.

What follows is a quantitative content analysis that tests the hypothesis about the frequency and sustainability of geostrategic framing in both New York Times and NBC stories; quantitative analysis is then combined with a descriptive, qualitative analysis captured during the coding process and analyzed in the light of relevant political events over the period of time coded.

Chapter 4: Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis

The objective of data analysis of The New York Times was to examine the frequency and character of articles that discussed the geopolitical implications of the War in Iraq for Iran and the region. Has the *New York Times* informed readers in a sustained manner about the geopolitical implications of the war?

The sample included stories that dealt only with Iran as well as the stories that contained Iran-Iraq link. Out of the entire number of sampled stories only twenty-three percent of the stories discussed Iran in relation to Iraq. The very fact that such a small portion of stories discussed Iran in relation to Iraq could be used as evidence that Iraq has not been central to the coverage of Iran in the period of time included in the coding. Please see Figure 1.

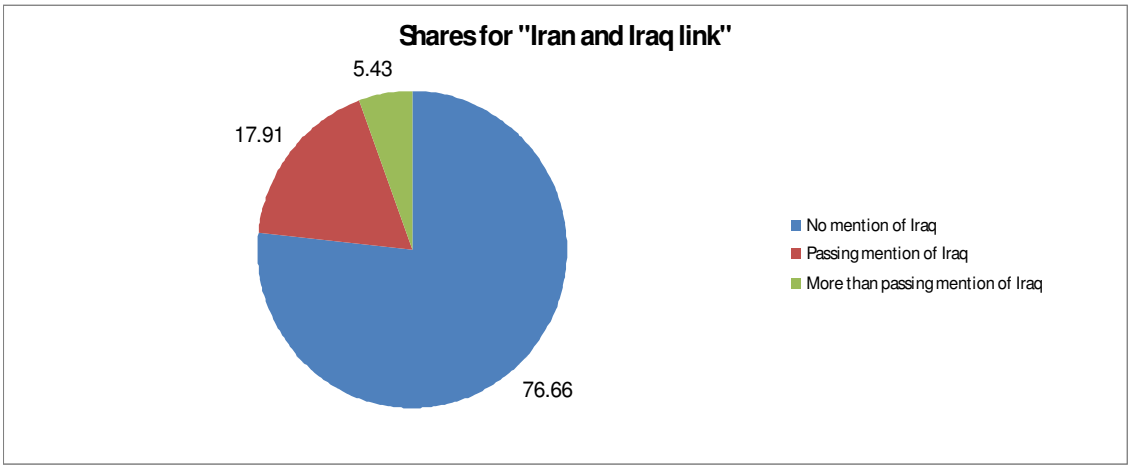
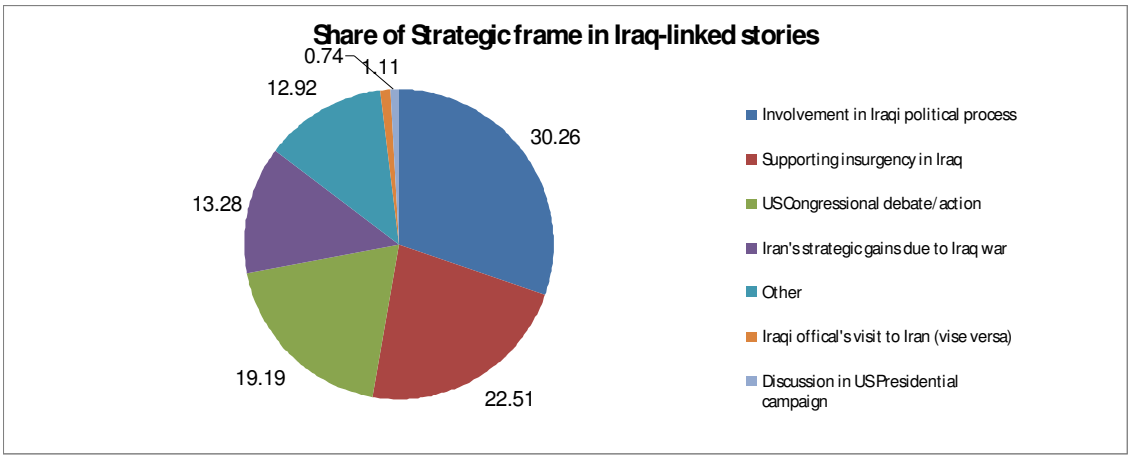


Figure 1. Shows percentage. Total number of stories 1200[3]

The graph in Figure 2 demonstrates the topical distribution of stories that contain Iran-Iraq link. Out of the total number of stories that discuss Iran in relation to Iraq War, only slightly over 13% discuss Iranian geostrategic gains due to Iraq war. The most frequent

[3] Figure 1.Shows percentage. Total number of stories 1200.

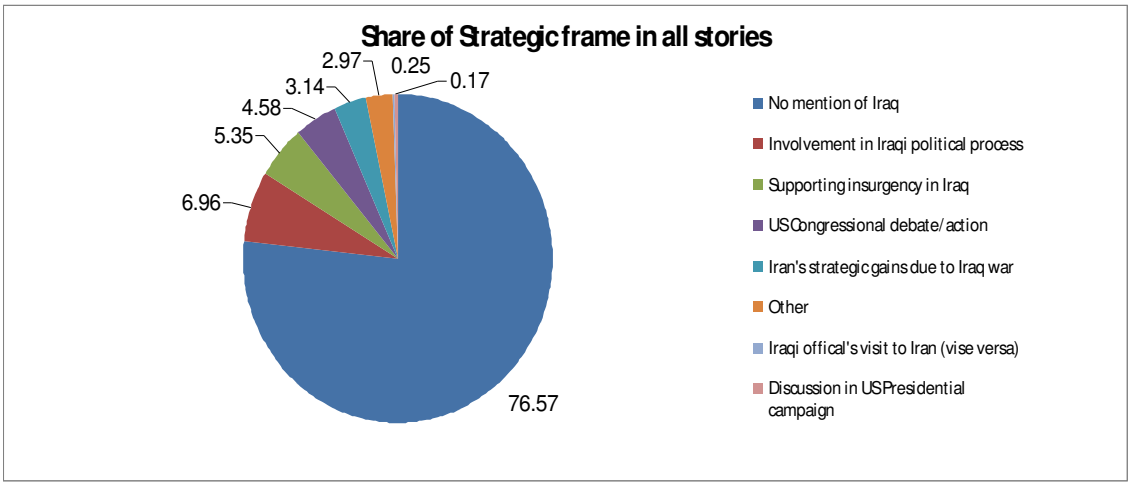
topic in overall stories (when we *do not* discriminate on a yearly basis), is the Iranian involvement in the Iraqi political process (30. 26 %), followed by the topic of Iran as a supporter for the insurgency (22.51 %). In reference to this observation it is important to notice that stories focusing on Iranian involvement in Iraqi political process and Iranian support for insurgency, which clearly outnumber those that discuss Iranian "geostrategic gains from the Iraq War," typically frame Iran as a "meddler in Iraqi politics." This statistical observation speaks to the hypothesis that "Iranian meddling" frame, typically promulgated by the White House, crowds out the frame of Iran as a geopolitical winner from the War in Iraq. Furthermore, stories that focused on "Congressional debate or action in the US regarding Iran-Iraq link" are also to a great extent procedural in nature since they focus on the very nature of the debate, rarely on intricacies of issues that are the object of the debate/action. Descriptive analysis will elaborate on the nature of the stories that were included in these largely procedural frames that seem to detract attention from the geostrategic frame.



[4]Figure 2. Shows percentage for the total number of stories 1200.

[4] Figure 2, shows percentage for the total number of stories 1200

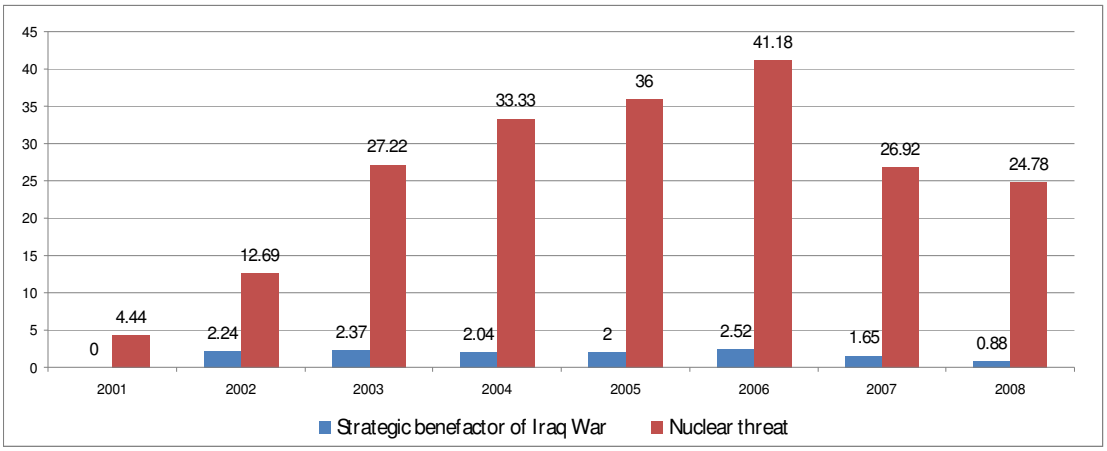
When all the stories in the sample are taken into consideration-including those that do not discuss Iran in connection to Iraq, the distribution in Figure 3 shows that the strategic frame appears in barely over three percent of all the stories.



[5]Figure 3. Shows percentage for the total number of stories 1200.

