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THE NEWS MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION  
THE PRESS COVERAGE OF U.S. INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS  
AND ITS EFFECT ON PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL

by

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B.S. University of Miami, 2006

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Political Science  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
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## **ABSTRACT**

A standing phenomenon exists in the fields of both political science and communication studies regarding the impact that the news media have on public opinion. This study recognizes the average American citizens' reliance on the press to gain information about international conflicts. Hence, it is theorized that news reports on a political occurrence could very well influence the mass-level opinion of an event such that positive news stories generate positive public opinion, and vice versa. Since foreign crises define a presidency in the public's minds, presidential approval ratings determine the degree to which the news media manipulate public opinion. Specifically, news media coverage of two international conflicts, the Vietnam and Persian Gulf Wars, are analyzed in light of their effect on American citizens' public opinion of Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson and George H. W. Bush, respectively.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Since the average United States citizen has little first-hand access to the nation's politics and politicians, the preponderance of his or her knowledge, perception and opinions of political events comes by means of the news media. When it concerns the United States' involvement in the international arena, Americans are even more dependent on the press to publish photos from a war, issue articles about a peace agreement, televise footage of a humanitarian mission, and stream audio of a foe's threatening words. Because of this, society places a significant amount of trust and confidence in the news media to relay information to them. As a result, the media's report of a political happening could greatly influence the way in which Americans formulate their opinion of that event. In theory, if positive news coverage is associated with a certain occurrence, citizens will, by default, have a favorable opinion of it. The converse should also be true. So, to what extent do the news media influence public opinion? Furthermore, do news reports, either positive or negative, of an international political situation influence the public's sentiment toward the reigning presidential administration? In this thesis, news media coverage of international conflicts is analyzed in light of their relation to American citizens' public opinion of the presiding president.

In order to provide a sound method for quantification of the question under study, a precise, yet comprehensive, definition for each of the terms must be offered. First and



foremost, the Vietnam War and Persian Gulf War will be the two international conflicts under examination. It is important to note that although the news media often referred to these situations as wars, they are actually international conflicts. This is so because, in both of the cases, the president sent troops into the foreign country without a formal declaration of war by Congress. Nonetheless, the term “war” and “conflict” is used interchangeably throughout the paper because the press, more times than not, referred to these conflicts as wars.

Clearly, comparing the Vietnam War and Persian Gulf War is highly challenging due to their incongruences, however the comparison is worthwhile nonetheless. The Vietnam and Gulf Wars were chosen for three reasons. First, the political parties were split on the United States’ engagement in both war efforts, and as the wars soured, the opposing party did not benefit from its position (Shapiro, 1995). Second, and similar to the first reason, the wars represented either side of the political spectrum. Specifically, the analysis examines Lyndon B. Johnson, a Democrat, during the Vietnam War and George H. W. Bush, a Republican, during the Gulf War. Lastly, the Vietnam and Gulf Wars were chosen because of their salience, or prominence in the news media. It is worthy to mention that the American people were more interested in the Vietnam War than the Gulf War (Mueller, 1994), perhaps because the news media was more attentive to inflation, drug problems and unemployment in the early 1990s than the military intervention in the Middle East. Clearly, this is not the only possibility; maybe people were more attentive to Vietnam simply because it lasted longer or because men

were being drafted. As such, the notion that the press focused the public's attention on one war more than the other will be explored in greater detail later in the thesis.

The analysis examines newspapers as the sole medium. Although Vietnam was described as a "television war" and the Gulf War-era experienced a significant decline in newspaper readership, the print medium still trumped all others (State of the News Media, 2004). According to the "State of the News Media 2004," approximately 60 million newspapers were sold each day in 1960 and nearly 62 million in 1990. Although the percentage of newspaper circulation as a function of the population undoubtedly decreased over the time span, the number of citizens watching television news paled in comparison to the daily newspaper readership. As noted by the Audit Bureau of Circulations (2008), the most widely distributed newspaper, the *New York Times*, is used for data collection. It should be noted that although the *New York Times* is known to be the nation's most read daily newspaper, it is also commonly characterized to be kinder to the left side of the political spectrum. As such, the newspaper's liberal bias is accounted for through the thesis.

On the whole, news media—newspapers, television, magazines and radio—play a role in shaping public opinion. The media influence opinion through two main vehicles: the type of information they report, and how much or little information they provide. People who read newspapers, therefore, are not isolated; it is highly plausible that they also watch the broadcast news, read magazines and listen to news radio. Nevertheless, people who follow the news prefer newspapers to any other media by a large margin (Edmonds, 2004). Additionally, newspapers have the ability to provide a

larger depth and breadth of story than broadcast news, and newspapers are a much more trusted than any other medium to be an accurate and ethical source of news (Edmonds, 2004). Furthermore, the newspaper under study is not only the most widely distributed paper, but the one people go to distinctly for their international and political news (Edmonds, 2004). Because of this, it is rational to expect that newspapers play a large role in informing the public, and in turn, affect how the public perceives and responds to international and political situations.

Through content analysis of the *New York Times*, the research theory is tested. To reiterate, the thesis seeks to determine if news coverage affects public opinion. More specifically, the paper theorizes that the press' coverage of international conflicts, specifically wars, influences the public's opinion of the president. Hence, if the news media releases favorable stories on the war, the public will respond similarly and have favorable opinions of the president, and vice versa. To assess this, news articles were analyzed to determine if they were favorable or unfavorable to the war effort, how salient they were, and if they reflected the president in a positive or negative light. It is important to note, however, that only news coverage was taken into account; so, quotes from other sources (for example, a critical quote of Johnson by Nixon) were not considered. The coverage was examined in relation to the public's opinion of the president and how he was handling the war effort to determine if news media coverage had an effect on the mass-level opinion.

The entire duration of war coverage for both conflicts was not analyzed due to the large number of articles written over that period of time; and furthermore, the time

span of the wars was so different. As such, each war was broken down into three main parts. The start of U.S. intervention in Vietnam at the beginning of Johnson's term on November 22, 1963, the escalation of U.S. involvement on January 31, 1965, and the turning point (Tet Offensive) on January 30, 1968, that lead to the U.S. failure in the war effort. Vietnam's turning point, otherwise referred to as the conflict's "decisive incident," derived from historical records that document this event as the fork in the war. The Gulf War was studied during these three phases: at the launch of U.S. combat operations on January 16, 1991, the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait on February 26, 1991, and the downturn in public approval post-war on May 30, 1991.

To test whether news coverage had an effect on public opinion, variables were formed to measure the independent concept: news media coverage of international conflicts. With that being said, the salience of the war during each of the three stages was the first variable for the independent variable. The salience variable is integral to this study because, many times, the press serves as the mechanism that distinguishes between what invokes national interest and what does not. As Mueller (1973) cites, the Korean and Vietnam Wars were relatively analogous cases, yet the public largely disapproved of the latter simply because there were less domestic issues diluting the media's coverage of the war. As a result, the American people knew more about the Vietnam War, therefore they were more disapproving of it. Salience was measured by how many war-related articles appeared in the first page of the newspaper for a month's duration. For example, November 22, 1963 marked the beginning of the U.S.' intervention in the Vietnam conflict, therefore all *Section A, Page 1* articles that were

published concerning the combat operations in Vietnam from that day until a month later (December 22, 1963) were included in the total.

The salience of the Gulf War in news coverage was also considered. For instance, January 16, 1991, marked the beginning of U.S. involvement in the Gulf War; therefore, all the *Section A, Page 1* articles that were published concerning the launch of combat operations from the day the war started until a month later (February 16, 1991) were included in the total. As to be expected, the salience of the Gulf War was significantly less than that of Vietnam due to the restrictions that the U.S. government put on the press regarding reporting from the Middle East war zone. This restriction was formalized in *Annex Foxtrot* and issued by the Pentagon at the start of the war. It was a preventative measure employed by the government in response to Vietnam, in which the military believed they had lost the war largely because of public opposition.

The next indicator denoted the press' judgment of whether the president was meeting the goals that he laid out for the country in the war efforts. The variable was measured by the number of the articles that said the president was fulfilling the wartime objectives he sought for the nation as compared to the number that said otherwise. Specific phrases and terms within the newspaper articles quantified this measurement. Take, for example, *New York Times*-derived terms like the "president's wartime policies prevail" or "president's decisions move forces in the right direction" were deemed as articles that signify the president met his wartime goals. More specifically, articles that cited that *Congressional budget sustains the war efforts* or *allied forces were making progress and contributing to U.S. success* highlighted the president was meeting his

wartime goals. Due to the nature of the variable, a great deal of flexibility was taken. For that, a complete list of articles that were used to quantify the measurement is cited in Appendix A (Vietnam War articles) and Appendix B (Gulf War articles).

On the other hand, language such as the “president’s policies fall short” or “president fails to meet war goals” indicate that the news media perceived the president was not meeting his goals. In particular, these articles cited information like *a large number or unnecessary deaths of U.S. servicemen and women, increased aggression and/or a rise in enemy attacks, critiques of information released by the State Department or Defense Department, and U.S. military invasion deemed unwarranted*. Once again, a flexible approach was taken when determining if an article fell within these parameters, therefore all the articles included to create this indicator are cited in the appendices.

An additional, but similar, variable assessed the news media’s perception of the military’s success in accomplishing its missions. It was contrasted with the number of articles that highlight a failed mission. Specific language within the newspaper articles quantified this measurement. For example, terms like “mission complete,” “troops succeed” or “military prevails” were deemed as articles that indicate successful military operations. More specifically, these articles cited that *if Congress cuts wartime spending war efforts could be impeded, American troops are stabilizing and liberating the country in which they are fighting, and the U.S. military is successfully executing its missions*. Alternatively, language such as “failed mission,” “troops unsuccessful,” or “military is losing ground” will be a sign of failed military operations. More precisely, these articles cited that the *military did something detrimental to innocent civilians, the*

*enemy was succeeding, the U.S. military was failing at its missions or there were increased chaotic conditions in the country in which U.S. forces were fighting.* The variable was measured based on the number of articles on successful missions relative to the number of articles on failed missions.

Again, it is important to note that the *president variable* and the *military variable* were examined during three phases of each war. In the case of the Vietnam War, the stages included Johnson's decision to send American troops into Vietnam, his decision to escalate U.S. involvement, and U.S. failure during the Tet Offensive. For the Gulf War, the three parts examined were the U.S. start of combat operations, the U.S. defeat with Iraqi withdrawal, and the post-conflict period.

The final independent variable examined the number of articles that highlighted U.S. troop casualties. As Mueller (1973) points out, people react with greater sensitivity to fatalities and severe wounds at the beginning of the war and progressively get more callous as time goes on. Like for the other variables, this measurement will be taken at each of the three stages for both wars.

To quantify the dependent variable—public opinion of the wartime president, the Gallup Poll was used to denote presidential popularity, or the percentage of Americans approving the way the president was “handling his job” and “handling the war.” The presidents under review were Johnson and Bush for the Vietnam and Gulf Wars respectively. Much like the independent variables, the polling data was acquired for the three phases of the wars. Once the articles were collected and interpreted for the

independent variables, the polling data for each of the stages of the war was used for quantification.

Take, for example, the 1968 turning point in the Vietnam War, the Tet Offensive. Most historians cite this as the decisive moment in the war because it was a political and psychological victory for North Vietnam even though it was a military failure for them. Sigelman (1979) eloquently noted, the “Tet was a definite turning-point in the war not so much because it was a military victory for the Communists (who in fact sustained huge losses) as because of its massive psychological effect on the American public, triggered by sensational media coverage” (p. 551). All applicable news articles published from the beginning of the Tet Offensive to the month following this turning point were correlated to the public opinion polls.

Data from the Gallup Polls provided figures to form the indicators for the dependent variables. It should be noted that although these variables appear as a single set, they were examined for both the Gulf and Vietnam Wars. The percent is based on the polling percentage at the time of the phase. This measurement is based on the one used in “Assessing the President: The Media, Elite Opinion and Public Support,” by Richard A. Brody (1991), to calculate the movement of public support for the president during rally events. Take, for instance, the turning point in the Vietnam War where 36% of Americans approved of Johnson; this figure is based on his approval rating at the time of the Tet Offensive. The indicators account for a national-level response, and are as follows:



- Percentage of those who approve the way the president is “handling the war” during the first phase of the conflict. In the case of Bush, the first month of U.S. combat operations in the Gulf War was considered. For Johnson, this indicator will not be considered because there is no available data.
- Percentage of those who approve the way the president is “handling the war” during the second phase of the conflict. For Vietnam, the escalation of U.S. forces is taken into account. For the Gulf War, the U.S. defeat over Iraq on February 26, 1991, is considered.
- Percentage of those who approve the way the president is “handling the war” during the last phase of the conflict. For Johnson’s approval ratings, the Tet Offensive time period was used. For Bush, the post-Gulf War period was examined.
- Percent of those who approve the way the president is “handling his job” at the start of the conflict. Johnson’s public approval ratings were analyzed at the *Gulf of Tonkin Resolution* that marked the U.S.’ involvement in Vietnam. It is important to note that during this time, Johnson recently took office with the assassination of John F. Kennedy. As a result, his approval ratings were incredibly high because of the circumstances that surrounded him coming to power. Johnson’s high ratings were considered because, at the very least, they could be a mitigating factor in the public opinion results. In the case of Bush, the first month of the Gulf War was considered.

- Percent of those who approve the way the president is “handling his job” at the second phase in the conflict.
- Percent of those who approve the way the president is “handling his job” at the third phase of the conflict. In the case of Vietnam, Johnson’s approval rating during the Tet Offensive was examined. For Bush, the post-war period is analyzed.

Accounting for each of the variables aforementioned, various hypotheses were considered:

*Hypothesis 1.* If salience of the Vietnam War rises, then there will be a drop in public opinion of Americans approving the way Johnson handled his job. Salience will be measured by how many war-related articles appeared in the first page of the newspaper for a month’s duration.

*Hypothesis 2.* If there are a higher percentage of articles on Johnson not meeting his goals during the Vietnam War than articles stating he was meeting his goals, there will be a drop in public opinion of Americans approving the way the president handled the war.

*Hypothesis 3.* If there are a higher percentage of articles on the military not successfully completing its missions during the Vietnam War than articles that state otherwise, there will be a drop in public opinion of Americans approving the way Johnson handled the war.

*Hypothesis 4.* If salience of the Gulf War rises, then there will be a drop in public opinion of Americans approving the way Bush handled his job.

*Hypothesis 5.* If there are a higher percentage of articles on Bush meeting his goals during the Gulf War than articles that state otherwise, there will be a rise in public opinion of Americans approving the way he handled the war.

*Hypothesis 6.* If there are a higher percentage of articles on the military successfully completing its missions during the Gulf War than articles that state otherwise, there will be a rise in public opinion of Americans approving the way Bush handled the war.

*Hypothesis 7.* If at the first phase of the war there is significant percentage (more than 20%) of articles citing military casualties, there will be a significant percentage (more than 50%) of Americans disapproving the way the president is handling the war.

*Hypothesis 8.* If at the last phase of the war there are an increased percentage of articles citing military casualties in comparison to the first phase, there will be no effect on the percentage of Americans disapproving the way the president is handling the war.

In the next chapter, a detailed literature review offers a comprehensive overview of the work that has already been done in this field. Following the literature review, two chapters are dedicated solely to each of the cases being studied. The news media coverage of the Vietnam conflict in relation to public opinion polls of the Johnson administration are examined in great detail in the third chapter. In the following chapter, the same is done for the conflict in the Middle East in relation to the mass-level opinion of Bush. The final chapter covers the data analysis of the findings from the hypothesis testing, outlines a full summary of the thesis and proposes future direction for research.

In summary, news media coverage is expected to have a relation to the American citizens' public opinion of their president. Specifically in this examination, it is theorized that if the press has a favorable view of the war, U.S. citizens will, in turn, have a favorable view of the president. More concisely, the study contends that if the news media emphasizes the president and the military are meeting their wartime goals, the public opinion of the president should be favorable. If the press highlights wartime casualties, public opinion of the president should be low. Furthermore, the more the public knows about the war through news media reports, the less likely they are to support the war effort and the president standing behind it. Through careful analysis and sound quantification, the thesis determines if news reports of an international conflict influence the public's sentiment toward the reigning presidential administration.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review provides an in-depth analysis of the scholarly work previously published regarding the influence of the news media on public opinion specifically as it pertains to the mass-level judgment of U.S. presidents. It is important to note that various arenas of scholarship are taken into account within this review, and therefore some of the literature is more directly connected to the research question under examination than others. In the seminal work in this area, “Assessing the President: The Media, Elite Opinion and Public Support,” Richard A. Brody (1991) contends that American people shape and redefine their opinion of the quality of presidential performance based on the information published in news reports. In arriving at this theory, Brody analyzes news stories—foreign and domestic, good, bad and neutral—relative to their effect on the presidential administrations of Kennedy through Ford, Carter and Reagan. In addition to his work, other scholars have “uniformly presumed that news media attention to a policy issue increases its impact on presidential job performance evaluations” (Miller and Krosnick, 2000, p. 301).

The president’s standing with the public is important for two reasons. First, mass-level opinion of the president makes political life for him easier or more difficult than it should be (Neustadt, 1980). Second, when the president has widespread approval, it is much easier for him to persuade Congress to adhere to his policy agenda (Neustadt, 1980). It is clear, therefore, that public opinion, although generally indirectly,

influences policymaking (Page and Shapiro, 1992). The larger implication of this is that “if the media’s decisions about what issues to cover are made using sound standards of newsworthiness, then public reliance on the media to...gauge presidential performance can be viewed as sensible and constructive” (Miller and Krosnick, 2000, p. 313).

The association between the news media and public opinion has not always been a widely accepted phenomenon for political scientists, however. Petrocik (1981) states that although political leaders and media outlets have always assumed this relationship existed, “political scientists, on the other hand, have been reluctant to credit the mass media with much influence at all” (p. 1054). One of the key political researchers to do this was Thomas E. Patterson when he published, “The Mass Media Election: How Americans Choose Their President,” in 1980. Although this literature review is primarily concerned with the influence of the mass media on public opinion of the incumbent president, it is insightful to note that in Patterson’s study of presidential elections, he finds an undeniable link between the press, the president and the public: “Today’s presidential campaign is essentially a mass media campaign.... For the large majority of voters, the campaign has little reality apart from its media version. Without the benefit of direct campaign contact, citizens must rely on the media for nearly all of their election information” (p. 1). While Patterson is primarily concerned with the effect the news media has on presidential elections, this association could very well spill over to the research question in this paper that seeks to understand the news media and its influence on the mass-level opinion of presidential performance during an international conflict. Much like during elections, citizens are almost unanimously dependent on the

press for information on the war. Just as the news media fashion public opinion during a presidential election, they could very well influence the public's opinion of a president during wartime. This is because "people do not observe most major events...directly. Perceptions...are mediated through reports which may or may not be faithful to reality" (Brody and Page, 1975, p. 140). More specifically, the average American citizen does not have the resources—money or time—to gain information about the war on his or her own accord. Many times, the average citizen does not have the knowledge to evaluate the president's performance by himself, so he needs the assistance of the news media to help shape the approving or disapproving judgments of the president.

As first noted by communication scholars, the mass media influence public opinion by way of agenda setting, which comes in two forms: priming and framing. These three terms will be defined and discussed in this section of the review. In ground-breaking research by McCombs and Shaw (1972), the correlation between the public agenda and the political agenda was deemed significant, thus the agenda setting theory was refined. Since, many other communication and political scholars have found that the media agenda (ranking policies by importance in the news) influences the policy agenda (rankings in legislative bodies) by way of the public agenda (rankings in opinion surveys). Agenda setting is simply the news media giving priority to certain policy issues, which cues the public to assign an increased level of importance to those issues (Cohen, 1963; Chyi and McCombs, 2004). Entman (1989) argues, "the media make a significant contribution to what people think—to their political preferences and evaluations—precisely by affecting what they think about" (p. 347). This researcher,

among others, found that the media affect public opinion not by directly shaping it, but by determining what issues are of national importance and deserving of national attention (MacKuen, 1984).

Other researchers argue that the news media influence public opinion by presenting a topic in a certain way. This is referred to as priming, or choosing to, or not to, report specific details on an issue (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). As a function of agenda setting, the news media can prime a situation in a particular manner and the public ultimately uses those facts to evaluate the president's performance (Iyengar et al., 1984). Miller and Krosnick (2000) clarify this idea and determine that the "news media coverage of an issue presumably makes information about [that issue] particularly available in people's memories. As a consequence, the information presumably comes to mind automatically when people search for criteria with which to evaluate the president" (p. 302).

Like some political scientists discovered a relationship between priming and public opinion, others uncovered that framing affected public opinion. Where priming is the idea that the news media presents only a subset of the facts on a particular issue, framing is the notion that the media slant the facts to support a specific angle of the larger story. Take, for example, the news media's treatment of different foreign policies where the American victories in Grenada and Panama were highly rejoiced, and the far more difficult missions in Haiti and Kosovo were embarrassingly neglected (Entman, 2004). Another form of framing can be found in the simple use of word choice. Entman (2004) illustrates this by noting that the press labeled the U.S.S.R. aircraft that shot



down a civilian aircraft as an “attack,” while referring to a similar situation in which the U.S. shot down a civilian Iran airplane as a “tragedy.”

Framing and priming, both effects of agenda-setting, are considered in this thesis. If the press reports that the president is meeting his wartime goals or the military is successfully accomplishing its missions, and subsequently the public responds favorably to the way the president is handling the war, framing may have occurred. If the news media prints articles that say the president is not fulfilling his goals as commander-in-chief or that the military is failing to accomplish its missions, and public opinion responds negatively to the president, framing could have occurred once again. The other effect of agenda setting, priming, might have occurred if salience (or increased coverage) of good news stories heightens public approval of the president. On the other hand, priming possibly occurred if bad news stories are prominently displayed, and consequently public opinion of the president lowers.

Undoubtedly, the American news media covers the U.S. at war, but many researchers contend that the degree of coverage is what truly affects public opinion. Brody (1991) states that “there should be little reason to doubt the proposition that the longer a story runs and the more prominence it is accorded by the media, the larger proportion of the public will declare it an important national issue” (p. 111). Heightened coverage yields higher public awareness. The more people know about the war and the longer a war goes on, the more they disapprove of it. Perhaps this is why Johnson’s ratings during the Vietnam War were much lower than Bush’s during the Gulf War since

the 1990s was a time when domestic issues set precedence in the news. This idea will be analyzed in great detail later in the thesis.

Many political scientists have studied the “rally around the flag” phenomenon, which is marked by a sudden surge in presidential popularity as a result of international crisis (Mueller, 1973; Brody, 1991; Lee, 1977; Brody and Shapiro, 1989). Mueller (1973) established three criteria in order for a rally to exist. First, the event inducing the rally must be international. Second, it must involve the U.S. president directly. And thirdly, the event must be precise and dramatic. In an idea championed by Sigelman and Conover (1981), this is the idea that “threats from outside a system promote cohesion within the system. One familiar manifestation of this principle is the tendency of the American people to rally in support of the president when the nation becomes embroiled in international conflicts” (p. 303). Clearly, this notion is pertinent to the thesis such that we should expect presidential approval to be higher at the beginning of the war since press coverage tends to be more positive.

Interestingly, the entire duration of the war does not serve as an entire “rally” period. As Brody (1991) notes, each phase that comprises a war is “‘international’ and [does] ‘directly involve’ the U.S. and the president, to be sure, but they are, because of sustained media attention, political situations about which the public and the opinion leaders are usually well informed” (p. 59). This has two implications. First, the different events, missions, agreements, withdrawal of troops, and so on, that occur during a war will not serve as a rally point. Second, as the news media increases the public’s information of the war, presidential approval should wane (Kostroski, 1977).

A decline in presidential approval is not inevitable, however, as it greatly depends on wartime events and their press coverage (Edwards, 1992). For example, Mueller (1994) cites that during the Gulf War-era, public opinion before, during and after the conflict was relatively favorable of the president and the war. Shapiro (1995) states, “the public shared Bush’s opposition to Iraq’s aggression, its potential nuclear threat, and its war crimes in Kuwait; Bush could promise an easy war; and he had...Saddam Hussein’s continued misbehavior virtually on cue” (p. 215). Mueller (1994) contends that the mass-level responded in a positive manner because of what the elites communicated to them by way of the mass media.

Clearly, Johnson did not experience similar heightened approval ratings during the Vietnam War, and perhaps because of the mass media. Schandler (1977), among others, attribute this to the “daily press reports filed from all parts of Vietnam...[that] contributed to the sense of disaster” (p. 80). A president’s approval rating will decrease when he is not meeting the expectations of the public who evaluate his performance based on “reports that carry information on the meeting of goals for which there is consensus in the polity and/or reports relevant to the expectations of policy outcomes that the president has set for the nation” (Edwards, 1992, p. 886). Presidential success or failure, as deemed by the news media, is central to the larger thesis which considers whether or not the president is meeting the wartime goals he sought for the nation. In addition, the research under study also considers news reports that assign success or failure to military operations and how that affects public opinion of how the president is handling the war.

In more recent research, political scientists contend that conflict-ridden news coverage of political events lead to the negative evaluation of political institutions and its leaders. Forgette and Morris (2006) note, “the increasingly popular conflict-oriented approach to covering politics in the news does influence opinion in a negative fashion” (p. 454). This idea provides insight to the larger theory under study. From this research, one should expect that articles on the president not meeting his wartime goals, the military failing to accomplish its missions, and a large number of articles citing casualties will yield a higher public disapproval of the president.

In closing, “American people form and revise their impressions of the quality of presidential performance on evidence contained in reports of politics and policy outcomes—political news—in the news media” (Brody, 1991, p. 4). From the literature, it is clear that the news media could have a significant influence on public opinion, which in turn, has the potential to indirectly affect policymaking and policy outcomes. Although the link between the news media and public opinion seems to exist, not to mention important to the political process on the whole, there is a relatively minimal amount of work done by political scientists in this area. The research within this thesis intends to provide a greater understanding of this phenomenon, and perhaps lead to further exploration of the mass media and its influence on the political system.

## **CHAPTER THREE: VIETNAM WAR**

A contentious debate surrounds the impact the news media had in covering the Vietnam War and its effect on public opinion. One side of the spectrum contends that the war was lost because of the media's misrepresentation of U.S. military actions (Westmoreland, 1976, p. 383). The other side argues that the media, in fulfilling its duties as a "watchdog," merely reported the facts about a failed international policy. This, they say, compelled the government to amend its course of action in Vietnam. Both sides of the argument agree that the news media played a vital role in altering the mass-level opinion of the Vietnam conflict. Furthermore, both sides concur that the change in public opinion occurred at the turning point in the war, the Tet Offensive. This chapter explores news media coverage of the Vietnam War in light of its impact on public opinion, specifically as it influenced the mass-level opinion of Lyndon B. Johnson's administration.

Before detailing the impact of the media on public opinion, it is important to provide a brief timeline of the Vietnam War. From September 26, 1959, until April 30, 1975, the Vietnam War was fought between the North Vietnamese with the support of communist allies, and South Vietnam, eventually with the alliance of the United States ("Vietnam War," 2009). Johnson became president on November 22, 1963, after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Under Johnson's tenure, the U.S. intervened in the Vietnam conflict to avert a communist invasion of South Vietnam. This foreign affairs

policy was part of the U.S.' larger international relations strategy to thwart communism. The United States' interest in the Vietnam War heightened in the early 1960s as American troops began deploying to South Vietnam in support of South Vietnamese government. The United States' involvement in the war effort steadily increased until after the 1968 Tet Offensive, argued by most history scholars as the turning point in the Vietnam War (Karnow, 1983, p. 556). Because of this incident, American support for both the war and the Johnson administration plummeted (Witz, 1991, pp. 1-2). As a result, Johnson withdrew his candidacy to run for reelection after losing several early primaries. After winning the 1968 presidential election, Richard M. Nixon employed a policy called Vietnamization. This policy sought to train and arm the South Vietnamese troops so American forces could withdraw (Wyatt, 1993, p. 192). Despite the Vietnamization policy, U.S. involvement persisted. Finally, in response to the anti-war movement in the United States, Congress passed the Case-Church Amendment in June 1973 that prohibited U.S. military involvement in Vietnam (Karnow, 1991, p. 671). In April 1975, the North Vietnamese military forces took control of Saigon; and one year later, North and South Vietnam were reunited.