Perhaps the scarcity of the strategic frame is best reflected when this frame is compared to the frequency of those instances when Iran was framed as a nuclear threat (please refer to the graph below with chronological distribution). The image in Figure 4 shows the total number of stories per year that had nuclear threat for their main frame as opposed to those that had Iranian geostrategic gains for their dominant frame. The numbers here confirm the assumption of overwhelming prevalence of the nuclear frame that then seems to crowd out the discussion of Iranian geostrategic gains from the War in Iraq. The stories that frame Iran as a nuclear threat would typically focus on *the very process* of persuading Iran to abandon its nuclear intentions, casting the issue in terms of "winning and losing" or "strategy" and focusing on the effectiveness of sanctions aimed at containing Iranian nuclear threat. Hence, arguably this type of coverage is another instance of framing that

fails to examine the intricacies of issues at stake, ultimately contributing to the isolation of policy outcomes from each other and from wider strategic goals (Entman, Livingston and Kim, 2009). Only on rare occasions would a story actually examine the possibility that Iranian nuclear build-up might have been facilitated through the US involvement in Iraq. A more elaborate examination of stories with nuclear frame and their implications for the scarcity of the discussion about Iranian geostrategic gains follows in the descriptive analysis section of the thesis.



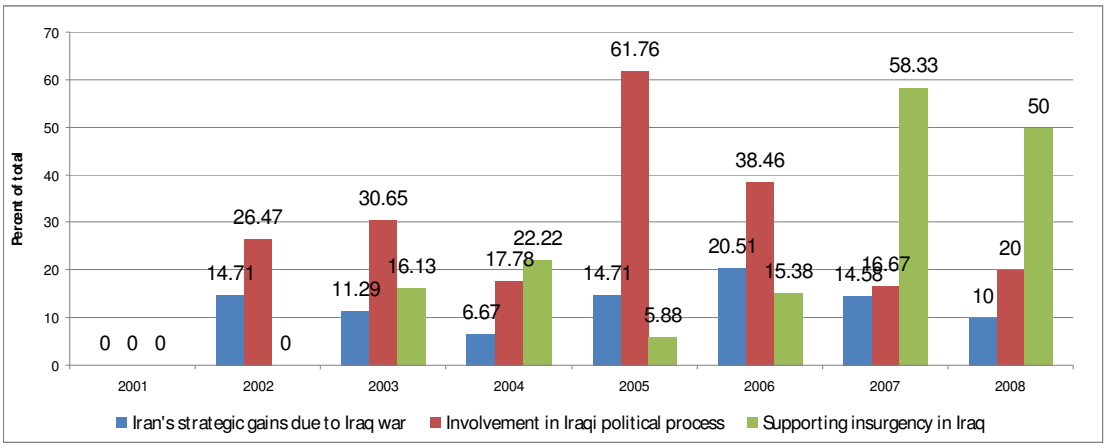
[6]Figure 4. Shows percentages for the total number of stories in the sample 1200. Total number of stories where nuclear frame is the dominant one for the entire story: 345 stories and geostrategic frame: 37 stories.

Even when the topic of Iran-Iraq link is analyzed on a yearly basis, in no single year does the topic of Iran as geostrategic benefactor in the Iraq War become the dominant one. Please refer to the graph in Figure 5 below. Iranian involvement in the Iraqi political process is the most common topic on a yearly basis, up until the year 2007, when the Iranian support for insurgency becomes conspicuously the most common topic –with more than 50% of all stories, as compared to barely 15 % of stories that discussed Iranian

[5] Figure 3, shows percentage for the total number of stories 1200

[6] Figure 4, shows percentages for the total number of stories in the sample 1200. Total number of stories where nuclear frame is the dominant one for the entire story: 345 stories and geostrategic frame: 37 stories

strategic gains from the War for that year. It should be observed here that it was precisely in the beginning of 2007 that the Administration increasingly mounted the accusations of Iranian involvement in Iraqi insurgency. Hence, this observation could also serve as an indicator of journalists' dependence on official sources, as part of the "authority disorder bias" (Bennett, 2003).

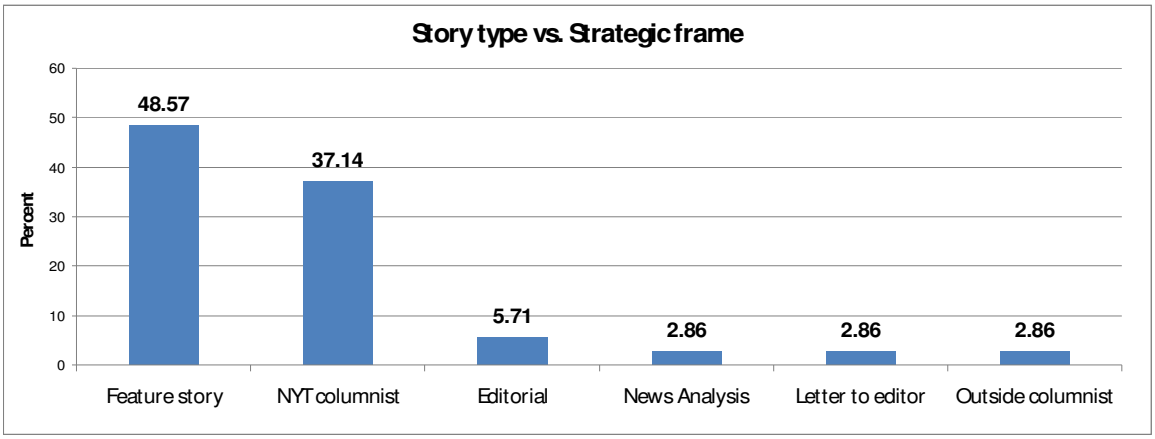


[7]Figure 5. Shows percentage of stories; total number of stories in the sample: 1200.

As hypothesized in the methodology chapter, the geostrategic frame was expected to be more frequent in story formats that would provide more space for thematic framing and less reliance on official sources and White House cues. This was the rationale for including editorials and columns in the sample as well. As evidenced in the graph below, in almost half of the cases, the geostrategic frame appears in feature stories. The frame is also common in columns stemming from New York Times columnists (almost 38%). Perhaps the most pertinent observation from the graph below is that the geostrategic frame did not appear in one single hard news story coded. Feature stories were expected to provide more space for issue-oriented discussion-what Iyengar would term as "thematic framing."

[7] Figure 5, shows percentage of stories; total number of stories in the sample: 1200

Feature stories are characterized by "their timeless quality," which is why they are expected to have fewer instances of reports that are rooted in daily events-in this case- individual reports of Iranian support for insurgency or other types of meddling in Iraqi affairs. New York Times columnists were particularly apt at conveying the frame, but only in the later time period after the invasion. Maureen Dowd for instance would point out that the US gave the country to Shiites that are closer to Iran on quite a few occasions. Hence, the nature of the story where the geostrategic frame was more likely to appear proved to have a tendency to be more independent from official sources-as exemplified in editorials and columns.



[8]Figure 6. Shows percentage of stories. Out of the total number of stories with the geostrategic frame-37 stories total.

In order to examine the level of media dependence on official sources for information, content analysis looked into the sources directly quoted in stories that contained most common frames of Iran. One of the hypothesized assumptions was that media tend to focus on tactical outcomes of the War and typically rely to a great extent on government officials for cues. The underlying assumption was that the stories that tend to focus on tactical

[8] Figure 8., shows the percentage of stories. Out of the total number of stories with the geostrategic frame-37 stories total

outcomes of the War, and were expected to be procedural in nature, would rely to a greater extent on officials for cues-providing straight-forward, often neutral reporting, without thematic or issue-oriented discussion.

The analysis is also intended to provide a more subtle analysis of what is termed as "official sources" –whether particular frames have been populated primarily by White House officials, often referred to as "the administration," or other elites, such as Congress members, staffers, ex-officials and experts (Entman, 2004). Results are presented in tables below and intended as basis for inference about the media capacity to generate an independent frame as a counterweight to the administration line, having in mind the amount of opposition coming from officials outside of the White House and represented voices of independent experts.

Sources speaking about Iran in stories with the nuclear frame (Table 1)

Source	Percentage of stories with direct quotes that contained nuclear frame (total number of stories for this category: 345; out of the 1200 stories in total for the sample)
Other administration official	27
International official	19
Bush	12
Other Iranian official	12
Rice	12
Think tank scholar/non-military analyst	4
Congressional Democrat	3
Ahmadinejad	3
Powell	3
Cheney	1
Iranian citizen	1
Other	1
US/Coalition military official	1
Congressional Republican	1

Table 1, displayed above, shows the distribution of sources for the most common frame of Iran-the nuclear frame. As descriptive analysis will elaborate further on, stories that contained the nuclear frame would typically focus on the process of persuading Iran to abandon its nuclear arsenal. They would rarely examine the more complex proposition that Iranian standing in nuclear debate might have been empowered by the US war in Iraq. The distribution of direct quotes from Table 1 seems to bolster this proposition. Administration officials constitute the majority of directly quoted sources, and their views are usually complemented by those of international officials, or counterbalanced with the views of Iranian officials. Even the views of "other elites" as exemplified in Congress members and experts are not as prominent as government sources.

Sources speaking about Iran in stories with the meddling frame (Table 2)

Meddling frame is particularly interesting in this regard as it had been initially described as a frame typically stemming from the White House-hence the administration frame-that would place the blame for US challenges in Iraq on Iranian meddling. The Table 2 below demonstrates that administration officials indeed prevail in this discussion. Their comments are usually counterbalanced with those of Iranian officials. Other elites, such as Congress members seem to be left behind in this discussion, as the numbers indicate.

Source	Percentage of stories with direct quotes that contained meddling frame (total number of stories for this category: 101; out of the 1200 stories in total for the sample)
Other administration official	19
Rumsfeld	11
Other Iranian official	11
Think tank scholar/non-military analyst	8
Bush	5
US/Coalition military official	5
Iraqi government official	5
Ahmadinejad	5
Iraqi citizen	5
Other Iraqi official	5
Rice	2
Powell	2
Congressional Republican	2
Iraqi cleric	2
International official	2
Iranian citizen	2

Stories speaking about Iran in stores with the geostrategic frame (Table 3)

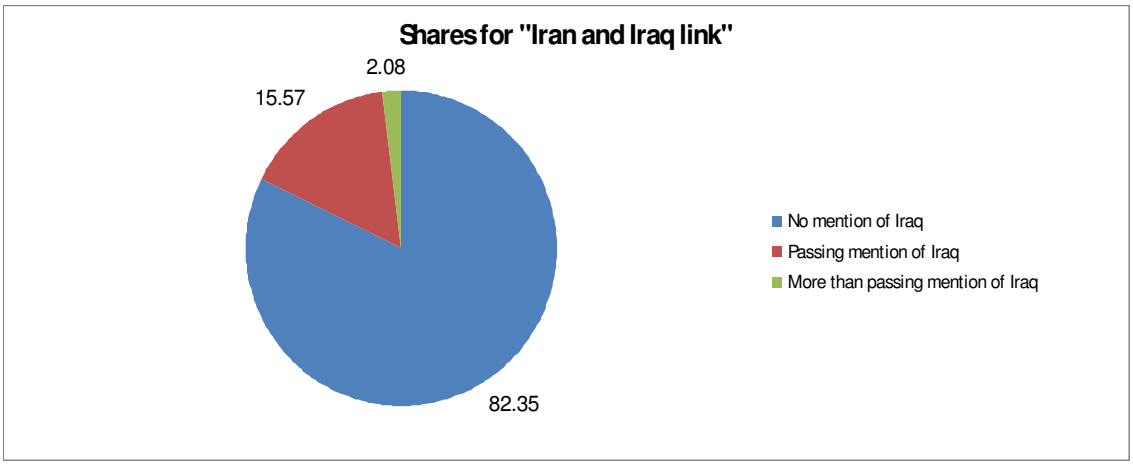
Finally, the Table 3, below, indicates the distribution of directly quoted sources for the geostrategic frame. The list of sources would suggest that apart from President Bush, other elites- and primarily think-tank scholars and analysts pervade this discussion. The fact that President Bush appears among the most commonly quoted sources relates to the previous finding about the story type-many of these stories were opinion pieces where a direct quote from an official would be counter-balanced with a non governmental source, or used as a baseline for an opposing remark. The fact that policy experts are often quoted in these stories is in line with the proposition that stories with geostrategic frame are expected to be less reliant on government officials. Yet, the finding that even the stories where geostrategic frame appears also contain quotes from officials within the administration

could indicate the need for journalist to tie any type of story to official sources – as an incentive or trigger for the coverage itself

Source	Percentage of stories with direct quotes that contained geostrategic frame (total number of stories for this category: 33; out of the 1200 stories in total for the sample)
Bush	30
Think tank scholar/non-military analyst	20
Rumsfeld	10
Other administration official	10
Iraqi government official	10
Ahmadinejad	10
Other Iranian official	10

Quantitative content analysis for the NBC as compared to the New York Times

Out of the entire sample of coded NBC transcripts, only slightly more than 17% of the stories discussed Iran in the context of the Iraq War. Just like in the case of The New York Times, the fact that such a small portion of stories examined Iran in the context of Iraq can be seen as evidence that the media do not perceive Iraq as central to the coverage of Iran. Please refer to the Figure 7, located below.

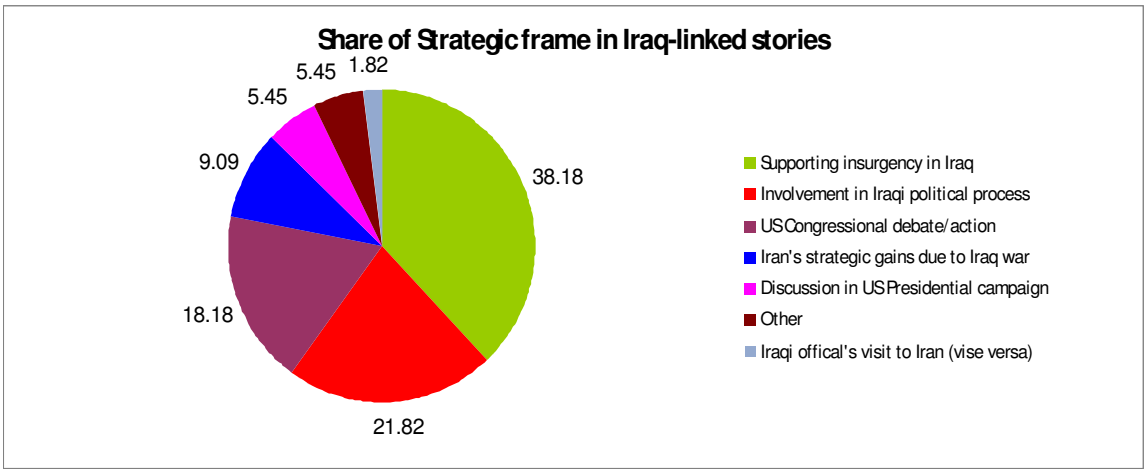


[9]Figure 7. Shows percentage of stories, for the total number of stories -289.

When we look at the share of stories that discuss Iranian geostrategic gains from the War in Iraq, we can observe that only slightly less than 6 % of the stories discuss this topic out of all the stories that contain Iran-Iraq link. Just like in the New York Times case, the topic of "Iranian support for the insurgency," with more than 32% of the stories, and the topic of "Iranian involvement in the Iraqi political process," with 20 % of the stories seem to dominate to the detriment of the geostrategic discussion of Iranian gains from the War. Just like in the case of New York Times, when these two topics are discussed, Iran would typically be framed as a "meddler in Iraq War"- a frame usually bolstered by the White House. Please see the graph below. Such framing is also typically procedural in nature and hence the conclusion reached for The New York Times sample applies here as well. Still, the scarcity of the geostrategic frame is even more conspicuous in the case of NBC coverage. Likewise, the stories that would focus on Congressional debate or action in the US regarding Iranian involvement also outnumber the stories that discuss Iranian

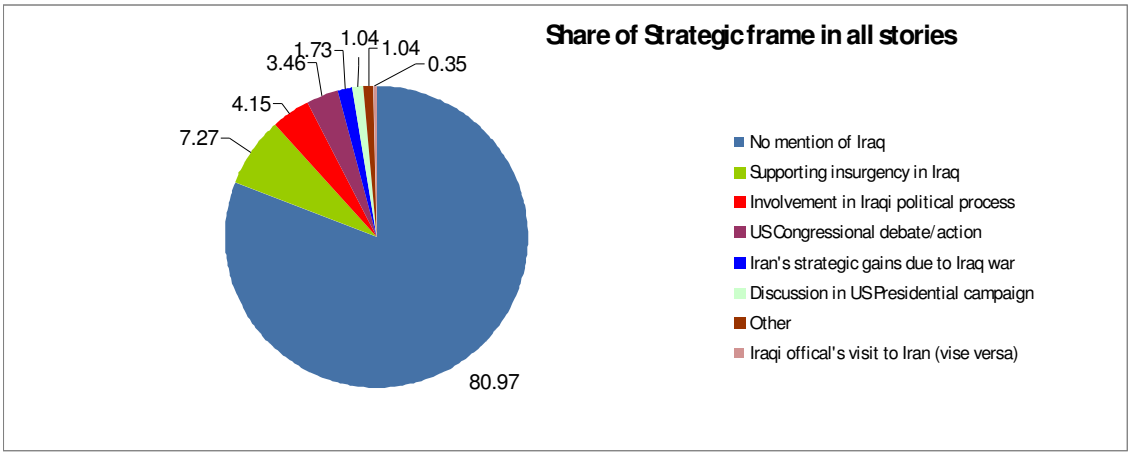
[9] Figure 7, shows percentage of stories, for the total number of stories -289.

geostrategic benefits and embody examples of procedural framing, as it will be elaborated on the descriptive analysis section.



[10]Figure 8. Out of the total number of 289 news transcripts in the sample.

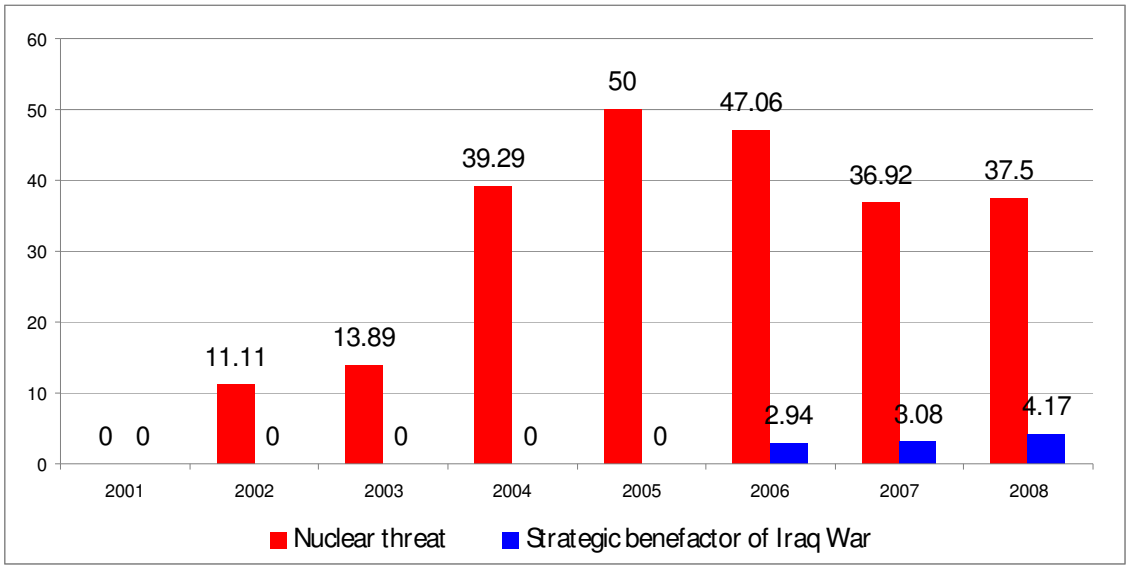
When the total number of stories is taken into consideration, even those that do not discuss Iran in the context of the Iraq War, the frequency of Iranian strategic gains amounts to barely two percent of the entire number of stories, which again testifies to the scarcity of geopolitical discussion and relevant framing. Please refer to the graph below.