Because this paper is most interested in the height of the Vietnam War under Johnson's presidential tenure, the events occurring during this timeframe are presented in detail. On August 4, 1964, the *USS Turner Joy* was attacked in the Gulf of Tonkin along the North Vietnamese coast, thus prompting the United States' intervention in Vietnam. As such, the *Gulf of Tonkin Resolution* was approved on August 10, 1964, that gave Johnson the power to conduct military operations in Vietnam without a formal

declaration of war by Congress (Palmer, 1978, p. 882). During this period, Johnson enjoyed little debate with the news media regarding U.S. actions in Vietnam because “the ‘objective journalist’ would not report on criticism of administration policy unless it came from ‘responsible sources’—which meant, in effect, from within the government itself. And the president’s control over the political process was still strong enough that...very little open controversy emerged” (Hallin, 1986, pp. 87-88). Furthermore, Johnson, like all U.S. presidents at the beginning of their tenure, experienced high approval ratings during the first month of his term. It is likely that his high approval ratings made U.S. military intervention in the Vietnam conflict easier than it would be had his ratings been low. The next section of this chapter presents the findings from the analysis performed in this thesis for the first phase of the Vietnam War.

A number of conclusions can be made concerning the effect of the news media on public opinion at the start of U.S. combat operations in Vietnam under Johnson’s tenure. The time period surrounding the onset of military operations in Vietnam from the start of U.S. intervention on November 22, 1963, to one month later, December 22, 1963, was considered. It is important to point out two figures that represent this time period. First, 74% of American’s approved the way Johnson was handling his job as president. The percentage of Americans who approved the way the president was handling the war is not considered for this phase because the Gallup Poll did not obtain this data. Second, a total of 34 *New York Times* articles make-up the total number of news stories for this phase. It is important to note that editorials, letters to the editor, unrelated articles, articles that did not fall into any category and unbiased articles were

not included in the total number of articles. For a breakdown of the articles and a complete list of the valid articles, reference *Annex A: Vietnam War News Articles—Phase 1*.

To begin, the salience of the war as covered by the *New York Times* was rather high being that approximately 38% of war-related articles appeared on the first page of the newspaper for one month from November to December. In this phase, 38% is considered high because salience for the second and third phase of the Vietnam War is at 29% and 15% respectively. During the same timeframe, 74% of Americans approved of the way Johnson was handling his job as president. Once examined, it is clear that, in this case, salience does not influence public opinion because, as stated earlier, public approval should be low if salience is high. Being that this is the first phase of the war, though, it is important to consider the rally around the flag effect where support for the president is high regardless of the circumstances.

Of the *New York Times* articles on the Vietnam War during the beginning of combat operations, 26% of the articles (nine of 34 articles) stated that the president was meeting wartime goals as compared to only 5% (two of 34 articles) that stated otherwise. Comparatively, 74% of Americans approved the way Johnson was handling his job during this period. To explain, a greater percentage of articles said the president was meeting his goals. As a result, the overall coverage of the president meeting his wartime goals appears to be positive. Once the positive news coverage is correlated with the 74% approval rating for Johnson, it is clear that articles on the president meeting his objectives are associated with a significant change in public opinion.



On the other hand, articles that state the military is meeting wartime goals does not display an important difference when compared to the public opinion ratings. This is because 11% of the articles (four of 34 articles) stated the military was meeting wartime goals while 17% (six of 34 articles) stated the opposite. As a result, there was a greater percentage of negative news coverage, which does not show an association to Johnson's 74% approval rating.

Finally, 23% of articles (eight articles) highlighted military casualties and 74% of Americans approved of the way that Johnson was handling his job. Articles on casualties do not exhibit an essential change when correlated to public opinion. To simplify, one out of five articles highlighted military casualties yet 74% of Americans approved the way Johnson is handling the war. The lack of association between articles on casualties and public opinion is evident because a relatively high percent of articles—approximately one out of every five—citing death or severe wounds should not correlate with high approval ratings.

To summarize the findings from the first phase of the Vietnam War, the only clear link can be made between articles on the president meeting his wartime goals and public opinion (see Appendix A for a complete list of articles). As noted in Table 1, the other independent variables, namely salience, the military meeting its goals, and articles citing casualties, do not show an understandable association to public opinion. Perhaps this will evolve as the other two phases are examined in the latter part of the chapter. At any rate, a short summary, much like this one, follows each phases' presentation of findings. The same review is done in Chapter 4 for the Gulf War.

**Table 1. Data from Phase 1 of the Vietnam War**

Phase 1	Number of Articles for Each Variable						Presidential Approval	
	Salience	President Pos.	President Neg.	Military Pos.	Military Neg.	Casualties	Handling Job	Handling War
Dec. 5-10, 1963	1	2	0	0	1	2	78%	No data
Dec. 12-17, 1963	1	0	0	0	1	3	74%	No data
Total Duration of Phase: Nov. 22 - Dec. 22, 1963	13 of 34	9 of 34	2 of 34	4 of 34	6 of 34	8 of 34	74%	No data

The U.S.' intervention in the war effort officially escalated on January 31, 1965, when Air Force pilots were deployed from Okinawa, Japan, to Da Nang Air Force Base in support of a military mission to cross into North Vietnam. In reaction to several North Vietnamese attacks against the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Marines were deployed to provide protection and security, in which the American public overwhelmingly supported the dispatch of additional American troops ("Generations Divide," 2002). The Marines were relatively unsuited for their defensive assignment in Vietnam as they were schooled and trained in offensive operations only. Still, U.S. support remained strong as 3,500 Marines were deployed in March and 200,000 by December of that same year (McNamara, 1999, pp. 349-351).

During this period of heightened U.S. support, the news media correlated to public opinion in two instances. It is important to specify a few details before the findings are presented. First, the period under examination is from January 31 to March 2, 1965. Second, 68% of Americans approved the way Johnson was handling his job, which signifies a six percent drop from the first phase. Along the same lines, 59% of Americans approved the way Johnson was handling the war. Third, 124 articles

comprise the total number of valid articles for this phase. For a breakdown of the articles, refer to *Annex A: Vietnam War News Articles—Phase 2*.

The number of Vietnam War articles appearing on the first page of the newspaper decreased to 29% of articles (37 of 124 articles). Furthermore, the public's opinion of the way Johnson was handling his job decreased to 68%. The salience indicator does not display an important change when associated with the public's opinion of Johnson. This is because approval should go up as salience goes down. In this case, the number of first-page articles decreases and so does the public's approval of Johnson. In this phase, salience is not associated to public opinion.

Also during this phase in the war, 31 articles highlighted that Johnson was meeting his wartime goals. When compared to the public's falling approval rating of the way Johnson was handling the war at 59%, articles on the president meeting his objectives displays an important difference when associated with public approval. This is because 25% of the articles (31 of 124 articles) stated that the president was meeting his wartime goals as compared to 45% (56 of 124 articles) that said otherwise. The association between news coverage and public opinion is clear because negative articles on the president meeting his wartime goals happens at the same time as the drop in public approval for Johnson.

Conversely, articles on the military meeting goals does not portray an important change when compared to public approval because 17 of 124 articles said the military was meeting goals and 17 of 124 articles said the military was not fulfilling its goals. As a result, no conclusive evidence determines that articles on the military meeting its

goals is linked to Johnson’s declining public approval ratings. In this scenario, news media coverage is not associated with public opinion.

Lastly, nine articles at this phase in the war cited military casualties—a 16% decrease from the previous phase. The percent change indicates that articles on casualties do not displayed an important change when compared to the drop in public approval. To explain, the fall in the number of casualty articles happened at the same time there was a fall in public approval. In this phase, it appears that news articles are not associated with public opinion.

To recap the second phase’s findings, a clear link is made once again between the president meeting his goals and public opinion. In this case, a rise in negative articles on the president not fulfilling his wartime mission was associated with a fall in public approval ratings for Johnson. Once again, the salience variable, military variable and casualty variable do not show a relationship with public opinion. For a detailed comparison of Phase 2 news articles and public opinion, reference Table 2 and see Appendix A for a complete list of articles.

**Table 2. Data from Phase 2 of the Vietnam War**

Phase 2	Number of Articles for Each Variable						Presidential Approval	
	Salience	President Pos.	President Neg.	Military Pos.	Military Neg.	Casualties	Handling Job	Handling War
Jan. 28 - Feb. 2, 1965	1	0	1	2	4	0	70%	59%
Feb. 19-24, 1965	8	6	10	1	2	1	68%	59%
Total Duration of Phase: Jan. 31 - Mar. 3, 1965	37 of 124	31 of 124	56 of 124	17 of 124	17 of 124	9 of 124	68%	59%

During this time, immediate concerns were raised regarding the possibility of press censorship in order to protect operational security. The new commanding general of U.S. forces in Vietnam, William Westmoreland, petitioned for censorship. He soon

realized that due to the sovereignty of South Vietnam and presence of foreign news media outlets, censorship was not possible (Hammond, 1988, p. 160). Specifically, Hammond (1988) notes:

Censorship would require not only the legal underpinnings of a declaration of war, but also an enormous logistical effort. The censors would have to control South Vietnam's mail, communications, and transportation facilities. They would have to employ multilingual military personnel to do the censoring and would have to develop expanded Teletype and radio circuits to move the censored material. Even if they could do all that, there was no guarantee that many of the correspondents who were foreign nationals and beyond the reach of American regulations would cooperate. Beyond that, there was the South Vietnamese government to consider. Its leaders would have to play a key role in the program, yet they lacked any concept of American-style free press. (p. 43)

As a result, the best answer to protecting operational security existed in a system of cooperation between the press and the military. The news media abided by a list of rules and regulations to ensure proper precaution in return for military transportation, access to briefings and accreditation (Hammond, 1988, p. 285). Between 1962 and 1968, the system seemed to have worked as the American people were receiving relatively accurate accounts of the war without also helping the enemy (Hammond, 1988, p. 285).

From 1964 to 1966, the press corps in Vietnam rose from 40 to 419 members (Hammond, 1988, p. 197). To facilitate a proper flow of communication from the press to the public regarding the war, the U.S. instituted an "information czar" known as the Mission's Minister-Counselor for Public Affairs, Barry Zorthian (Hammond, 1988, p. 5). He was responsible for rectifying any erroneous news stories and publicizing pro-U.S.

policies on the war. Zorthian also hosted nightly briefings to inform reporters of the day's events (Hammond, 1988, p. 5). Furthermore, he provided reporters with off-the-record information on political or military events to ensure their situational awareness of the military operations that were occurring (Stienmann, 2002, p. 33). The installation of the "information czar" seemed to bolster the seemingly symbiotic relationship that existed between the press and the military throughout the first half of the Vietnam War.

During this period of reasonably friendly relations between the military and the media, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam suffered two grave losses in May and June 1965 at the Battles of Dong Xoai and Binh Gia respectively (McNamara, 1999, pp. 349-351). As a result, South Vietnam's success was in grave danger. U.S. Army General William Westmoreland advised U.S. Navy Admiral Grant Sharp to take up the fight for the National Front for Liberation of South Vietnam (McNamara, 1999, p. 349-351). Westmoreland predicted a South Vietnam victory by 1967, and in doing so, Johnson approved the plan for offensive operations—something that he adamantly opposed at the start of the conflict (Department of Defense, 1971, pp. 117-119). Johnson did not, however, communicate the change in strategy to the news media. In fact, the administration's preference for a closed relationship with the media became more and more apparent as they only highlighted stories of progress in the war. This relationship would ultimately erode public trust in the administration, especially as the press' coverage of Vietnam and that of the Department of Defense diverged ("Public Papers," 1965, pp. 794-799).

The decisive break between the news media and the Johnson administration occurred during the Tet Offensive. North Vietnam broke the truce that historically accompanied the Lunar New Year when they launched a surprise attack on South Vietnam (McNamara, 1999, pp. 363-365). Although the North Vietnamese acknowledged the defeat, the Tet Offensive proved to be a military failure for the U.S. The failure derived from the mistrust of the American people toward the government as a result of the events being portrayed in the news media (Witz, 1991, pp.1-2). Specifically, General Westmoreland, who became the face of the war, led Johnson's public relations campaign to augment public support for the war (Witz, 1991, pp. 1-2). During the campaign, he promised that the end of the conflict was near, and the American public was taken aback at U.S. military operations in the Tet Offensive because it countered the president and military's claims of progress (Witz, 1991, pp. 1-2). This state of affairs further increased the credibility gap between the public and the government as the news media, which was once supportive of the war efforts, became critical.

Some scholars contend that the news media misinterpreted the Tet Offensive, and consequently, the public's opinion of the war changed from supportive to oppositional. On the other hand, some scholars argue that the Tet Offensive merely reinforced declining public support for the war (Wyatt, 1993, p. 182). These scholars support their argument by noting that, at the onset of full-on combat operations in January 1965, 25% of the public disapproved of the war, and opinion steadily declined over the next three years (Wyatt, 1993, p. 182). More specifically, "Tet was less the

occasion of a sudden shift in such opinion than it was a confirmation of characteristics and trends that had been around a long time” (p. 182). Scholars from both schools of thought, nevertheless, agree that the Tet Offensive marked the first time that the majority of citizens disapproved of the Vietnam War (Dougan and Weiss, 1983, p. 69).

Nevertheless, many historians criticize the news media for its highly critical coverage of the Vietnam War, especially during the Tet Offensive, in which they state that the press largely contributed to the military failure of the U.S. Specifically, Westmoreland noted, “The war still could have been brought to a favorable end following the defeat of the enemy’s Tet offensive.... But that was not to be. Press and television had created an aura not of victory but of defeat, which...profoundly influenced timid officials in Washington” (p. 410). Concurrently, Peter Braestrup (1977) asserts that the media’s coverage of the war had a direct causal relationship to American people’s loss of commitment to the war effort (p. 705). In doing so, Braestrup analyzes print and broadcast news stories to conclude that the media misreported the facts as a U.S. defeat. Furthermore, one of the most famous examples of the media’s anti-war sentiment was CBS News anchorman Walter Cronkite’s special report on February 27, 1968. Cronkite, whose reporting on the war had been relatively unbiased, became highly critical after a two-week tour in Vietnam (Karnow, 1983, p. 110). Upon Cronkite’s return, he reported, “We have been too often disappointed by the optimism of the American leaders, both in Vietnam and Washington, to have faith any longer in the silver linings they find in the darkest clouds” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 77).