[11]Figure 9. Out of the total number of 289 news transcripts in the sample.

[10] Figure 8, out of the total number of 289 news transcripts in the sample

When comparing the number of stories that discussed the threat of nuclear Iran as their dominant frame, to those whose dominant frame had been Iran as a geostrategic winner, the difference in frequency when observed chronologically is even more striking than in the case of The New York Times-as evidenced in the graph below. Stories where the geostrategic frame appears as the dominant one for the entire news piece appear only in the last three years encompassed by coding- a striking difference from what can be said about the prevalence of the nuclear frame.



[12]Figure 10. Out of the total number of 289 news transcripts in the sample.

When we look into sustainability of the geostrategic frame over time and compare it once again to "Iranian support for the insurgency" and "Iranian involvement in Iraqi politics," two topics where Iran is repeatedly framed as a "meddler," we can observe that in no single year does the topic of Iranian geostrategic gains and the frame of Iran as geostrategic

[11] Figure 9, out of the total number of 289 news transcripts in the sample

benefactor attain highest frequency. It does, however, assume parity for the year 2008, with the Iranian involvement in Iraqi political process. However, one must point out that in terms of numbers in the sample, this occurrence amounts to only one story. Unlike in the case of the New York Times, the graph below displays the frequencies not only for "Iranian involvement in Iraqi political process" and "Iranian support for insurgency" relative to the "Iranian strategic gains," but it also includes yearly numbers for stories whose topical focus was "US Congressional debate or action in the US regarding Iranian involvement" and "discussion in the US presidential campaign." Stories coded under these two topics would typically focus on the very process of deliberation and not on issues behind the policy debate and could hence be considered as instances of procedural and not thematic framing. US Congressional debate or action in the US regarding Iranian involvement in Iraq is the most frequent topic for the years 2003 and 2006; stories that discuss "Iranian involvement in Iraq as part of the Presidential campaign" as their primary topic are the most frequent ones for the year 2004. In New York Times coverage this was never the case, which is why these two topics were not included in The New York Times graph presented above, but were presented for NBC in the graph below- to prove the greater degree of prevalence of procedural framing.

[12] Figure 10, out of the total number of 289 news transcripts in the sample.

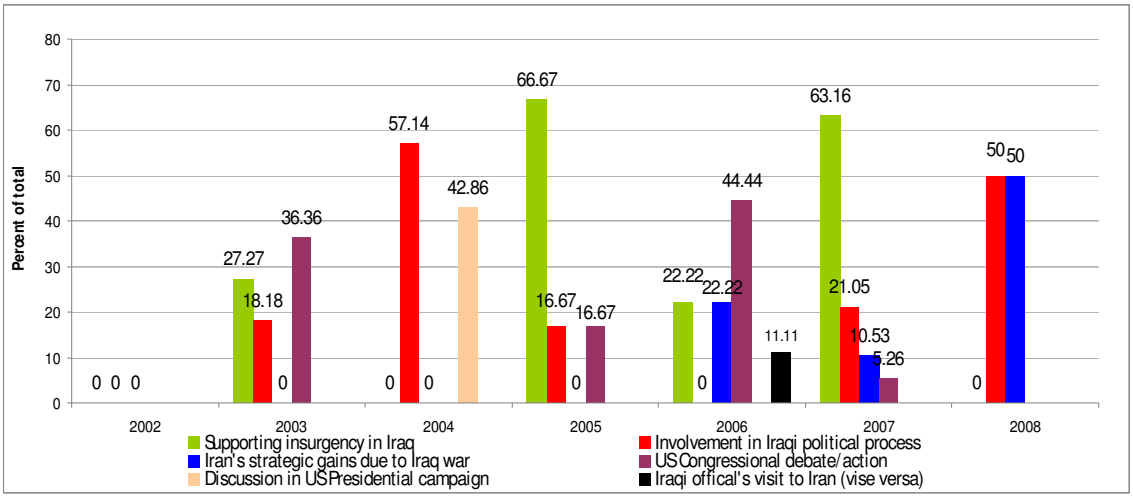


Figure 11. Shows percentage for the total number of stories 1200.

Finally, sources speaking about Iran were considered as well, as displayed in Table 4 below for the nuclear frame. Much like in the case of the New York Times, the most commonly quoted sources come from the White House, with a greater prominence of counterbalance from Congressional elites than in the case of the New York Times.

Nuclear frame: Table 4

Source	Percentage of stories that contained a direct quote from respective source when story contained nuclear frame (total number of stories for this category: 104; out of the 289 stories in total for the sample)
Bush	18
Congressional Democrat	18
Congressional Republican	18
Think tank scholar/non-military expert	18
Rice	9
Other administration official	9
Cheney	4.5
International official	4.5

The case of meddling frame, as displayed in Table 5, again shows a prevalence in sources coming from the administration, followed by Congressional elites. More than half of the

directly quoted sources stem directly from the administration, which should confirm the proposition that these sources tend to promulgate this particular frame, which seems to crowd out a sustained discussion of the geostrategic implications of the Iraq War.

Meddling frame: Table 5

Source	Percentage of stories that contained a direct quote from respective source when story contained meddling frame (total number of stories for this category: 33; out of the 289 stories in total for the sample)33
Bush	33
Rice	11
Rumsfeld	11
Other administration official	11
Congressional Democrat	11
Congressional Republican	11
Think tank scholar/non-military expert	11

In case of geostrategic frame, however, as shown in Table 6 below, prevalent directly quoted sources were think-tank scholars and non-military experts, which again suggests that such discussion would be independent from the official sources.

Geostrategic frame: Table 6

Source	Percentage of stories that contained a direct quote from respective source when story contained geostrategic frame (total number of stories for this category: 25; out of the 289 stories in total for the sample)
Think Tank Scholar/non-military expert	40
Rice	20
Congressional Republican	20
Former military analyst	20

Descriptive Data Analysis

What follows is a descriptive analysis of The New York Times and NBC coverage, intended to provide additional nuance to the quantitative results. This descriptive analysis seeks to describe the findings related to hypotheses testing in more detail by scrutinizing the nature of the coverage already outlined in the quantitative analysis chapter. Descriptive analysis particularly focuses on explaining the type of framing, categorized throughout this study as "procedural" or "episodic" and explain in what ways the domination of such coverage acts to the detriment of substantive or issue-oriented framing. The primary purpose of the analysis that follows is to explain how such coverage isolates news stories from one another and from the larger context, thus neglecting to convey the long-term, strategic outcomes of the War in Iraq. One of the propositions of this thesis is that Iranian geostrategic gains exemplify precisely these more profoundly negative news that are not rooted in daily events and are often outnumbered by news reports of tactical success or failures, typically triggered by daily acts of violence. The lack of geostrategic frame and abundance of "meddling frame," where Iran is typically used by the administration as an excuse for the prolongation of US involvement in Iraq, would also indicate the reporters' continuous dependence on official sources. Descriptive analysis hence seeks to provide a more exhaustive way of detailing the premise that the coverage is rarely issue-based or thematic in nature and is often dependent on official sources for cues, when Iranian involvement in Iraq is concerned.

The New York Times

A common theme that exemplifies a lack of in-depth, issue-oriented coverage is the failure to define Iranian geopolitical gains from the War in Iraq as problematic, along with an explanation of causal attribution to the problem. Instead, articles would often treat Iranian gains *as a normal and non-problematic occurrence.* For instance, an article would quote foreign minister in, at the time, President Khatami's government who, in answer to accusations that Iran is sending money to Moktada al-Sadr and other Shiite parties, said that Iran did not need to resort to such actions, since it already "wielded influence in Iran." Such article would not attempt to explain in what way Iran already exerts influence over Iraq and what might have led to such state of affairs. Instead of sounding an alarm bell for this potentially dangerous development, the article treats this piece of information as a natural occurrence. It does not verbally indicate in any way that Iran has benefited from the very fact that the United States is involved in Iraq, nor does it explain the nature of the Iranian influence on the Iraqi government and its long-term benefits. *Such articles would typically fail to point out apparent contradiction behind the purported Iranian simultaneous support for various Shiite factions that stand in opposition to each other. As a matter of fact, the articles would often not even specify the Shiite parties in question.* Numerous stories that simply report individual instances of apparently contradictory Iranian interference in Iraqi politics, without providing a broader context and explanation, contribute to generation of disjointed, fragmented coverage referred to as one of the biases in US media coverage (Bennett, 2001). One of the properties behind "episodic" framing that was referred to earlier, is that it tends to be "non-interpretative," which is what the stories of this type exemplify. (Iyengar, 1994, p. 32)

Another common occurrence is the instance where an article would mention Iranian geopolitical gains only briefly and then go on to discuss another topic at length-typically that of nuclear Iran-thus framing Iran primarily as a nuclear threat. In such cases, the dominant frame of Iran for the whole article is considered to be nuclear threat. This observation relates to the "salience" aspect of framing. Even when the geopolitical discussion is present in the coverage, other topics that are given more space or greater prominence overshadow its salience. Numerous articles dating back to 2004, for example, would report fears that President Bush's focus on Iraq is neglecting Iran as a nuclear threat. This was the case even with the stories dating back to the beginning months of the War (March and April 2003), which focused on fears that Iran might be a more immediate threat than Iraq because of its nuclear arsenal. Such stories, however, would not observe how Iran might gain geopolitically from prospective toppling of Saddam Hussein's government. The focus on nuclear Iran becomes even more prevalent in the later months of 2003 when the International Atomic Agency became particularly vested in the issue, threatening with UN sanctions. In such cases, the very driver behind the story with the topic of "nuclear Iran" would be a round of negotiations, an international summit, or other type of *event* whereby the story would focus *on the very process of negotiations and Iranian regime's motives, and not on background information or more complex implications of a certain policy.* Hence, the coverage of nuclear Iran proved to be episodic in this respect.

Framing Iran as a "contained threat"[13] when geopolitical implications of the Iraq War were discussed was another common observation in the articles dating back to 2003. Iran was sometimes discussed as a potential ally for the US in the War in Iraq. A telling example

would be an article from an outside columnist, suggesting that US should consider working with Iran as an ally that could help with Iraqi Shia. Another opinion piece from a guest columnist, pointed out that the US kept Saddam Hussein in place for the fear of Iranian Shiite influence; however, the piece assessed that this policy had been flawed and went on to frame Iran as a contained threat. Hence, even though the *geostrategic discussion* was observed occasionally at this earlier time *–the frame of Iran as a potential strategic winner from the War was typically missing.* The following example illustrates an article that would also frame Iran as a potentially contained threat: "Iraq is envisioned as a springboard for eliminating the Baath party in Syria, undermining the mullahs in Iran and enhancing American power across the region." Furthermore, the articles from the earlier period encompassed by coding -2001 and 2002- also tend to cite Iranian support for US efforts in toppling the Taliban in Afghanistan, thus suggesting that Iran might be a new force for stability in the region.

A typical example of a story that would bring up Iranian geopolitical gains from the War but would give greater prominence to the nuclear issue, would be the following feature story that quoted Ms. Yaphe, referred to in the policy chapter of this thesis, who testified in front of Congress about Iranian geopolitical gains from the War in Iraq. Apart from giving greater prominence to the nuclear issue, the article did not attempt to examine Iranian nuclear ambitions in the light of growing Iranian influence in Iraq and how it might provide greater leverage to Iran during nuclear negotiations- as several reports reviewed in the policy chapter of this thesis indicated.[14] Ms. Yaphe's testimony before Congress also

[13] Category under variable xi in the code sheet

[14] For a sample of a rare article that actually discusses such gains, please refer to Appendix, Part I, excerpt: i)

outlined how newly established and thriving Iranian financial and trade relations with Iraq present a strategic gain from the War in Iraq. *Numerous articles examined in the content analysis would report these newly established connections; yet the articles would not frame these connections as problematic, nor would they attribute the cause behind this newly developed situation to the US invasion.* For instance, an article would report that Iraqi airline is flying again and that most of the users were Iranians, on their way to visit the Holy Shrines; or the fact that Iranian goods are flooding the Iraqi market. Such articles, however, would mention these ideas as side-facts, without bothering to analyze their causes and implications. It is in this respect that "episodic" or "non-interpretative" reporting contributes to further fragmentation of the coverage: *by not defining separate instances of Iranian gains as problematic; and by failing to piece those individual instances together into a frame that would convey how Iran might have gained geopolitically from the war.*

Failure to provide a clear definition of Iranian influence and an explanation behind its origin is best exemplified in articles that would repeatedly use the term "Iran-backed Shiite parties" almost as a linguistic collocation –without ever framing the fact that parties are "Iran-backed" as potentially problematic. An unexamined repetition of this verbal phrase could potentially create a sub-context that implies that Shiite parties in Iraq are by default "Iran- backed"- and that this is a normal state of affairs. Furthermore, numerous articles would mention Iran as the natural basis for the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI); yet they would typically fail to draw any conclusions or imply any connection for Iranian stakes in the Iraqi political process, let alone go into examining the relationship between Prime Minister Maliki and ISCI. On numerous occasions, Moqtada al-Sadr would be described as the enemy, not ISCI, because his army was contributing to US casualties at the

given time. Such *an article would sometimes even acknowledge that ISCI might not be an ideal ally for the US,* but would point out that it is much better than "volatile thug Sadr." Hence, the focus of the article would *not* be on Iran's stake at supporting either of the two, but on *whether or not* Iran is a defacto financial backer of Sadr. Such an article would typically fail to provide a discussion of what backing of either of the two means for Iranian influence in the region or geostrategic gains from the war.[15] Therefore, the article would focus on Iranian support for insurgency, defining the problem behind Iranian involvement in terms of US casualties and growing violence; not in terms of Iranian stakes in supporting a particular Shiite faction. Numerous articles from 2003 and 2004 would also merely mention that Iran is financially supporting the insurgency or that fighters are coming in from Iran-without placing the discussion in a broader context and trying to explain the nature of the Iranian involvement. Articles that discuss Iranian support for violence also often do not portray the Iranian influence as problematic, but merely state it as a neutral fact by mentioning that certain bloodshed is committed by the "Iranian-trained militia"-the Badr brigades. Equally rare were the articles that question the administration line about Iranian meddling, much used to accuse Iran and spur support for US government policies.[16]

NBC Stories

Perhaps the most important observation when comparing The New York Times coverage to that of NBC is the greater percentage of NBC stories that focus *on the very process of decision making* in the United States when Iraq and Iran are concerned. The stories whose

[15] For examples of such articles, please refer to Appendix , Part II (in this case excerpt: i)
[16] Please refer to the Appendix, Part II for excerpts that exemplify such reporting

focus of Iran-Iraq link[17] is "Congressional debate or action in the United States" or "discussion of Iran and Iraq in the light of US presidential campaign," which are typically episodic in nature, are more prevalent in NBC than in The New York Times coverage. This proposition was confirmed in the quantitative content analysis. Descriptive analysis that follows seeks to provide a more detailed explanation as to why such coverage is fragmented (Bennett, 2001) and why it further disjoints "war policy outcomes from each other" and from "strategic goals," thus further undermining public accountability (Entman, Livingston, Kim 2009). TV news is also expected to contain a greater number of stories driven by visuals, typically event-driven and more episodic in nature, than the newspaper coverage. These propositions were part of the fourth hypothesis and descriptive analysis primarily seeks to shed further light on comparison between the two media. TV coverage was also expected to be focused on personalities-with significant implications for attributions of responsibility, as reviewed in the literature review chapter (Iyengar, 1994).

Dependence on only one source for information and scarcity of issue-oriented and balanced discussion was a common occurrence in the surveyed news stories. A typical story would interview an official, for instance, US Ambassador Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, who would report that "some of the clerics who were opposed to Saddam Hussein were based in Iran-so there is Iranian influence there is no question about that." Yet, the news story would not seek to explain the nature of this influence or raise questions about the Iraqi government's ties to Iran. What seems to be even more revealing of *the episodic nature of the story* is the way the question to, in this case, Mr. Khalilzad was phrased: *"Are the Shiite clerical leaders closer to Iran or to the United States?"* the anchor asked. The focus of this

[17] Variable V

question seems to be on the process of "winning and losing," assuming the format of "who is in charge" and "will the order be restored"-typical of media bias described earlier- without examining broader implications of Iranian involvement and what might have led to the Iranian influence in the first place. Moreover, a typical story that would fail to provide counterweight to the administration line when discussing Iran in the light of geostrategic outcomes would quote an administration official without examining the veracity or facts behind the quote. For example, one of the stories quoted the former Secretary of State Rice saying that "the notion that somehow Iraq, under Prime Minister Maliki and his government is something akin to Iran is just not right. I mean, it's just erroneous." The story fails to examine the viability of the quote any further.

Framing Iran as a contained threat whose regime might be toppled as a result of US invasion of Iraq was a common topic prior to and at the beginning of the invasion in NBC coverage as well. Here we could evidence an example of inter-media agenda-setting. For instance, NBC programs picked up from The New York Times the column from Thomas Friedman that discussed geopolitical outcomes of the war in Iraq in a positive light –in terms of potential domino effect of toppling the regime in Iraq. This program only parroted the words of Thomas Friedman. In fact, this geostrategic discourse that predicted positive effects on Iran from the Iraq invasion appeared on several occasions in the coded stories right before and in the early stages of the War. When these early stories from 2003 discuss Iranian influence, they would typically define the problem in theocratic terms -as a threat of introducing Iranian-style theocracy in Iraq. Such stories would heavily focus on Iranian revolution in 1979, *and on iconic personalities*. Typical example is a reference to Khomeini, in a very visual manner, harkening back to his accusations of the United States,

or drawing *on very visual elements of the story*-for instance, by saying that his photos are for sale in Najaf "like posters of a rock star."

Stories pertaining to the 2004 period of time prior to the US elections would typically focus on the discussion in the context of the US presidential campaign, and were more procedural in nature-reporting which candidate said what about Iran and Iraq-without examining the background information to what the candidates were saying. These stories would typically discuss which of the two countries should the US be according more attention to: Iran or Iraq, thus missing out on a substantive discussion of the nature of Iranian involvement in Iraq.

Stories reporting Iranian support for violence in Iraq tend to focus on the fact that the weapons used as the support for insurgency were actually purchased in Iran. Yet, much like the stories in The New York Times that simply referred to "Iran-backed parties," some of these stories would merely mention that the weapons were purchased in Iran and imply Iranian involvement, without even defining that as a problem or making further investigations as to why this might be the case. A typical story that frames Iran as a meddler would also simply cite President George W. Bush saying that "Iran is fueling the insurgency in Iraq and that violence has entered a new phase but has not amounted to civil war. Such a story would potentially go on to question the frame of "why we do not call it [violence] a civil war," *but would fail to discuss the nature and the consequences behind Iranian involvement. Such stories are typically episodic in the sense that they are triggered by daily instances of violence and would miss out on issue-oriented discussion.* Perhaps

these stories could best be characterized in the following manner: who is winning in Iraq, the United States or "Iran the meddler"?