In examining the final phase of the Vietnam War considered in this thesis, a number of conclusions can be made about the effect of the news media on public opinion during the Tet Offensive. Again, it is important to specify a few details before the findings are presented. First, the time period under study is from January 30 to March 2, 1968. Second, 36% of American's approved the way Johnson was handling his job—a significant decline from both of the previous phases. Approval for the way Johnson was handling the war plummeted to 40%—a nine percent drop since the second phase when the Gallup Poll began recording the data. Third, a total of 102 valid articles were published during this phase. For a complete list of the valid articles, refer to *Annex A: Vietnam War News Articles—Phase 3*.

Since the start of the war, salience decreased to 15% of articles (16 of 102 articles) appearing on the first page of the *New York Times*. Salience dropped significantly since the first phase of the war where 38% of the articles were published on the front page of the paper. Similarly, the public's opinion of the way Johnson was handling his job decreased to 36%, which marked a 32% fall in public opinion from the second phase and a 38% fall from the first phase. Salience does not exhibit an important change when correlated to the public's opinion of Johnson. Public approval should increase as the number of first-page, prominently placed articles decreases. In this phase, however, salience decreases as approval also decreases. Salience does not show an association to public opinion.

During the Tet Offensive, 22 articles highlighted that Johnson was meeting his wartime goals. When compared to the public's approval rating of the way Johnson was

handling the war at 40% (down from 59% in the second phase), articles on the president meeting his objectives does display an important difference when associated with public opinion. To explain, 21% of the articles (22 of 102 articles) stated the president was meeting his goals while 38% (39 of 102 articles) said the opposite. As such, a greater percentage of articles said the president was not meeting his wartime goals. When compared to the decline in public approval, negative news articles on the president meeting his goals is associated with public opinion.

Also during this phase, 10 articles cited that the military was successfully accomplishing its mission. When compared to the public's approval rating of the way Johnson was handling the war at 40%, articles on military meeting their objectives does display an important difference when associated with public opinion. To explain, only nine percent of the articles stated the military was meeting its goals while 23% (24 of 102) stated otherwise. The falling public opinion could be associated to the articles that portrayed the military in a negative manner. The greater percentage of negative articles (as compared to positive articles) may be related to the fall in public approval.

Lastly, 20 articles at this phase in the war cited military casualties—a 12% increase from the second phase. For this phase, the percent change indicates that articles on casualties exhibit a significant difference when associated with a fall in public approval for Johnson. It is important to mention, however, the three percent decrease in the articles citing casualties since the first phase. This signifies a drop in the number of casualty articles and a drop in public approval. Since there should be a rise in public

opinion with a drop in these kinds of articles, the independent variable does not have an overall correlation with the dependent variable in this case.

In review of the findings from this phase, it is evident that articles on the president meeting his wartime goals are associated with public opinion. There was a correlation between these two variables in all three of the phases. For the first time, the military variable showed an association with public opinion. Also, the casualty variable correlated to public opinion, but once it was examined further, no association existed. For a detailed chart of findings for Phase 3, reference Table 3. In reviewing the findings for all three phases, the only apparent link between the news media and public opinion can be seen in the president variable; see Table 4. For a complete breakdown of news articles included in the data, refer to Appendix A.

**Table 3. Data from Phase 3 of the Vietnam War**

Phase 3	Number of Articles for Each Variable						Presidential Approval	
	Saliency	President Pos.	President Neg.	Military Pos.	Military Neg.	Casualties	Handling Job	Handling War
Feb. 2-7, 1968	3	4	3	3	3	5	41%	40%
Feb. 22-27, 1968	4	3	9	0	6	2	36%	40%
Total Duration of Phase: Jan. 31 - Mar. 3, 1968	16 of 102	22 of 102	39 of 102	10 of 102	24 of 102	20 of 102	36%	40%

**Table 4. Data from All Three Phases of the Vietnam War**

Phases	Number of Articles for Each Variable						Presidential Approval	
	Saliency	President Pos.	President Neg.	Military Pos.	Military Neg.	Casualties	Handling Job	Handling War
Nov. 22 - Dec. 22, 1963	13 of 34	9 of 34	2 of 34	4 of 34	6 of 34	8 of 34	74%	No data
Jan. 31 - Mar. 3, 1965	37 of 124	31 of 124	56 of 124	17 of 124	17 of 124	9 of 124	68%	59%
Jan. 30 - Mar. 2, 1968	16 of 102	22 of 102	39 of 102	10 of 102	24 of 102	20 of 102	36%	40%

After the Tet Offensive, Johnson's approval ratings fell from 48% to 36%, and he declined the opportunity for a second term (Witz, 1991, pp. 1-2). In October 1968, Johnson issued orders to halt attacks on North Vietnam. Although peace talks between the United States and North Vietnam had been ongoing since May 1968, Richard Nixon, in contention for the presidency, advised South Vietnam not to participate until after the U.S. presidential election. Nixon said he would offer the South Vietnamese a better deal once he became president (Witz, 1991). As such, backward progress in the Vietnam War characterized Johnson's presidency. As noted by historian Robert Dallek (1998), Johnson's policy to increase the U.S.' involvement in the Vietnam War divided America, cost 30,000 American lives, and devastated his presidential tenure (Gerdes, 2005, p. 27). Furthermore, his refusal to send additional U.S. troops to Vietnam was perceived by the American people to be Johnson's acceptance of defeat (Gerdes, 2005, p. 27).

It is important to note the change that occurred in the news media during the Vietnam conflict. At the start of the war, the media adhered to World War II ethics of reporting such that the press remained docile and quite loyal to the government even while covering a provocative issue like Vietnam. After the Tet Offensive, the news media reversed its allegiance to the Johnson administration and highlighted the American people's disenchantment toward the lack of progress in Vietnam (Hallin, 2006, p. 276). During this period of transition within the news media, reporters became more egotistical, biased and entrenched with sentiment on the conflict (Stienmann, 2002, p. 35). Because of the change, reporters admitted that they made mistakes in

their news coverage of the fast-breaking and perilous Tet Offensive; Hallin (1986) explains:

It may be one of the many ironies of Tet coverage that it gave the public a more accurate view of the overall course of the war through the *inaccurate* view it gave of the outcome of the particular battle. Before Tet, 48% of the public thought the war would last two years or less, 32% that it would continue more than two years, with the rest unsure. After Tet the respective percentages were 35 and 30, with fully 35% unsure—a much more realistic assessment. (p. 173)

Due to the change in the media over the course of the Vietnam conflict, public opinion took on a more critical tone to mirror the news coverage. More specifically, “given that critical news coverage leads to critical attitudes—and favorable content to favorable attitudes...there exists a significant relationship between media content and evaluations of government” (Hallin, 1984, p. 4).

When considering the news media in light of the Vietnam War, one would be remiss not to mention the effect that television had on public opinion of the conflict as it was the first time the horrors of war were brought into Americans’ living rooms. By the escalation of the war in 1965, the three primary broadcast outlets—CBS, NBC and ABC—dramatically increased their coverage. In a survey from the Roper Organization for the Television Information Office, 58% of Americans got their news from the television as compared to 56% from newspapers, 26% from radio and 8% from magazines (Hallin, 1986, p. 106). Since the television networks did not adequately archive these newscasts until 1968 under the Vanderbilt Television News Archive, this thesis does not use television news as part of the content analysis (Hallin, 1986). In analyzing television news coverage, one discovers that its journalistic standards follow

that of newspaper coverage such that reports were neither critical nor graphic in their depiction of the conflict until the Tet Offensive (Hallin, 1986, pp. 163-174). As noted by Hammond (1988), “although treated to nightly scenes of combat and men in battle...rarely, if ever, before 1968 and the Tet Offensive, saw the war in all its bloody detail” (p. 238). News coverage could have impacted the way in which Americans perceived the Vietnam War because public opinion, more times than not, displayed a decrease in public approval as negative news articles became more prominent.

An overview of the Persian Gulf War is provided in the following chapter. Much like the layout of this chapter, the next section offers a timeline of the events surrounding U.S. involvement in the Middle East in the early 1990s. The historical background of the Gulf War provides the framework for exposing the quantitative data discovered in this thesis. One should expect the Gulf War to maintain higher levels of public approval than the Vietnam War being that it was a much shorter conflict, the government largely controlled the information being released to the public, and the state of affairs (i.e., shaky economy and no military draft) shifted public attention away from the crisis in the Gulf. In addition, the news media maintained a relatively positive tone in their reports of the Gulf War. Despite the differences between the two conflicts, public opinion is expected to respond similarly such that news media reports impact approval ratings.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: PERSIAN GULF WAR**

The news media's influence on the American public's opinion of the Bush administration's handling of the Persian Gulf War remains somewhat of a political mystery. Bush's approval ratings remained consistently high, and even soared at points, throughout the conflict. Previous and subsequent international conflicts almost always started with high presidential approval ratings, but those ratings quickly declined as the conflict proceeded. This was not the case after the Gulf War. As Pan and Kosicki (1994) cite, "The Bush administration successfully used the media to portray the conflict as the peace-loving people of the world rising up against an aggressive, evil dictator threatening democracy" (p. 120). Many scholars agree that the news media contributed to high approval ratings because the coverage was wrought with patriotism and justice; reporters depended exclusively on official government sources; and the articles condemned Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, while they dehumanized Saddam Hussein. As such, the "mass media failed in their information function by focusing primarily on patriotic emotions, human dramas, spectacular images, and the president's rhetoric, [and therefore] they had deprived the public of its ability to engage in policy reasoning" (Pan and Kosicki, 1991, p. 122).

Through analysis of the media's coverage of the Gulf War—especially in comparison to that of the Vietnam War, it is clear that the press can be one factor responsible for influencing public opinion. In an effort to demonstrate the relationship

between the news media and public opinion, this chapter will offer an overview of the significant events leading up to, during, and after the conflict in the Persian Gulf. Each of these events is examined in light of the media reports that surrounded them. From there, the outcome of the quantitative analysis for each phase of the war is presented to show whether or not public opinion correlated with the associated news articles. Specifically, the correlation is demonstrated at three important points throughout the duration of the war, namely the beginning of U.S. involvement (January 16 – February 16, 1991), U.S. defeat and Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait (February 26 – March 26, 1991), and the U.S.' post-conflict policy (May 30 – June 30, 1991).

In response to Iraq's aggressive invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the United Nations Security Council issued economic sanctions against the country while the United States, United Kingdom and other U.N.-member states prepared for a military conflict (Loeterman, 1996). The U.S. Congress authorized intervention in the conflict on January 12, 1990, and soon after, U.N. coalition nations followed suit. Brent Scowcroft, retired Air Force general and Bush's National Security Advisor, states in the PBS' Frontline report on the Persian Gulf War, "The notion of Iraq, which was an oil powerhouse in itself, acquiring the Kuwaiti resources and thus, perhaps, being able to dominate OPEC, was a tremendous danger to the United States and to the industrialized world" (Loeterman, 1996). At this time, the impending U.S. intervention in the conflict was quite unclear to the news media. When UPI reporter Helen Thomas asked Bush of the potential for U.S. involvement in the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, the president responded, "We're not discussing intervention. I would not discuss any military



options, even if we'd agreed upon them” (Loeterman, 1996). Accordingly, news media accounts of public support for the war was much different than the public’s actual opinion of the war. In other words:

While ordinary citizens and political elites alike debated the wisdom of this military build-up during the five-month prologue to the Gulf War, news accounts portrayed an opinion climate characterized by growing consensus favoring the government’s actions. Actual polling data contradict this impression of increasing support for U.S. military action. (Allen, O’Loughlin, Jasperson, and Sullivan, 1994, p. 256)

Although Bush provided little insight of what was to come to the press, U.S. involvement was imminent. As noted by former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell, the Bush administration kept the news media in the dark because “for those of us who were Vietnam veterans, we all have a view that says, ‘If you’re going to put us into something, then you owe the armed forces, you owe the American people, a clear statement of what political objective you’re trying to achieve” (Loeterman, 1996). In doing so, the Bush administration sold the Gulf War to the American people by emphasizing the brutality of the Iraq regime against the Kuwaitis, the competition for oil, and Saddam Hussein’s likelihood to build weapons of mass destruction. At this time though, a large portion of the American public adamantly opposed sending U.S. forces to the Middle East. As noted by Gene Ruffini (1992), “news programs largely ignored public efforts to oppose the Bush administration’s military policies in the Persian Gulf” because only one percent of the press’ coverage highlighted the opposition of the public toward sending troops into the Middle East (p. 283).

President George H. W. Bush deployed U.S. troops to the Middle East on January 16, 1991, to expel Iraqi troops from their occupation of Kuwait (Loeterman, 1996). As noted by Bernard Trainor, author of *The General's War* (1995), "The Gulf War was an American War. There were Iraqis there and lots of allies in the coalition were there, but it was a U.S. war from start to finish" (Loeterman, 1996). On January 17, 1991, the U.S. initiated an immense air campaign that became known to Americans as Operation Desert Storm. The U.S., with the support of the coalition forces, employed an antiaircraft offensive, deprived Iraq of command, control and communication, and destroyed the Iraqi military facilities. Throughout these operations, the American news media reported from the war zone as the American people watched the war unfold in real-time. In the PBS Frontline report, Powell recalls:

One of the first scenes [the news media aired from] one of our airfields is of this F-16 landing. Rolls to a stop, canopy pops open, pilot comes out. His name is Jet Jurnigen. And I'm watching this in real-time in my office and suddenly the youngster turns around to talk to the reporters and I said, 'Uh-oh.' No telling what Jet Jurnigen is liable to say to a pushy reporter. And what Jet Jurnigen says is, 'first, I want to thank God that I completed my mission successfully and I got back to my base safely. I've been a very fortunate fellow.' Sounds pretty good. American people hearing this. Confident young American pilot. Starts to walk away and he looks over his shoulder a second time. He says, 'The Lord blessed me with a good woman.' Starts to walk away again. He looks over his shoulder a third time. He says, 'I want to thank God that I'm an American.' And then he looks over his shoulder a fourth time. He says, 'I want to thank God that I'm an American fighter pilot.' I about swooned." (Loeterman, 1996)

For the first time since World War II, Americans saw the military's confidence and professionalism through reports from the news media.