Even when the elements of the geostrategic discourse appear in the news, they would give voice to one prominent public figure, such as a US Congress representative, to express his own view of the issue. Such stories would also typically focus on personalities. For the stories prior to Ahmadinejad's election, this was predominantly the Supreme leader Khamenei. The following story quotes a republican congressman from Florida who frames Iranian support for insurgency as the problem, and blames it all on Khamenei in particular: "I think Iran is a major player. *Ayatollah Khamenei, not the Iranian people, because they're not the problem. Ayatollah Khamenei is the problem."* Interestingly enough, such a story would again just give voice to this representative without even providing counterbalance by quoting someone else with an opposing view. Most importantly, the news story did not provide any implication that Iranian influence might be the consequence of US government invasion of Iraq. *The blame is shifted solely on Iran-and it is arguably quite a simplified blame-attached to one personality.* The implications of such coverage for attribution of responsibility could be inferred here from Iyengar's writings discussed earlier in this study (Iyengar, 1994).

Other stories that imply an increase in Iranian influence in the region in connection to the War in Iraq would also cast the debate in "who is in charge" format. These stories would typically pin the observation of growing Iranian influence to one or two Congress members, White House officials or occasional experts, without going into detailed explanations that would shed additional light on their statements. Even the very quotes

illustrate visually-oriented and dramatic nature of the coverage. For instance, the following news piece quoted Senator Lieberman: “asking Iran and Syria to help in Iraq is about like your local fire department asking a couple of arsonists to put out the fire.” This news piece then provides a statement from Richard Perle who said that if Bush tried to seek Iranian assistance and cooperation in Iraq it would be seen “as an indication of American weakness.” *This quote also reveals little about the issue in question, but focuses on the “who is in charge” aspect of the issue.*

Furthermore, quite often the discussion in such news pieces does not proceed to examine policy precursors that led to US regional weakness and rising Iranian influence. Instead, the discussion of Iran proceeds, in a very typical manner, *to focus on Iranian nuclear issue, and even emphasizes the fact that when analyzing problems with Iran, Iraq should not act as a distracting factor.* This type of reporting presents evidence of procedural (Entman, 2004), or episodic (Livingston, 2007) coverage that contributes to further fragmentation of news environment (Bennett, 2001) by failing to provide a comprehensive, systematic insight into the nature of the Iranian problem. *Instead of looking into how different aspects of the Iranian issue and increasing influence in the region relate to each other and to US polices that might have contributed to such state of affairs, the coverage reports one issue separately from the other.*

Stories that frame Iran as a “meddler in Iraq War” would typically interview an official who would use Iranian meddling as an excuse for staying in Iraq. The following story quotes a military official who cast the debate about Iranian influence into “winning and losing” script: “Well, we're in a power struggle with the Iranians over who’s going to

exercise influence in the future Iraq and they want to be that power." In terms of policy-prescription or the remedy aspect of the frame, this news piece, indicative of the rest of the coverage, emphasizes that the administration cannot afford to leave the country *because of Iranians*. *The story never seemed to even imply that the invasion of Iraq might have opened the door to such state of affairs. On the contrary, Iranian influence was used to bolster the administration's remedy aspect of the frame.* Even when the discourse, on occasions, goes against the administration line, it questions the administration's policies on the grounds of not having the adequate military policy response, and not on the basis of geostrategic argument.[18]

In 2007, such framing of "Iran the meddler" pervades the stories that still rely on administration officials for telling the whole story. Reporting focuses on the details of US action regarding Iranian insurgency and hence exemplify procedural framing. The primary problem is framed in terms of the fact that Iranian bombs *are creating American casualties* and not the fact that this empowerment is an aspect of growing Iranian strength that might have resulted from the US policy in the first place.[19] Furthermore, unlike The New York Times, NBC abounds in news stories that, when discussing the insurgency, usually tie the issue to Al Quds Force, in an equally episodic manner, focusing on the question of *which personality in the Iranian regime is directly involved in the provision of this support. Such stories would typically focus on speculations of President, Mahmud Ahmadinejad's personal involvement.* The primary concern behind covering Iranian support for insurgency would be the responsibility for killing American soldiers.[20] Therefore, what

[18] Please refer to Appendix under "NBC Stories" for more examples
[19] Please refer to the Appendix section, NBC stories, example iii)
[20] Please refer to Appendix section, NBC stories, example iv)

seems to be an overwhelming focus on reports triggered by daily violence, typically driven by concern for American casualties, seems to place the issue-orientated, thematic discussion of geopolitical aspects of the war in a shadow. Even when an augmenting Iranian influence is acknowledged, responsibility is rarely attributed to US government policies, but cast in terms of "nefarious Iranian meddling." Hence the cause behind the problems tends to be attributed to individual, visible actors within the Iranian regime, and not the US invasion.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks and Discussion

This study hypothesized that the mainstream media in the United States underreported Iranian geopolitical gains from the War in Iraq. With slightly more than 3% of the total number of New York Times stories that framed Iran as a geopolitical winner from the Iraq War, and less than 2% of the total number of examined NBC stories that contained such a frame, the quantitative content analysis apparently supports the central premise. As a matter of fact, the very low number of stories that discuss Iran in relation to Iraq War can be considered as an indicator that Iraq is not perceived as central to the coverage of Iran. Those stories that do discuss Iran in connection to Iraq War typically focus on Iranian support for insurgency or interference into Iraqi political affairs. Such stories would then frame Iran as a "meddler in Iraq War"-a frame often supported by the administration and used as an excuse for a prolonged US presence in Iraq. Reporting in such instances tends to be episodic in nature (Iyengar, 1994) - by focusing on the very process of Iranian supply of weapons or financial support for various groups in Iraq and without an issue-oriented discussion that would examine Iranian stakes behind the support for each of these groups.

An analysis of sources most often quoted in case of this frame for both The New York Times and NBC coverage confirms that administration officials pervade this discussion, promulgating the frame whose frequency crowds out the geopolitical debate. When meddling frame is concerned, another pertinent observation regarding most often quoted sources is the rarity of appearance of the "other elites" such as think tank scholars and experts outside of the government, relative to sources within the administration. Even the

Congressional elites are quoted less frequently, especially in the case of The New York Times. Administration officials are also prevalent in the case of nuclear frame-the most frequent frame in Iranian coverage, although in the case of NBC, Congressional elites tend to balance out the discussion to a considerable degree. Nonetheless, most common sources in both frames support the proposition that the frames that appear most frequently are those that can be traced back to primarily administration officials and Congressional officials, which could indicate that media reflect the discussion present in the official circles. In the case of geostrategic frame, on the other hand, most often quoted sources are precisely elites outside of the government-primarily think-tank experts and policy analysts. Even Congressional members rarely appear as directly quoted sources when this frame is concerned. These observations are arguably relevant for the discussion on media capacity to develop an independent counter frame in circumstances where elites outside of the administration failed to raise a strong voice of opposition. Such circumstances suggest that media failed to report important geopolitical developments because of the lack of sufficiently relevant sources among "other elites," which in turn left the public uninformed about this issue. Since there was no incentive for the media to report on this issue, the geopolitical message failed to cascade to the public, hence leaving Congressional officials without signal from both public opinion and the media that they should promulgate the geopolitical discourse on Iran more forcefully. Another possible explanation for the reluctance of both media and officials outside of the government to promote the geopolitical discussion on Iran could reside in the notion of cultural congruence. Conveying the idea that the United States has kept the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein in power for years prior to his deposition in March 2003, is an idea that is not congruent with

the self-image of both journalists and the public in the United States. Hence, such frame was not likely to be accepted by relevant parties in the media system in the first place. The relevance of this situation resides in the fact that it bolsters the proposition that the "very paucity of media images may reduce pressure on officials to consider changing problematic policy," (Entman, Livingston and Kim, 2009, p. 701) Coupled with the fact that the coverage focuses on violence and other tactical outcomes of the War that are more convenient for journalists in the light of mounting commercial pressures, the public is arguably deprived of crucial information necessary for holding the government accountable. Iran-supported Iraqi Shiite faction that causes the largest number of American casualties or violence at any given time is the one that typically garners media attention; a more complex discussion about multiple levels of Iranian support of Shiite factions is also rarely examined or lost amidst the prominence of reports of military deaths and violence. This type of coverage contributes to the neglect of long-term, strategic outcomes of the War: instead of being used as a case for demonstrating the strategic policy failure behind US government's decision to invade Iraq, Iranian influence is repeatedly used as an excuse for the lingering US presence in the country.

Coverage that predominantly frames Iran as a"meddling force" without conveying geopolitical outcomes of the Iraq War, and relies on official sources for information should also demonstrate the presence of "authority-disorder" bias in media coverage (Bennett, 2001). Furthermore, even when Iranian support for different Shiite factions seems contradictory, as exemplified in the reports of simultaneous backing of Nouri al-Maliki and Moqtada al-Sadr for instance, the news media would fail to point that out, reporting these

individual instances of support in a disjointed manner and thus contributing to further fragmentation bias in media coverage (Ibid). Stories that managed to capture the geopolitical discourse were those that were expected to provide ample space for an issue-oriented discussion not triggered by daily events, and typically exemplified via thematic framing. The fact that not a single hard news story reported Iranian geostrategic gains from War in Iraq, and that more than half of the stories that did report the geopolitical gains were features, "characterized by their timeless quality" (Livingston and Bennett, 2003) should confirm this hypothesis as well. The frame was also expected to appear in story types typically less dependent on official sources-such as editorials and columns. This proposition was also confirmed through quantitative content analysis and should act as an indicator that lack of geostrategic frame presents an instance of media tendency to default to official sources, especially when the ambiguity of the topic is considerable, which could be argued for the case of Iranian influence in Iraq. Whereas stories would occasionally examine Iranian gains in Iraq in terms of growing Shiite influence in the country, they would rarely point out Iranian geostrategic empowerment from the growing Shiite influence in the region. Occasional reports of Iranian support for Hezbollah were never examined in the light of Shiite empowerment in Iraq and growing Shiite unrest in the region, as examined in the policy section of this study. The relevance of Shiites of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, or Lebanon are hardly ever discussed in the light of the Iranian regional gains and US involvement in Iraq. Hence Iranian geostrategic gains were lost in the fragmented coverage, overly reliant on debate pushed on the agenda by administration officials, and occasionally counterbalanced by Congressional members.

The content analysis has also demonstrated that the news media often seem to fail to even define Iranian influence in Iraq as problematic, as the coverage abounds in episodic-in the sense of "non-interpretative" (Iyengar, 1994) reports of growing Iranian influence that neither defines the problem, nor conveys a cause, moral judgment and hence policy treatment thereof. Thus, substantive framing is conspicuously scarce in the coverage, giving way to procedural framing that typically focuses on attributing responsibility for US predicaments in Iraq to what could be described as "nefarious Iranian influence," often pinned to visible personalities within the Iranian regime, such as the President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei, or to the loosely defined notion of "Iranian regime." We could then infer consequences of such episodic coverage for the attribution of responsibility effect on public opinion (Iyengar, 1994). We could also infer the negative influence of such framing of Iranian involvement in Iraq on public opinion from the proposition that procedural framing often fails to equip the public with tools necessary to become involved in political deliberation as it depresses their motivation for political engagement (Entman, 2004, p. 6).

The study also showed a prevalent focus on Iranian nuclear threat, which is the frame that appears most frequently in the coverage of Iran. Since this frame is given considerably greater salience than any other, as shown in the results from the quantitative analysis, a sustained discussion about Iranian geopolitical gains from Iraq War is arguably overshadowed by seeing Iran primarily as a nuclear threat. Other two germane observations can be attached to the examination of the coverage of Iranian nuclear influence. Firstly, just like the frame of "Iranian meddling," the frame of nuclear Iran is to a great extent episodic

in nature-focusing on the very process of placing pressure on Iran, usually on behalf of the international community; and secondly, stories rarely connect the two issues by examining how Iranian position on the nuclear issue might have been bolstered by the establishment of an Iran-friendly Shiite government in Iraq, as suggested in the policy review of the thesis. The coverage hence fails to even raise the possibility that Iranian gains from the War in Iraq might further empower Iran geopolitically. Such coverage again exemplifies failure to analyze issues in relation to one other, thus contributing to a fragmented coverage of Iran.

Researchers point out that a "coherent, resonant frame, that emphasized policy failure would have potential significance for accountability" (Entman, Livingston and Kim, 2009 p. 701). The analysis of sources suggests that lack of voices who would raise the geopolitical issue both from the government and Congressional elites, precluded this discussion from the coverage. Such situation, coupled with the proposition that geopolitical frame is incongruent for the US journalists and the public, might have reduced the incentive to pursue this debate further; and hence the scarcity of geopolitical frame would exemplify a failure to develop a sustainable independent counter frame. Important implication from this conclusion stems from the fact that it leads to the situation where potentially poorly conceived policies do not receive public scrutiny and a neglect of strategic outcomes of the War helps frame government policies as success, thus incapacitating the public to scrutinize the government and ultimately diminishing the incentives for the government to consider altering its course of action. Yet, one must point to the limitations of basing the study solely on the content analysis. This thesis does not introduce a way to test the effects of the missing geostrategic frame on public opinion in

the United States. Nor does this study conduct an experiment or a survey that would examine the effects of hitherto described media framing of Iranian influence. Inquiries that would explore the effects of media framing described in this thesis would constitute a recommendation for future research.

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Appendices

(Emphases in italics is added by the author to highlight the most relevant parts of the stories)

i) The following is an excerpt from an article that contains Iranian geostrategic gains from the War in Iraq examined in the light of the nuclear build up (an extremely rare occurrence of an article that would tie the nuclear issue to Iranian geopolitical gains from the Iraq War and place the two issues together in a broader context instead of examining them as two separate and even disparate topics.

(The New York Times -year 2006):

"[….] Iran's mullahs aren't feeling much pain from the Americans next door. *In fact, officials at all levels of government here say they see the American presence as a source of strength for themselves as they face the Bush administration. In almost every conversation about Iran's nuclear showdown with the United States and Europe, they cite the Iraq war as a factor Iran can play to its own advantage.* "America is extremely vulnerable right now," said Akbar Alami, a member of the Iran's Parliament often critical of the government but on this point hewing to the government line. *"If the U.S. takes any unwise action" to punish Iran for pursuing its nuclear program, he said, "certainly the U.S. and other countries will share the harm."* […] *In addition, the Iranians have longstanding ties to influential Shiite religious leaders in Iraq, and at least one recently promised that his militia would make real trouble for the Americans if they moved militarily against Iran.*

All of those calculations have reduced Iranian fears of going ahead with their nuclear program -a prospect that frightens not just the United States, Europe and Israel, but many of the Sunni Muslim-dominated nations in the region, including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Egypt."

ii)(The New York Times-year 2006):

"Yet this is all going on not in Iraq, but here in the religious capital of Iran. *As the Bush administration seeks simultaneously to stabilize Iraq, in part by empowering its Shiite majority, and contain Iran, it must carefully navigate the complex relationship between the countries. It is not just Iran's influence in Iraq that the United States must confront, but Iraq's connection to Iran, as well.* While Ayatollah Sistani is viewed suspiciously by the leadership of Iran - he opposes clerics' involvement in politics -his relations with the Iranian people have deepened and spread since the American occupation of Iraq. *Divisions that once stood between the Shiites of Iraq and Iran, animosity fed by the eight-year war between the countries, have become less relevant as Iraq's Shiites re-establish their identity after decades of oppression under Saddam Hussein."*

iii) The New York Times, year 2006

"Iran's power is also newly apparent in Iraq, where the government is led by Shiites with close ties to Iran's religious hierarchy. On Wednesday, Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki forcefully denounced Israel's bombing campaign in Lebanon, a position deeply at odds with the Americans whose invasion allowed the Shiites to gain power. One of Iraq's most powerful leaders, the Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr, has gone farther, hinting that he

might actively support his Shiite brethren in Hezbollah. Iran's influence has economic ramifications, too. *"If Iran emerges as a more powerful state, it will make other states in the region, and external powers like Russia and China, more willing to cooperate with Iran on energy despite U.S. objections,"* said Flynt Leverett, a former director of Middle Eastern affairs at the National Security Council and a former C.I.A. analyst."

iv) Exemplifies those articles that contain the geopolitical discussion and cite an expert or refer to a book on the subject- a common occurrence when the geostrategic frame eventually appears-hence confirming the expectation that in order to convey geostrategic frame the article would typically attain a degree of independence from official sources. The following is an example from an opinion piece:

"First, we break Iraq and hand it over to the Shiites, putting in a puppet who leans toward Iran and is aligned with the Shiite militias bankrolled by Iran. Then, as Peter Galbraith writes in The New York Review of Books, President Bush facilitates "the takeover of a large part of the country by an Iranian-backed militia," with the ironic twist that "there is now substantially more personal freedom in Iran than in Southern Iraq. "Reagan was able to help the Soviet Union -- and world communism -- to fall apart. All W. has managed to do is destroy the country he wanted to turn into a democracy and make Iran more powerful than it was before. In a sad testimony to how bollixed up things are in Iraq, Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki told the Council on Foreign Relations Monday that civil war has been averted in Iraq -- not! -- and that Iranian intervention has "ceased to exist." Gen. David Petraeus recently said that Iran was providing "lethal" support to Iraqi militias."

v) The following excerpt from an article from 2007 is a rare example of an article that would notice and point out the contradictory nature behind US support for the Iraqi government:

"Iran certainly is helping arm and train Shiite militias. But the administration is certainly exaggerating the salutary effect of any cutoff as long as these militias enjoy the protection of Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. If Mr. Bush is genuinely worried –and he should be-he needs to be as forceful in demanding that Mr. Maliki cut ties to these groups and clear about consequences if he refuses."[1]

vi) Consider the following letter to the editor as an example of a response to a New York Times editorial that accused Iran of meddling in the Iraqi affairs-and hence essentially agreed with the administration's accusations of Iran. It was written by the press secretary of the Mission of Iran to the United Nations in February 2007. Relevant question to be entertained here is: ***what is the position of the Times then-by choosing to raise this issue in a letter to the editor? Is it a statement against the administration's accusations of meddling? Can it be seen as an attempt of the New York Times to point out that Iran is gaining geostrategically in peaceful ways? How come that this letter to the editor failed to spur an increased amount of more elaborate reporting on this topic?***

To the Editor:

Re "Bullying Iran" (editorial, Feb. 1):

"The United States has now resorted to the soft power of disinformation about Iran by leveling false charges regarding Iran's behavior toward Iraq. *While Iran has fully supported the new government in Iraq and has signed various trade and energy agreements with Baghdad, the United States government continues to demonize Iran and blame it for America's own failures.* Contrary to your assertion that Iran is sowing chaos in Iraq, Iran is concerned about the growing chaos and the unwanted consequences of spill-over conflict and masses of refugees. Iran favors a strong, unified Iraq whose sovereignty is not constantly trampled upon by the intrusive Western powers. To this effect, Iran has responded favorably to Iraq's call for a regional forum to discuss the country's dangerous crisis."