At the commencement of official U.S. involvement in the conflict, public scrutiny ceased as approval for the war effort increased more than 20% (Allen, O'Loughlin, Jasperson, and Sullivan, 1994, p. 257). Based on the quantitative analysis performed in this study, a number of conclusions can be made concerning the effect of the news media on public opinion at the start of U.S. combat operations in the Persian Gulf. Before presenting the findings, it is first important to identify three main details about this phase. First, articles published from January 16, 1991, to January 24, 1991 were examined. Different from the one-month time period considered for the other phases, a week's worth of news was taken into account for this phase. This was done for two reasons. Primarily, there were 670 articles in one month. Additionally, the articles remained similarly complimentary of the war and the president for that week as compared to each week in the month thereafter. Second, the Gallup Poll recorded Bush's handling of his job at 83%, and his handling of the war at 80%. Third, it is important to point out that there are 70 valid articles considered for this phase. Like for the other phases, the opinion articles, categorically unrelated articles, unbiased articles, and the like are not included in the total number of valid articles. For a breakdown of the articles and a complete list of the valid articles, refer to *Annex B: Persian Gulf War News Articles—Phase 1*.

First, the salience of the war as covered by the *New York Times* was rather low being that approximately 10% of war-related articles (31 of 70 articles) appeared on the first page of the newspaper for approximately one week from the beginning of U.S. intervention on January 16, 1991. During the same timeframe, 83% of Americans

approved of the way Bush was handling his job as president. Once quantified, it is clear that salience displayed an important difference when compared to public opinion. This is because only one out of every 10 articles on the Gulf War appeared on the first page of the newspaper; and when salience is low, approval should be high. In this phase, it appears that salience correlates with public opinion. The heightened public opinion could also be due to the rally affect rather than the low degree of salience.

Of the *New York Times* articles on the Gulf War during the beginning of combat operations, 57 articles noted that Bush was fulfilling the U.S. goals in the conflict. Comparatively, 80% of Americans approved the way Bush was handling the war during this period. Articles on the president meeting his objectives exhibit an important change when compared to public opinion. To explain, 33% of articles (57 of 170 articles) stated the president was meeting wartime goals while only 19% said he was not. At the same time, 80% of American's approved of Bush's handling of the war. Positive news coverage could attribute to high approval ratings. Once again, the president variable shows an association to public opinion.

Also during this phase, 50 articles cited that the military was fulfilling its mission while 80% of Americans approved the way Bush was handling the war. It is clear that articles on the military meeting their objectives exhibit an important change when compared to public opinion. More specifically, 29% of articles (50 of 170 articles) stated the military was meeting wartime goals while only 15% stated he was not. Positive articles on the military could have guided the heightened public approval of Bush. Nevertheless, the military variable correlates with public opinion in this phase.

Finally, 4% of the articles cited military casualties and 80% of Americans approved of the way that Bush was handling the war. Articles on casualties could be associated with high public approval because, as hypothesized, the low percentage of casualty articles should correlate with high approval ratings. As previously mentioned, the more the public reads about war-related deaths and severe injuries, the less they support the war effort. In this case, the casualty variable is linked to public opinion.

To summarize the first phase of the Gulf War, all four independent variables—namely, salience, president, military and casualty—are associated with the dependent variable; see Table 5 for a detailed comparison of the variables and reference Appendix B for a complete list of articles. The durability of the association between the two variables is tested throughout the remainder of the chapter, specifically as Phases 2 and 3 are examined. In comparison to the Vietnam War’s first phase, the only variable that correlated with public opinion was the president variable. In fact, the president variable was the only factor that remained consistently linked to public opinion throughout all three phases. Whether the same holds true for the Gulf War is tested throughout the rest of this chapter.

**Table 5. Data from Phase 1 of the Persian Gulf War**

Phase 1	Number of Articles for Each Variable						Presidential Approval	
	Salience	President Pos.	President Neg.	Military Pos.	Military Neg.	Casualties	Handling Job	Handling War
Jan. 17-20, 1991	16	37	19	27	6	1	82%	80%
Jan. 19-22, 1991	16	22	19	29	15	2	80%	80%
Jan. 23-26, 1991	7	11	7	7	11	0	83%	77%
Total Duration of Phase: Jan. 16-24, 1991	31 of 170	57 of 170	33 of 170	50 of 170	26 of 170	3 of 170	83%	80%

This period of heightened public support for the president's actions is typical during wartime engagements as characterized by the "rally around the flag" hypothesis. Nearly all international conflicts begin with a rally phase because "the public wishes to support its leaders' actions, rival elites see no political advantage in expressing public dissent, and the media have vivid, compelling copy and visuals without disrupting this equilibrium" (Allen, O'Loughlin, Jasperson, and Sullivan, 1994, p. 262). Usually the rally effect subsides as the war progresses and public approval of both the war and the commander-in-chief steadily decline. This is not true for the Gulf War. High public approval ratings were sustained throughout the duration of the war effort, and even spiked toward the end. Allen, O'Loughlin, Jasperson, and Sullivan (1994) identify this phenomenon as the "spiral of silence," or the American people's willingness to support the conflict since the news media reported only good news stories. Specifically, the "lack of media coverage [on unified dissent] contributed to the impression that opposition was minimal, making it more unlikely that Americans who opposed the war would locate many who agreed with them" (Allen, O'Loughlin, Jasperson, and Sullivan, 1994, p. 271). The conditions attributing to the spiral of silence are highlighted throughout the remainder of the chapter.

According to *Washington Post* reporter Rick Atkinson, "Many of the military commanders involved in Desert Storm believed that the press had been a prime contributor to the loss in Vietnam, that the press, by negative reporting, tended to undermine support for the U.S. military at home" (Loeterman, 1996). Atkinson also noted that Powell "recognized that the media was, for one thing, a very important part of

his arsenal because you can win the battle and lose the war through television” (Loeterman, 1996). Powell’s sentiment toward the news media was solidified in a statement he made on January 23, 1991, when he asked the press to “just trust me” because he did not want to divulge information that perhaps the opposing forces could use against the U.S. Later, Powell described this situation as the “point where the American military has gained a level of credibility again with the American people and the press” (Loeterman, 1996).

Some scholars say that the Americans’ approval of the Gulf War also remained relatively high because the military carefully scanned each article and video before it was released to the public. Potentially because of this, Bush experienced high approval ratings. A prime example is the stress the Department of Defense placed on endorsing the conflict in the Persian Gulf as a high-technology war. The government stressed that due to the advanced war fighting techniques, the Gulf War was like no other previous conflict. They said that the U.S. was fighting strictly an air war, and therefore, U.S. troops and all civilians were safe from enemy combatants. Author Bernard Trainor, in the PBS report of the Gulf War, underlined the U.S. military’s attempt to shape public opinion. He states:

The image that we got from the war has reinforced the American attitude that you can fight a clear war from the air with very few friendly casualties and the only ones being hurt on the enemy side are the enemy soldiers and not the enemy civilians. Wrong. War is a dirty, confusing thing, whether it's from the air or from the ground.” (Loeterman, 1996)

Although the U.S. military's original plan was to fight strictly an air war, the bombing of a bunker with Iraqi civilians on February 13, 1991, "brought home the bloody reality of even a high-tech war and created a major public relations problem for the allies" (Loeterman, 1996). Before this incident, the media reports "reinforced the belief that the U.S. military had the technology to avoid harming innocents. Through this exaggerated focus on U.S. weaponry's technological precision and sophistication, expert commentary reassured the public of the military's capabilities for pinpoint accuracy to accomplish its mission" (Allen, O'Loughlin, Jaspersen, and Sullivan, 1994, p. 278). From that point on, bombing Iraq became an exception, not the rule, and subsequently, the ground war commenced on February 24, 1991.

Just before the start of the ground war, the Iraqis agreed to a Soviet-proposed cease-fire on February 22, 1991, that mandated they withdraw their troops from Kuwait within six weeks. Former Deputy National Security Advisor, Robert Gates, said, "[Mikhail Gorbachev] wanted to stay with the United States in the course of this conflict and yet he also was under, I think, great pressure from various elements of the Soviet bureaucracy to try and preserve this client relationship with the Iraqis and with Saddam Hussein who, after all, had been a Soviet client for many, many years" (Loeterman, 1996). Although the U.S.-led coalition forces rejected the deal, they guaranteed that Iraqi troops would not be attacked while retreating from Kuwait. On February 25, 1991, Iraq defiantly attacked coalition barracks in Saudi Arabia killing 28 U.S. troops. The U.S. successfully retaliated with a surprise attack on Iraqi forces. Consequently, Iraq



began withdrawing its forces from Kuwait February 26, 1991; and on April 6, 1991, President Bush declared a cease-fire and that Kuwait was liberated.

Whereas the first spike in public support for Bush during the onset of military operations against Iraq could be attributed to the “rally around the flag” phenomenon, the second rise in public opinion occurred in late February 1991. As Allen, O’Loughlin, Jaspersen, and Sullivan (1994) note, “the initial increase was followed by a second surge of support for President Bush’s action, with approval peaking at 80 percent by February 28” (p. 260).

During this period of Iraqi troop withdrawal from Kuwait, the news media could be linked to public opinion. The time period under study is one month beginning with the date of Iraqi withdrawal: February 26, 1991 to March 26, 1991. At this time, 84% of American’s approved the way Bush was handling his job, which marks a one percent increase from the previous phase. Approval for Bush’s handling of the war increased seven percent to reach 87%. A total of 79 valid articles were accounted for in this phase. A complete list of valid articles can be found in Appendix B: The Persian Gulf War News—Phase 2.

Salience increased to 15% of articles (12 of 79 articles) appearing on the first page of the *New York Times*. Similarly, the public’s approval of the way Bush was handling his job increased to 84%. In this case, salience is not correlated with the public’s opinion of Bush because salience increased and approval increased. For these variables to display an association, approval should decrease as salience increases. It is worthy to point out that this case might deviate from the norm because news

coverage was so favorable. Prominently placed, highly favorable news stories may have attributed to the heightened approval ratings.

During this phase in the war, 30 articles highlighted that Bush was meeting his wartime goals. When compared to the public's approval rating of the way Bush was handling the war at 87%, articles on the president meeting his objectives correlates with public opinion. To explain, 37% of articles stated the president was meeting his wartime goals, while 10% said he was not. This case shows that positive articles could correlate to positive public opinion as Bush's wartime approval ratings were at an all-time high.

Also during this phase in the war, 32 articles cited that the military was successfully accomplishing its mission. When compared to the public's approval rating of the way Bush was handling the war at 87%, articles on the military meeting their objectives does correlate with public opinion. To explain, 40% of the articles said the military was meeting their wartime goals while 8% said they were not. This case shows that positive articles could correlate to Bush's wartime approval ratings.

Lastly, five percent of the articles (four of 79 articles) in this phase cited military casualties—an .86% increase from the previous phase. The percent change indicates that articles on casualties are not associated with public opinion. This is because as articles on casualties increase, approval ratings should decrease. In this case, both variables increase which denotes a lack of association. The small percent increase, however, may not be significant enough to correlate with public opinion.

To recap the findings from the second phase of the Gulf War, two independent variables—president and military—are associated with public opinion. On the other

hand, the salience and the casualty variables did exhibit an association to the dependent variable. For a detailed comparison of the data in Phase 2, reference Table 6. A complete list of articles that make-up the data can be found in Appendix B. It is worthy to mention that in all of the cases for both conflicts, the president variable indicated a correlation to public opinion. The military variable is associated with public opinion in both Phase 1 and 2 of the Gulf War. In the previous chapter on the Vietnam conflict, however, the military variable only showed a correlation to public opinion in Phase 3.

**Table 6. Data from Phase 2 of the Persian Gulf War**

Phase 2	Number of Articles for Each Variable						Presidential Approval	
	Salience	President Pos.	President Neg.	Military Pos.	Military Neg.	Casualties	Handling Job	Handling War
Feb. 28 - Mar. 3, 1991	4	8	1	10	1	1	89%	87%
Mar. 7-10, 1991	0	1	1	2	1	0	87%	87%
Mar. 14-17, 1991	0	1	2	0	0	0	86%	87%
Mar. 21-24, 1991	0	1	0	0	0	0	84%	87%
Total Duration of Phase: Feb. 26 - Mar. 26, 1991	12 of 79	30 of 79	8 of 79	32 of 79	7 of 79	4 of 79	84%	87%

After the end of combat operations, the Bush administration took some criticism for allowing Saddam Hussein to remain in power. Instead of continuing to commit U.S. troops to the Middle East, the administration had intended for Saddam Hussein's regime to be overthrown by an Iraqi coup d'etat. Because Kurdish leaders unsuccessfully initiated the uprising that lacked American support, they were brutally admonished when the Iraqi government defeated the revolt. According to a PBS report, "A week after the Iraqis attacked the Kurds, the president went home to Houston to celebrate his victory. But the television images of the Kurdish exodus were making that victory ring hollow"

(Loeterman, 1996). As noted in 1992 by Dick Cheney, the U.S. Secretary of Defense at the time:

While everybody was tremendously impressed with the low cost of the conflict, for the 146 Americans who were killed in action and for their families, it wasn't a cheap war. And the question in my mind is how many additional American casualties is Saddam worth? And the answer is not that damned many. So, I think we got it right, both when we decided to expel [Saddam] from Kuwait, but also when the president made the decision that we'd achieved our objectives and we were not going to go get bogged down in the problems of trying to take over and govern Iraq. (Dubose and Bernstein, 1996, p. 172).

More than a half million American troops returned home from the Persian Gulf on March 10, 1991. American approval for the war efforts and the Bush administration remained relatively high until spring 1991. As Allen, O'Loughlin, Jasperson, and Sullivan (1994) document, "the [high] level of support remained steady until April [1991]. Yet even then, support was as high as the initial rally [around the flag] rating of 72 percent in favor of the president's actions" (p. 260). Public approval began to wane May 30, 1991, although the majority of American's still approved of Bush's policy (Allen, O'Loughlin, Jasperson, and Sullivan, 1994, p. 260).