M. A. Mohammadi Press Secretary, Mission of Iran to the United Nations, New York, Feb. 1, 2007

Part II

Excerpts from The New York Times stories that frame Iran as a "meddler in Iraq War"

What follows are excerpts from stories that frame Iran as a meddling force in Iraq: (articles that typically report the administration's accusations of Iran as a supporter for insurgency or any type of violence in Iraq). They would typically simply reiterate the administration line, used as a justification for lingering US efforts in Iraq. Articles that report on Iranian attempts to obstruct the work of Iraqi government also tend to frame Iran as a "meddler."

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[1] (article 973)

i) The New York Times, year 2007

The following article is an apt example of episodic coverage that casts any discussion of Iranian involvement in Iraq in terms of American deaths and procedures behind military operations. A discussion that would discuss the nature of Iranian involvement is typically missing.

The group was also "known for facilitating the transport of weapons and explosively formed penetrators, or E.F.P.'s, from Iran to Iraq, as well as bringing militants from Iraq to Iran for terrorist training," the military said in the statement. The Bush administration has criticized Iran's government for failing to shut off the flow of E.F.P.'s into Iraq, though officials have conceded that they have no conclusive intelligence that senior officials in Tehran are behind the smuggling. *The penetrators use explosives to fire a molten slug that is able to penetrate even the strongest armor plating, and they are responsible for dozens of American and Iraqi military deaths every month, according to military officials.* Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, in remarks to reporters on Thursday, underscored the American concern about smuggling of the devices from Iran. Iran's "support for militias, their involvement in the development and transfer of E.F.P.*'s that are killing our forces,* these are not good things," said Mr. Crocker, who is scheduled to hold talks with Iranian officials next Saturday in Baghdad.

ii) Excerpt from a typical article reporting the administration's justifications for staying in Iraq on the basis of growing fear of Iranian influence:

"Mr. Bush has previously warned Iran about its involvement in Iraq and its nuclear programs, but his remarks on Tuesday were especially forceful, *and suggested that he was blending the justification for staying in Iraq with fears held by members of both parties in Congress that Iran could emerge as a threat."*

iii) The following article would present an epitome of such reporting: repeating the administration line without examining it: ***Please note the article does include a comment clearly added by the journalist that Maliki is "an Iraqi Shiite who was in exile in Iran while Saddam Hussein led Iraq." However, the article does not proceed to discuss this point further.***

"Mr. Bush questioned Iranian reports that Mr. Maliki had thanked Mr. Ahmadinejad for Iran's "positive and constructive" role in Iraq and said he awaited Mr. Maliki's report. "Now if the signal is that Iran is constructive," the president said, "I will have to have a heart to heart with my friend the prime minister, because I don't believe they are constructive.' United States military officials said this week that attacks on American-led forces using a lethal roadside bomb said to be supplied by Iran set a record last month. *Mr. Bush said he was confident that Mr. Maliki, an Iraqi Shiite who was in exile in Iran while Saddam Hussein led Iraq, shared his view that Iran has had a destabilizing role in Iraq.*

iv) The following article is particularly interesting because it provides an elaborate explanation for reports of Iranian influence from the mouth of a politician who supports Maliki. The article exemplifies a case of straight-forward reporting that does

not proceed to examine the facts behind the quotes even when it provides an elaborate discussion about the nature of Iranian influence-a rare instance of such reporting.

"Iran generally supports many groups simultaneously, including some Sunni ones, so that it can benefit from any eventuality, said Sami al-Askari, a Shiite member of Parliament who works closely with Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. *"Iran intervenes in many ways, with many methods," Mr. Askari said.* In the case of the Mahdi Army, he said, Iran has recognized its diffuse nature, sprinkling support at high and low levels. Some support comes through ties to Hezbollah, the Shiite militia in Lebanon that also receives Iranian support. Beirut now has a Sadr office, and Mahdi commanders say they have been sending fighters to Hezbollah at least since last summer, when Hezbollah battled Israel. Iran also provides institutional assistance to Iraq, mainly to the Health Ministry, which is run by Mr. Sadr's political bloc. Three days after bombs killed more than 140 people in Sadr City last fall, for example, 50 Iraqi ambulances carried some of the wounded to the Iranian border. *They were transferred to Iranian ambulances and taken to Iranian hospitals, with much of the cost covered by organizations in Iran.*

Sample NBC stories

i) Excerpt from a story that focuses on personalities, frames Iran as a meddling force and does not examine Iranian increasing influence as an outcome of US policy:

(Quoting a Congressional Republican who had visited Iraq): "In fact, as we talked with the Iraqi officials and we met with the speaker of the parliament, the prime minister, the defense minister, the two generals in charge of the Iraqi military, the chairman of the

constitutional writing authority, we heard a common theme, that Syria may have the largest number from outside of Iraqi country, *but Iran overwhelmingly has the quality behind the insurgency.* And we've got to come to grips with that. And what's startling to me is that at one of our briefings at the classified level in Iraq reinforced that when one of our commanding officers looked to Iran on a map and said, "It's a black hole. We just don't have the intelligence that we need about Iran's involvement." That, to me, is absolutely outrageous. I've been raising this issue for the past two years. I think Iran is a major player. *Ayatollah Khamenei, not the Iranian people, because they're not the problem. Ayatollah Khamenei's the problem.* […]"

ii) **Story that relies solely on administration official who uses Iranian influence in Iraq as the rationale for endorsing the Surge policy**

Secretary Rice: "Well, what we're prepared to do is to complete the security gains that we've been making, to create circumstances in which an Iraqi government and the local officials can find political accommodation, as they are doing in Anbar, and to be able then from Iraq, with allies in the war on terror, to resist both terrorism and Iranian aggression"

iii) **A sample story that exemplifies numerous cases where reports of Iranian involvement in Iraq are reduced to descriptions of operational procedure behind potential US military response**

[Military official]: "The US is going to be throwing an awful lot of muscle at Iran. The Navy is going to be sending a second aircraft carrier, the Stennis, into the Persian Gulf. The Army will soon have two Patriot anti-missile batteries in both Kuwait and Qatar. And the

Navy's going to be conducting military exercises with friendly nations in the gulf. Now, this is all part of a new strategy that the administration is calling its anti-Iran strategy, designed to keep the heat on Iran and reassure US allies in the gulf that the US intends to keep Iran in a box."

iv) **Excerpt from a story that exemplifies numerous instances of episodic framing where any discussion of Iranian influence is reduced solely to discussion of responsibility behind deaths of American soldiers.**

Anchor: Iran claims they're diplomats. The US says they're members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard *responsible for killing American soldiers.* The new aggressive military strategy is aimed at stopping the flow of sophisticated IEDs from Iran into Iraq. Now those roadside bombs are the *number-one killers of Americans in the war.* And despite all that, US military officials insist there are still no active plans to launch military strikes inside Iran."

Coding Scheme for the New York Times and NBC

I Story date

Enter as follows:

1a (for page 1), 10a, 3b etc

II Headline

Blank= Iran not mentioned in headline

1=Iran mentioned in headline

III Lead

Blank=Iran not mentioned in first three paragraphs

1=Iran mentioned in first three paragraphs

IV Iran-Iraq link

Blank= no mention of Iraq

1= passing mention of Iraq (e.g. only present in one or two sentences and not in the first few paragraphs)

2= More than passing reference to Iraq

V Substance of the Iran-Iraq link

1= focus on Iran supplying weapons or otherwise supporting the Iraqi insurgency/Al Qaeda in Iraq/ etc

2=focus on Iran's involvement in Iraqi political process

3= Focus on Iraqi officials' visit to Iran (vise versa) or meetings with Iraqi officials outside of Iraq

4= Focus is on Iran's strategic gains from the Iraq war

5= Congressional debate or action in the US about Iran

6= Discussion of Iran in the context of US Presidential campaign

7=other

VI Subtheme (enter 1 for any of the above topics)

VII Non-Iraq related discussion of Iran

For a story that discusses Iran more than superficially, it is primarily interested in

1= Iranian nuclear ambitions/threat

2=Iranian official's speech or international appearance

3= domestic political situation in Iran (including protests)

4= Iranian sponsorship of international terrorism

5= Everyday life in Iran

6= Iranian arts and culture

7= Iranian influence in the region

8=Congressional debate or action in the US about Iran

9= Discussion of Iran in the context of the US Presidential campaign

10=Other

VIII Subtheme: For any of the above topics (1-10 above) enter 1 if discussed in the story, leave blank if not.

IX Whether Ahmadinejad was mentioned:

Blank- not mentioned

1= named but not quoted

2= named and quoted

X Other Iranian official named:

Blank: no

1=yes (please name in comments)

XI Frame of Iran:

0=no clear frame of Iran

1= Regional threat

2= Meddling in Iraq War

3=Nuclear Threat

4= Threat to US home front

5= Strategic Benefactor of Iraq War

6=Theocracy

7=Contained Threat

8=Other (please specify)

XII Sources: who is speaking about Iran?

1-Bush

2=Cheney

3=Rice

4=Powell

5=Rumsfeld

6=Gates

7=Other Administration Official

8=US Military Officer/Coalition military officer

9=Congressional democrat

10= Congressional republican

11= Think tank scholar/other non-military expert analyst

12= Former military analyst

13= Iraqi government official

14 =Iraqi cleric

15=International official (not including coalition military official)

16= Ahmadinejad

17=other Iranian official

18=Iranian citizen

19=Iraqi citizen

20- Other Iraqi official

21= other

XIII Substance of each quote:

1= Iran is supplying weapons/otherwise supporting Iraqi insurgents

2=Iran is meddling in Iraqi pol. Affairs

3=Iran is a regional threat

4=Iran is a nuclear threat

5= Iran is benefiting from us war in Iraq

6=Iran is not as much of a threat as many claim

7=comment on Ahmadinejad

8=Iran supports terrorism

9=the us should engage Iran diplomatically

10=the us should take an aggressive militaristic approach to Iran

11=other