The final phase examines the effect of the news media on post-war public opinion from May 30 to June 30, 1991. At this time, Bush's ratings for handling his job dropped 12% to a 72% approval rating. Similarly, the ratings for Bush's handling of the war dropped five percent to 82%. A total of 11 articles were examined for this phase. For a breakdown of the omitted articles and a complete list of valid, refer to Appendix B: The Persian Gulf War News—Phase 3.

One finds that salience significantly decreased because zero articles appeared on the first page of the *New York Times*. The public's approval of the way Bush was handling his job also decreased to 72% percent (down from 84% in the second phase and 83% in the first phase). As such, salience does not exhibit an important difference when associated with the public's opinion of Bush. As salience decreases, approval should increase. Because these variables move in the same direction, salience is not associated with public opinion.

At the conclusion of the conflict, four articles highlighted that Bush met his wartime goals. When compared to the public's approval rating of the way Bush was handling the war at 82%, articles on the president meeting his objectives displays an important change when associated with public opinion. To explain, 36% of the articles stated Bush was meeting his wartime goals while no articles stated otherwise. Because there are a greater percentage of positive articles, it is probable to assume that news coverage of the president could be associated to favorable approval ratings. In comparison to the previous phase, however, the percentage of positive articles on the president fell. Similarly, public approval fell. News coverage on the president is associated with public opinion.

Additionally, one article cited that the military successfully accomplished its mission. When compared to the public's approval rating of the way Bush was handling the war at 82%, there is no conclusive evidence that articles on the military meeting its goals exhibit an important difference when correlated with public opinion. During this phase, there was only one article that indicated the military was meeting its goals, and

one article that stated the military was not meeting its goals. Because the data does not produce a definitive association, one cannot correlate news coverage on the military and public opinion of the president.

Lastly, three articles at this phase after the war cited military casualties—a 22% increase from the start of U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf. The percent change indicates that articles on casualties exhibit an important difference when associated with public opinion. Opinion of the president dropped as articles about casualties increased, which signifies an association between the independent and dependent variables. For the Gulf War, an association between articles on casualties and public opinion was made in two of the three phases. An association did not exist in the second phase, but the increase in the number of casualty articles was less than one percent. Throughout the Gulf War, it is probable that the casualty variable correlates with public opinion.

To summarize the rest of Phase 3, the president variable was once again associated with public opinion. In this case, casualty also exhibited a correlation to public opinion. On the other hand, the salience variable and military variable did not show an association to Bush's approval ratings. For a complete list of data used for Phase 3, reference Table 7. Although the military variable was correlated to public opinion in the Gulf War's Phase 1 and 2, it did not stand in the third phase. See Table 8 for a complete comparison of data for all three phases. In comparison to the findings from the Vietnam War analysis, the only clear association exists between the president variable and public opinion. A full assessment of both the Vietnam and Persian Gulf conflicts is made in the next chapter.

**Table 7. Data from Phase 3 of the Persian Gulf War**

Phase 3	Number of Articles for Each Variable						Presidential Approval	
	Saliency	President Pos.	President Neg.	Military Pos.	Military Neg.	Casualties	Handling Job	Handling War
May 30 - Jun. 2, 1991	0	0	0	0	0	1	74%	82%
Jun. 13-16, 1991	0	0	0	0	0	0	71%	82%
Jun. 27-30, 1991	0	0	0	0	1	0	72%	82%
Total Duration of Phase: May 30 – Jun. 30, 1991	0 of 11	4 of 11	0 of 11	1 of 11	1 of 11	3 of 11	72%	82%

**Table 8. Data from All Three Phases of the Persian Gulf War**

Phases	Number of Articles for Each Variable						Presidential Approval	
	Saliency	President Pos.	President Neg.	Military Pos.	Military Neg.	Casualties	Handling Job	Handling War
Jan. 16 - Jan. 24, 1991	31 of 170	57 of 170	33 of 170	50 of 170	26 of 170	3 of 170	83%	80%
Feb. 26 - Mar. 26, 1991	12 of 79	30 of 79	8 of 79	32 of 79	7 of 79	4 of 79	84%	87%
May 30 - Jun. 30, 1991	0 of 11	4 of 11	0 of 11	1 of 11	1 of 11	3 of 11	72%	82%

Perhaps the fall in public approval for Bush occurred because the “consensual media discourse concerning the Gulf crisis collapsed after the war was over” (Pan and Kosicki, 1994, p. 123). At the end of the conflict, patriotic articles were replaced by stories that detailed Saddam Hussein’s aggression against the Shiite and Kurdish uprisings, and the U.S.’ failure to interference. Now, articles on the U.S.’ hasty withdrawal dominated the newspapers. The diversion of elite consensus dominated the post-war phase, and therefore the news media reported just that. As a result, public approval waned.

Although the thesis examines newspaper articles on the Gulf War to maintain consistency in the content analysis for both cases, it is important to understand the role that the broadcast media played in shaping public opinion of the Bush presidency during

the conflict. For the first time ever, the three big networks—NBC, ABC and CBS—aired instantaneous footage from the warzone. Furthermore, CNN maintained 24-hour coverage of the Gulf War. As a result, Americans could instantly see live video of military operations right from their living rooms. Bennett (1994) notes, “the public could see Patriot missiles appear to intercept Scuds, bombed-out Iraqi cities, and devastated Israeli neighborhoods. As hostilities ended, scenes of joyous Kuwaitis greeted their liberators mingled with those of carnage along the Iraqis’ line of retreat. Shortly after the war ended, people watched the first units return home in triumph” (p. 184).

In response to lessons learned from the Vietnam War, one would be remiss not to highlight the restrictiveness the U.S. placed on the press under a proclamation called the Annex Foxtrot. As Allen, O’Loughlin, Jaspersen, and Sullivan (1994) conclude:

Military briefers as well as journalists managed coverage, affecting public opinion through a controlled, comprehensive narrative with limited presentation of alternative views. The continuous, repetitious, redundant, and unbalanced nature of media coverage contributed to the framing and priming of the war, reinforcing the potential for a spiral of silence to operate once the initial rally phenomenon dissipated. (p. 270)

Although formal press censorship was not entirely enacted, media coverage was influenced by the U.S. because only a select number of journalists were allowed to report on the conflict from the war zone, many could-be sources and places were restricted, and much of the information came from military briefings. In essence, the news media’s coverage of the conflict, in accordance with U.S. restrictions, portrayed the war as one that destroyed the adversary and never civilians, furthered U.S. diplomacy, and contributed to the greater good of the world. As such, the press “framed



and primed views of dissent, patriotism, technology, and elite consensus to construct a reality that stifled dissent and influenced citizens' evaluations of military actions" (Allen, O'Loughlin, Jasperson, and Sullivan, 1994, p. 283). Clearly, the news media reports on the Gulf War heightened the American public's approval of the Bush administration.

The next, and final, chapter of the thesis will provide a summary of the findings revealed in this research. In doing so, the impact of the news media on how Johnson handled the Vietnam War will be compared to the impact the news had on the public's approval of Bush's handling of the Persian Gulf War. At that point, the potential faults with the validity and reliability of the thesis is reported. Finally, the closing chapter will offer recommendations for future areas of study on this topic and discuss the implications of these prospective studies.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

The thesis seeks to explore the impact that the news media have on public opinion. Recognizing the average American citizen's reliance on the press to gain information about international conflicts, it is theorized that news reports on a political occurrence could very well influence the mass-level opinion of an event such that positive news stories generate positive public opinion, and negative news stories generate negative public opinion. It is important to note that this research does not prove causation, only association when the independent variable showed an important change at the same time the dependent variable altered. Although conclusions cannot be drawn from the analysis, the findings certainly determine whether there is a connection or disconnection between the variables. This information, while it does not answer any questions, allows future research to ask the right questions. It is also significant to point out that while the indicators are quite valid, they may not be entirely reliable. Due to the nature of a content analysis of newspaper articles, a great deal of careful flexibility was taken when placing the articles into a variable. The following analysis provides a conclusion of all the findings discovered through the premise of this research.

At first glance, the findings in this thesis differ from what was expected based on the research examined in the literature review. Specifically, Brody (1991) argues that

heightened coverage yields higher public awareness. He determined that the more people know about the war, the more they disapprove of it. The first hypothesis in this research theorizes that if salience of the Vietnam War rises then there will be a drop in public approval. Once quantified, it is evident that a change in salience is not associated with a change in public opinion. Specifically, 38% of the articles appeared on the first page at the start of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, 29% at the escalation of U.S. forces, and 15% at the Tet Offensive. Clearly, salience steadily declined as the war progressed. Comparatively, public approval of Johnson also fell from 74% in the first phase to 68% approval in the second phase and then to only 36% approval in the last phase. In this case, it is clear that salience is not correlated with public opinion because salience should increase as public approval decreases.

When the salience variable was considered for the Gulf War, the same held true such that salience did not show a correlation to public opinion. To explain, 10% of the wartime articles were published on the front page during the start of U.S. combat operations, 15% during the U.S.' defeat over Iraq, and zero percent during the post-war period. In comparison, 83% of Americans approved of the way Bush was handling his job as president during the first phase, 84% at the second phase, and 72% at the last phase. Once analyzed, the variables show no correlation in each of the specific phases because the salience indicator and the public opinion indicator do not move in inverse directions. It is important to elaborate on the first phase of the Gulf War that initially displays an association between the variables. Although, at first, there seems to be a

correlation because salience is low and public opinion is high, it is clear that the heightened public opinion is rather a function of the rally around the flag effect.

When comparing the Vietnam War to the Gulf War, however, the salience variable is associated to public opinion. Perhaps Johnson's ratings were much lower than Bush's ratings because the Vietnam War was much more salient than the Gulf War. As a result, the American people were more interested in the Vietnam War than the Gulf War (Mueller, 1994). Maybe the news media were more attentive to Vietnam simply because it lasted longer or because men were being drafted. Perhaps the media was more attentive to inflation, drug problems and unemployment in the early 1990s than the military intervention in the Middle East. As such, the press greatly focused the public's attention on one war more than the other and consequently, public opinion could in fact be associated with salience.

Next, the data shown here allow one to conclude that articles highlighting the president meeting his goals are associated with heightened public approval. Consider the hypothesis that questions whether the articles on Johnson not meeting his goals are associated to a decline in public's approval of the president handling the war. Once quantified, the association appears to be true. During the first phase of the Vietnam War when Johnson's approval ratings reached 74%, articles on the president meeting his objectives correlate to public opinion because 26% of the articles stated that the president was meeting wartime goals as compared to only 5% that stated he was not. During the second phase, public opinion fell to 59% while only 25% of the articles stated that the president was meeting his wartime goals as compared to 45% that said

otherwise. In the final phase, public opinion plummeted to 40% of people approving the way Johnson was handling the war while 21% of articles stated the president was meeting his goals and 38% said the opposite. In summary, the falling public approval could be associated to the negative articles that portrayed the president's handling of the war.

A correlation between the independent and dependent variables also exists for the Gulf War. During the first phase, 81% of the articles cited that the president was meeting his wartime goals and 80% of Americans approved the way Bush was handling the war. It is important to point out that 47% of the articles stated the president was not meeting his wartime goals; however the majority of the articles that fell into this category highlighted press censorship. Once those articles are removed from the indicator, the number of negative articles almost diminishes. In the second phase, public approval soared to 87% as 37% of articles stated the president was meeting his wartime goals, while 10% said he was not. When comparing the first phase the second phase, it initially seems like there is no correlation because the percent of positive articles greatly decreases. The percentage of positive news articles significantly outweighs negative articles, however. Again, this instance shows that positive articles could correlate to positive public opinion. In the final phase, 82% of the public still approved of the way Bush handled the war while 36% of news articles highlighted that Bush met his wartime goals as compared to none that stated otherwise.

Take, for example, the hypothesis that theorizes if the number of articles on the military not successfully completing its missions during the Vietnam War rises, there will

be a drop in public opinion of Americans approving the way Johnson handled the war. In the first phase, 11% of the articles stated the military was meeting wartime goals while 17% stated the opposite. Comparatively, 74% of Americans approved the way Johnson was handling his job during this period. As a result, articles on the military not meeting their missions are not associated to public opinion ratings because the number of negative articles outweighed the positive articles, yet public approval was overwhelmingly high. It is important to note, however, that during this time, Johnson recently took office with the assassination of John F. Kennedy. As a result, his approval ratings were incredibly high because of the circumstances that surrounded him coming to power. Johnson's high ratings were considered because, at the very least, they could be a mitigating factor in the public opinion results.

In the second phase of the Vietnam War, the same percentage of articles said the military was meeting their goals as there were articles that stated the contrary. Despite this, the number of negative articles decreased from 17% in the first phase to 13% in the second phase. As a result, the decrease in negative articles cannot be attributed to the fall in public approval to 59%. In the final phase, only nine percent of the articles stated the military was meeting its goals while 23% stated otherwise. In the final phase, the negative news coverage could be associated to the falling approval ratings of the way Johnson was handling the war, which dropped to 40%.

Much like in the Vietnam case, articles on the military meeting its goals during the Gulf War produces a mixed association when compared to public opinion. Specifically, the hypothesis questioned whether the number of positive articles on the

military successfully completing its missions during the Gulf War is associated to the public's high approval ratings of Bush. At the start of combat operations, 71% of the articles said the military was meeting their goals and 37% of the articles said otherwise. When compared to the 80% approval ratings for Bush, it is possible that the positive coverage is associated to the public's high public opinion of the president. Once the military defeated the Iraqis, 40% of the articles were positive and eight percent were negative. Public opinion of Bush rose to 87%, and again, news coverage is positively correlated to public opinion. At the time of post-war phase, no conclusive evidence that articles on the military meeting its goals exhibits an important difference when correlated with public opinion. This is because there was only one article that indicated the military was meeting its goals, and one article that stated the military was not meeting its goals.

When examining the outcomes of the hypotheses aforementioned, it is evident that agenda setting effects occurred. Specifically, priming occurred because, when the two cases were compared to one another, increased coverage of positive new stories were associated with heightened public approval of the president. Priming also occurred because prominently displayed bad news stories were correlated with a decrease in approval of the president. In addition, framing also occurred. The press' reports of the president meeting his wartime goals were associated with a favorable opinion rating of the president handling the war. Similarly, the articles that say the president is not fulfilling his wartime goals are correlated with a decrease in public approval of president. On the other hand, framing does not appear to have occurred in

all instances because articles on the military accomplishing their missions are not associated with public opinion. This is an interesting deviation and deserves further exploration in future research.

Now, the association between articles on wartime casualties and public opinion will be discussed. During the first phase of the Vietnam War, 23% articles cited military casualties and 74% of Americans approved of the way that Johnson was handling his job; therefore, articles on casualties have little effect on public opinion. In the second phase, there was a 16% percent decrease in the articles citing military casualties from the first phase. The percent change indicates that articles on casualties are not associated with the six percent drop in public opinion. During the final phase, there was a 12% increase from the start of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The percent change indicates that articles on casualties exhibit an important difference when associated with public opinion. Overall, articles on casualties are not associated with public opinion.

When analyzing wartime casualties and public opinion for the Gulf War, the a different pattern of association holds true. At the start of the war, four percent of the articles cited military casualties and 80% of Americans approved of the way that Bush was handling the war. The articles on casualties signified an important change when compared to public opinion. During the second phase, the percent of casualty articles increases less than one percent as public approval reaches 87%. This denotes a lack of association because the spiked public approval of Bush can most likely be attributed to the U.S. winning the war. During the post-war period, three articles at this phase



after the war cited military casualties—a 13% increase from the start of U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf. The percent change indicates that articles on casualties exhibit an important difference when associated with public opinion because approval of the president dropped as articles about casualties rose.

Overall, the findings show that changes in the news media's coverage is, in many cases, associated to changes in public opinion. To reiterate, salience is not associated to public opinion in each of the cases individually, but the variables do correlate when the two cases are compared to one another. Additionally, articles that state the president is meeting his wartime goals is associated to the public's approval of the president "handling his job" and "handling the war." On the other hand, there is no clear association between articles that highlight the military meeting its goals and the public's approval of the president "handling the war." In all actuality, the link between these two variables might be too abstract to make any clear connection. And finally, an increase of articles on wartime casualties is sometimes linked to a decline in public approval. While the existence and degree of causation between the news media and public opinion is hoped to be examined in future research, this study contends that changes in the news media's coverage of international conflicts correlates with changes in public opinion of a wartime president.

**APPENDIX A:  
VIETNAM WAR NEWS ARTICLES**

**Phase 1: U.S. Involvement in Vietnam at the Beginning  
of the Johnson Administration  
November 22 – December 22, 1963**

Total Number of Articles: 36

Total Number of Valid Articles: 34 (one editorial, one letter to the editor)

**Articles Published on the front page of the *New York Times*: 13 of 34 – 38%**

Kenworthy, E. W. (1963, November 25). Johnson Affirms Aims in Vietnam;  
Retains Kennedy's Policy of Aiding War on Reds. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Planes in Vietnam Drive Off 200 Reds. (1963, November 28) *New York Times*, p. 1.

Smith, H. (1963, November 28). Vietnam Holdovers from Diem Regime Arouse  
Resentment. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Smith, H. (1963, December 1). Politics in Forces Curbed By Saigon. *New  
York Times*, p. 1.

Halberstam, D. (1963, December 2). Vietnamese Post Firm to Last Man. *New  
York Times*, p. 1.

Smith, H. (1963, December 3). Vietnam Curtailing Hamlets Program. *New York  
Times*, p. 1.

Smith, H. (1963, December 4). 220 G.I's Leave Vietnam for U.S.; Acknowledges  
Debt to U.S. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Smith, H. (1963, December 9). Lodge Agrees to Consider Eisenhower's Plea to  
Run. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Smith, H. (1963, December 15). Vietnam Casualties Heavy in November. *New York  
Times*, p. 1.

Smith, H. (1963, December 20). McNamara Opens Inquiry in Vietnam on War Crisis.  
*New York Times*, p. 1.

Smith, H. (1963, December 21). U.S. Drops Plans for 1965 Recall of Vietnam Force.  
*New York Times*, p. 1.

Smith, H. (1963, December 22). Vietnam's Forces Revise Strategy; Kill 20 in Ambush. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Frankel, M. (1963, December 22). McNamara Gives Report to Johnson on Vietnam; McNamara Sees Johnson on Vietnam Deadline Called Political Force Numbers 16,500. *New York Times*, p. 1.

### **Articles Stating the President is Meeting Wartime Goals: 9 articles**

Halberstam, D. (1963, November 24). Vietnam's New Leaders Face A Tough Challenge; Stakes Are High in the Hard Battle Against the Vietcong Which Could Decide the Fate of All of Southeast Asian Area Eroding Position Easy Targets Explaining Threat Appearances. *New York Times*, p. 96.

Regime in Vietnam Expresses Sorrow. (1963, November 24). *New York Times*, p. 6.

Kenworthy, E. W. (1963, November 25). Johnson Affirms Aims in Vietnam; Retains Kennedy's Policy of Aiding War on Reds. *New York Times*, p. A1.

Smith, H. (1963, December 4). 220 G.I.'S Leave South Vietnam as Troop Reduction Gets Under Way; 220 G.I.'S Leave Vietnam for U.S. – Acknowledges Debt to U.S. *New York Times*, p. 6.

Baldwin, H. (1963, December 7). Key Factors in Vietnam; The Issue of Victory or Defeat Is Linked To Questions of Politics and Psychology U.S. Reaction Is Vital. *New York Times*, p. 2.

Smith, H. (1963, December 10). Neutrals in Exile Barred By Saigon; Pro-Reds Also Kept Out—Unity Talks Rejected 137 Diem Followers Held Explains Junta Policy Firm On North Vietnam. *New York Times*, p. 11.

Smith, H. (1963, December 20). McNamara Opens Inquiry in Vietnam on War Crisis. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Smith, H. (1963, December 21). U.S. Drops Plans for 1965 Recall of Vietnam Force; McNamara Assures Junta Troops Will Stay as Long as Wanted and Needed; Washington also Disavows Any Interest in Proposals to Neutralize Country. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Smith, H. (1963, December 22). Vietnam's Forces Revise Strategy; Kill 20 in Ambush. *New York Times*, p. A1.

### **Articles Stating the President is Not Meeting Wartime Goals: 2 articles**

Problems Abroad; Situations Fluid U.S. Responses? Vietnam Question Pressure on Aid. (1963, November 24). *New York Times*, p. 88.

Frankel, M. (1963, December 22). McNamara Gives Report to Johnson on Vietnam; McNamara Sees Johnson on Vietnam Deadline Called Political Force Numbers 16,500. *New York Times*, p. A1.

### **Articles Stating the Military is Accomplishing Wartime Missions: 4 articles**

U.S. Civilian Seized in June Is Freed by Vietnam Reds. (1963, November 24). *New York Times*, p. 15.

Planes in Vietnam Drive Off 200 Reds. (1963, November 28) *New York Times*, p. 1.

Smith, H. (1963, December 1). Politics in Forces Curbed by Saigon. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Smith, H. (1963, December 22). Vietnam's Forces Revise Strategy; Kill 20 in Ambush. *New York Times*, p. 1.

### **Articles Stating the Military is Not Accomplishing Wartime Missions: 6 articles**

Halberstam, D. (1963, November 25). Vietnam Reds Slay 37 at Camp after Slipping Past Sentries; 24 Asleep in Barracks' Shot—At Least One American Is Wounded—4 Missing. *New York Times*, p. 13.

Reds in Vietnam Crush 2 Villages; 1,000 Defenders Reported Missing in Mountain Area. (1963, November 26). *New York Times*, p. 19.

Halberstam, D. (1963, December 2). Vietnamese Post Firm to Last Man; At Least 57 Die in Defense of Position—Guerrillas Retreat after 6 Hours. *New York Times*, p 1.

Smith, H. (1963, December 5). Two U.S. Copters Downed in Vietnam by Red Fire. *New York Times*, p 5.

Smith, H. (1963, December 15). Vietnam Casualties Heavy in November; Vietnam's Losses High In November Morale Deteriorates. *New York Times*, p 1.

Frankel, M. (1963, December 22). McNamara Gives Report to Johnson on Vietnam; McNamara Sees Johnson on Vietnam Deadline Called Political Force Numbers 16,500. *New York Times*, p. 1.

### **Articles Highlighting Wartime Casualties: 8 articles**

Halberstam, D. (1963, November 25). Vietnam Reds Slay 37 at Camp after Slipping Past Sentries; 24 Asleep in Barracks' Shot—At Least One American Is Wounded—4 Missing. *New York Times*, p. 13.

Halberstam, D. (1963, December 2). Vietnamese Post Firm to Last Man; At Least 57 Die in Defense of Position—Guerrillas Retreat after 6 Hours. *New York Times*, p 1.

Reds Kill 19, Hurt 69 In Vietnam Ambush. (1963, December 6). *New York Times*, p. 7.

5 Lost As U.S. Plane Crashes in Vietnam. (1963, December 7). *New York Times*, p. 2.

One Listed by Air Force as Dead in Vietnam Crash. (1963, December 10). *New York Times*, p. 3.

4 In Copter Killed In Crash In Vietnam. (1963, December 13). *New York Times*, p. 15.

U.S. Officer Killed by Reds in Vietnam. (1963, December 16). *New York Times*, p. 3.

Bodies of U.S. Fliers Found on Beach in South Vietnam. (1963, December 17). *New York Times*, p. 10.

### **Phase 2: Escalation of U.S. Forces in Vietnam January 31 – March 3, 1965**

Total Number of Articles: 175

Total Number of Valid Articles: 124

Editorial: 9

Letter to editor: 16

No category fit/unbiased/ not enough information: 26

### **Articles Published on the front page of the *New York Times*: 37 out of 124 – 29.8%**

Tanner, H. (1965, January 31). Kosygin to Visit Hanoi for Talks; Trip, at Invitation of North Vietnam, Viewed as a Bid for Greater Asian Role. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Frankel, M. (1965, February 3). Rising Pessimism on Vietnam Spurs Mission By Bundy; He Leaves for Saigon Amid Uneasiness Over Political and Military Policies. *New York Times*, p. 1.

- Finney, J.W. (1965, February 5). Johnson Stresses U.S. Commitment to Guard Vietnam; Bars Speculation on Pullout at His News Conference -- Bundy Trip 'Routine'. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Frankel, M. (1965, February 9). U.S. Stops Raids to Assess Effect; Johnson Promises to Try to Keep Peace, but Won't Bar Future Strikes. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Topping, S. (1965, February 9). South Vietnam Planes Hit North; U.S. Then Calls a Halt To Strikes. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- 2 Major Battles Erupt in Vietnam near Key Air Base; U.S. Installation at Danang Prepares for Onslaught as Reds Step Up Attacks. (1965, February 10). *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Middleton, D. (1965, February 11). Paris Again Asks Peace In Vietnam; De Gaulle Calls for Talks and End of Intervention. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Doty, R. (1965, February 12). Pontiff Appeals for Peace Effort; Implies Support for a U.N. Role in Vietnam Solution. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Mohr., C. (1965, February 12). Limit on Conflict Stressed By U.S.; Officials Point to Distinction between Retaliatory Raids and Outright Hostilities. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Frankel, M. (1965, February 12). The U.S. in Vietnam: Why It Is There; U.S. in South Vietnam: The Reasons It's There. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Teltsch, K. (1965, February 13). Thant Asks Talks On Vietnam Crisis; Urges Restraint; He Says Parley In or Outside U.N. Should Pave Way for Formal Negotiations. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Finney, J. (1965, February 14). U.S. Is Considering a Troop Increase in South Vietnam; Military-Police Companies Would Combat Terrorism Directed Against G.I.'s. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Chinese Recall War Role in Korea—Say North Vietnam Can Attack; Peking Indicates Hanoi May Fight. (1965, February 14). *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Tanner, H. (1965, February 15). Reds Charge U.S. Seeks Wider War; Premiers of Soviet and North Korea Pledge Support to 'Patriots' of Vietnam. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Szulc, T. (1965, February 15). Vietnam Policy Statement Is Expected in Washington; Capital Awaiting Outline of Policy. *New York Times*, p. 1.

- Topping, S. (1965, February 15). Truce Observers in North Vietnam Asked To Depart; Request Affects Five Teams Patrolling Major Routes From Chinese Bases. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Sheehan, N. (1965, February 16). Indonesia Seizes Third U.S. Library; Action Comes After 17,000 Demonstrate in Jakarta Against Vietnam Raids. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Mohr, C. (1965, February 18). Johnson Asserts U.S. Will Persist In Vietnam Policy; President Declares Justified and Necessary' Actions Will Be Continued. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Frankel, M. (1965, February 18). Washington Still Rejects Any Vietnam Negotiations; U.S. Still Rejects Talks On Vietnam. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Raymond, J. (1965, February 19). McNamara Barring a Vietnam Pullout. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Finney, J. (February 20). Possible Strongman Asleep in Maryland during Saigon Coup; Vietnam's Possible Strongman Slept in Maryland During Coup. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Frankel, M. (1965, February 20). Vietnam Flare-Up Irks Washington; Clash Surprises Officials -- They Fear New Efforts to Exploit Confusion. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Frankel, M. (1965, February 21). U.S. Rebuffs Paris On Vietnam Talks; U.S. Spurns Paris On Vietnam Talks. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Peace In Vietnam Is Sought By Pope; He Reveals Personal Effort for Contacts on Solutions There and Elsewhere. (1965, February 21). *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Middleton, D. (1965, February 23). Hanoi Said To Ask France To Press U.S. To Negotiate; Ho Chi Minh Is Reported Eager for Geneva Talks on Vietnam Settlement. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Middleton, D. (1965, February 24). Russians Support De Gaulle Appeal For Vietnam Talk; French Chief Confers With Soviet Envoy on Proposal for a Negotiated Peace; U.S. Bombing Deplored. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Frankel, M. (1965, February 24). Johnson Pressed On Vietnam View; Discussion of Policy Sought as Debate on Wider War in North Continues. *New York Times*, p. 1.



Frankel, M. (1965, February 25). U.S. Admits Shift In Vietnam Stand; 'Advising and Assisting' Role for Americans Omitted in Report on Air Raid. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Hamilton, T. (1965, February 25). Thant Asks Vietnam Talks Leading to a U.S. Pullout; U.N. Chief Reports He Has Offered Some Proposals—Says That if Americans Had Facts They Would Back Him. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Topping, S. (1965, February 25). China Chides Soviet As Soft on Vietnam; China Says Soviet Is Soft On Hanoi. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Langguth, J. (1965, February 26). Vietcong Bombed By U.S. Jets Again; B-57's Strike at Phuoc Tuy Province for Fifth Day -- 3 Areas Are Pounded. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Frankel, M. (1965, February 26). Rusk Bars Vietnam Talks Till North Ends War Role; Rusk Bars Talks On Vietnam War. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Mohr, C. (1965, February 27). Lodge Will Aid on Vietnam; U.S. to Send More Troops; Lodge Will Help In Vietnam Crisis. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Tanner, H. (1965, February 27). Kosygin Says U.S. Risks War Spread; Warns It to End 'Aggression' in Vietnam or Conflict Will Cross 'Original' Borders. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Langguth, J. (1965, February 28). Vietnam Buddhists to Seek Pullout of Foreign Forces; Buddhists Plan Drive To End War. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Szulc, T. (1965, March 2). More Marines Due For Vietnam Duty; Another Battalion May Be Sent to Guard U.S. Base, Possibly at Danang. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Langguth, J. (1965, March 3). 160 U.S. And Saigon Planes Bomb 2 Bases In North In Record Raid; Continuing Strikes Are Expected; 6 Aircraft Lost But 5 Pilots Are Saved—Targets Are Part of Military Complex. *New York Times*, p. 1.

### **Articles Stating the President is Meeting Wartime Goals: 31 articles**

Finney, J.W. (1965, February 5). Johnson Stresses U.S. Commitment to Guard Vietnam; Bars Speculation on Pullout at His News Conference -- Bundy Trip 'Routine'. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Lubasch, A. (1965, February 8). U.S. Commitment in South Vietnam, Begun in French Era, Involves 23,000 Men; First Troops Sent To Saigon In 1954 But Help Was Confined to Advisers and Equipment in the Early Years. *New York Times*, p. 16.

Reprisal in Vietnam. (1965, February 8). *New York Times*, p. 24.

Frankel, M. (1965, February 9). U.S. Stops Raids to Assess Effect; Johnson Promises to Try to Keep Peace, but Won't Bar Future Strikes. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Thailand Backs U.S. on Vietnam Strikes. (1965, February 9). *New York Times*, p. 13.

Mohr, C. (1965, February 9). Bundy Gives an Optimistic Report on Vietnam; After 4-Day Trip He Says Factions Seek a Stable Regime in Saigon. *New York Times*, p. 12.

Reston, J. (1965, February 9). Tension and Restraint; Both Sides' Tactics in Vietnam Crisis Believed Aimed to Avert Major Conflict. *New York Times*, p. 13.

Maidenberg, H.G. (1965, February 11). Commodities: Decline in Soybean and Grain Futures Halted by Vietnam News; Prices Rebound On 'Scare Buying'. *New York Times*, p. 49.

Lodge Says Action In Vietnam Is Wise. (1965, February 12). *New York Times*, p. 13.

Nixon Urges U.S. to Press Attacks on North Vietnam. (1965, February 12). *New York Times*, p. 13.

Reston, J. (1965, February 12). Washington: What Are Our Aims in Vietnam? *New York Times*, p. 28.

Mohr, C. (1965, February 12). Limit on Conflict Stressed By U.S.; Officials Point to Distinction between Retaliatory Raids and Outright Hostilities. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Marchers at U.N. Urge U.S. To Spur Effort in Vietnam. (1965, February 13). *New York Times*, p. 7.

Szulc, T. (1965, February 15). Vietnam Policy Statement Is Expected in Washington; Capital Awaiting Outline Of Policy. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Truman Supports Johnson's Moves; Urges That Everyone Back President on Vietnam. (1965, February 17). *New York Times*, p. 11.

Stilwell Supports U.S. on Vietnam. (1965, February 17). *New York Times*, p. 10.

- Mohr, C. (1965, February 18). Johnson Asserts U.S. Will Persist In Vietnam Policy; President Declares Justified and Necessary' Actions Will Be Continued. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Raymond, J. (1965, February 19). McNamara Barring A Vietnam Pullout. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Arnold, M. (1965, February 20). 14 Arrested Here In Vietnam Move. *New York Times*, p. 2.
- Langguth, J. (1965, February 20). Khanh Is Back In Power; His Troops Regain Saigon, Putting Down Brief Coup. *New York Times*, p. 2.
- Clark, A. (1965, February 21). 19 Arrested Here In Protest March; Picket Groups Criticize U.S. Involvement in Vietnam. *New York Times*, p. 4.
- GOLDWATER ASKS MORE AIR STRIKES; Favors Hitting Hanoi if Reds Persist in Vietnam Fight. (1965, February 22). *New York Times*, p. 2.
- ASIA GROUP HERE BACKS U.S. RAIDS; Americans Urge Stronger Action in Vietnam. (1965, February 23). *New York Times*, p. 10.
- Frankel, M. (1965, February 25). U.S. Admits Shift In Vietnam Stand; ' Advising and Assisting' Role for Americans Omitted in Report on Air Raid. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Topping, S. (1965, February 25). China Chides Soviet As Soft on Vietnam; China Says Soviet Is Soft On Hanoi. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Reston, J. (1965, February 26). Washington: The Guiding Principle in Vietnam. *New York Times*, p. 28.
- Stevenson Gives Thant Copy of Vietnam Paper. (1965, February 28). *New York Times*, p. 32.
- Text of U.S. White Paper on North Vietnam's Growing Role in War in the South; Report Details Extent of Hanoi's Assistance to the Vietcong in Men and Supplies U.S. Says Choice of Peace or War Is Up to Reds. (1965, February 28). *New York Times*, p. 30.
- British Cautious On Vietnam Talks; Means to Enforce Accord Called Key Problem. (1965, February 28). *New York Times*, p. 30.

A.F.L.-C.I.O. Backs Retaliatory Moves By U.S. in Vietnam. (1965, February 28). *New York Times*, p. 30.

Long Asserts U.S. Must Not Retreat; Warns That to Quit Vietnam Would Bring Red Expansion. (1965, March 1). *New York Times*, p. 9.

**Articles Stating the President is Not Meeting Wartime Goals: 56 articles**

Tanner, H. (1965, January 31). Kosygin to Visit Hanoi for Talks; Trip, at Invitation of North Vietnam, Viewed as a Bid for Greater Asian Role. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Frankel, M. (1965, February 3). Rising Pessimism On Vietnam Spurs Mission By Bundy; He Leaves for Saigon Amid Uneasiness Over Political and Military Policies. *New York Times*, p. 1.

U.S. Policy Failing, Many Leaders Say In Poll on Vietnam. (1965, February 4). *New York Times*, p. 3.

Topping, S. (1965, February 3). The Reds and Vietnam; Apparent Readiness to Ask Settlement Recalls Prelude to 1961 Laotian Accord. *New York Times*, p. 2.

Metz. R. (1965, February 9). Vietnam Tremors Shake Stock List; Events in Asia Reverberate in Market—Prices Slip as Trading Quickens. *New York Times*, p. 49.

Cubans Back North Vietnam. (1965, February 9). *New York Times*, p. 13.

Maidenberg, H.G. (1965, February 9). Commodities: Futures Markets Stirred by the Deepening Crisis in Southeast Asia. *New York Times*, p. 49.

Crisis In Vietnam Restrains Buying. (1965, February 9). *New York Times*, p. 58.

Allen, J. (1965, February 11). Message's Impact Slight In Market; Declines Traced to News of Vietnam Action. *New York Times*, p. 54.

Pickets In Capital Ask Vietnam Talks. (1965, February 11). *New York Times*, p. 6.

Middleton, D. (1965, February 11). Paris Again Asks Peace In Vietnam; De Gaulle Calls for Talks and End of Intervention. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Metz. R. (1965, February 11). Stocks Battered By Vietnam News; Report of Vietcong Attack Quells Rally and Touches Off a Wave of Selling. *New York Times*, p. 59.

Black Day in Vietnam. (1965, February 11). *New York Times*, p. 38.

- Allen, J. (1965, February 12). Bonds: Vietnam Crisis Brings Uncertainty Into Government and Corporate Markets. *New York Times*, p. 41.
- Doty, R. (1965, February 12). Pontiff Appeals for Peace Effort; Implies Support for a U.N. Role in Vietnam Solution. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Metz, R. (1965, February 12). Stocks Retreat As Jitters Grow; Traders, Concerned About Vietnam, Reduce Positions. *New York Times*, p. 37.
- Frankel, M. (1965, February 12). The U.S. in Vietnam: Why It Is There; U.S. in South Vietnam: The Reasons It's There. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Chinese Step Up 'Hate U.S.' Drive; Millions Vow Support for North Vietnam's 'Struggle'. (1965, February 13). *New York Times*, p. 6.
- Teltsch, K. (1965, February 13). Thant Asks Talks On Vietnam Crisis; Urges Restraint; He Says Parley In or Outside U.N. Should Pave Way for Formal Negotiations. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Hammer, A.R. (1965, February 14). Unlisted Stocks Fell Last Week; Uncertainty Over Vietnam Noted—Index Down 3.92. *New York Times*, p. F10.
- Koshetz, H. (1965, February 14). The Merchant's View; Vietnam Crisis and Payments Balance Pose Problems. *New York Times*, p. F13.
- Lewis, A. (1965, February 14). Split Over Vietnam Tests Laborites. *New York Times*, p. 3.
- Vietnam's Economy Continues To Slide. (1965, February 14). *New York Times*, p. 3.
- Crisis In Vietnam Worrying Many; Survey Finds Varied Views on Involvement of U.S. (1965, February 14). *New York Times*, p. 3.
- 2,000 March Here For Vietnam Truce and a Peace Parley. (1965, February 14). *New York Times*, p. 5.
- Chinese Recall War Role in Korea—Say North Vietnam Can Attack; Peking Indicates Hanoi May Fight. (1965, February 14). *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Tanner, H. (1965, February 15). Reds Charge U.S. Seeks Wider War; Premiers of Soviet and North Korea Pledge Support to 'Patriots' of Vietnam. *New York Times*, p. 1.

- Frankel, M. (1965, February 15). Tormented Decisions; A Normally Voluble Administration Shows Deep Anxiety Over Vietnam. *New York Times*, p. 2.
- Mrs. Westmoreland Bids South Vietnam Good-by. (1965, February 15). *New York Times*, p. 2.
- Topping, S. (1965, February 15). Truce Observers In North Vietnam Asked To Depart; Request Affects Five Teams Patrolling Major Routes From Chinese Bases. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Educators Urge Johnson To Negotiate on Vietnam. (1965, February 15). *New York Times*, p. 14.
- Sheehan, N. (1965, February 16). Indonesia Seizes Third U.S. Library; Action Comes After 17,000 Demonstrate in Jakarta Against Vietnam Raids. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Execution Follows Rioting In Vietnam. (1965, February 17). *New York Times*, p. 10.
- Kosygin Demands U.S. Quit Vietnam. (1965, February 17). *New York Times*, p. 10.
- Metz, R. (1965, February 17). Asia Casts Cloud On Stock Market; Many Issues Lose Ground as Soviet Stiffens Stand in the Vietnam Crisis. *New York Times*, p. 61.
- China Warns U.S. On Vietnam War; Liu Says Peking Supports Hanoi's 'Righteous' Cause. (1965, February 18). *New York Times*, p. 10.
- Frankel, M. (1965, February 18). Washington Still Rejects Any Vietnam Negotiations; U.S. Still Rejects Talks On Vietnam. *New York Times*, p. 1.
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Total Number of Articles: 137

Total Number of Valid Articles: 102

Editorial: 8

Letter to editor: 3

No category fit/unbiased/ not enough information: 24

#### **Articles Published on the front page of the *New York Times*: 16 of 102 – 15.6%**

Mohr, C. (1968, February 2). Street Clashes Go On In Vietnam, Foe Still Holds Parts Of Cities; Enemy Toll Soars; Offensive Is Running 'Out of Steam,' Says Westmoreland. *New York Times*, p. 1.

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- Baldwin, H. (1968, February 1). News Analysis; Public Opinion in U.S. and South Vietnam Is Viewed as Main Target of New Offensive by Vietcong. *New York Times*, p. 12.
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**APPENDIX B:  
PERSIAN GULF WAR NEWS ARTICLES**

**Phase 1: Start of the Persian Gulf War  
January 16 – February 16, 1991**

Total Number of Articles: 670 (one month)/214 (one week) – Jan. 16 – Jan. 24

Total Number of Valid Articles: 170

Editorial: 0

Letter to editor: 0

No category fit/unbiased: 44

**Articles Published on the front page of the *New York Times*: 31 of 170 – 18.24%**

Rosenthal, A. (1991, January 17). War In The Gulf: The Overview - U.S. And Allies Open Air War On Iraq; Bomb Baghdad And Kuwaiti Targets; 'No Choice' But Force, Bush Declares; No Ground Fighting Yet; Call to Arms by Hussein. *New York Times*, p. 1.

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Gordon, M. (1991, January 17). War In The Gulf: The Military; Raids, on a Huge Scale, Seek to Destroy Iraqi Missiles. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Shenon, P. (1991, January 17). War In The Gulf: Saudi Base; Rumble in the Sky Ends a 5-Month Wait. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Gordon, M. (1991, January 18). War In The Gulf: The Overview; Iraqis Fire Missiles At Israeli Cities After Second Day Of Allied Bombing; U.S. Discourages An Israeli Response. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Sciolino, E. (1991, January 18). WAR IN THE GULF: Iraq; Hussein Is Defiant As Raids Continue. *New York Times*, p. 1.

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- Brinkley, J. (1991, January 20). WAR IN THE GULF; Israel Says It Must Strike at Iraqis But Indicates Willingness to Wait. *New York Times*, p. 1.
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- Barron, J. (1991, January 21). WAR IN THE GULF: Prisoners; Iraqi TV Broadcasts Interviews With 7 Identified as Allied Pilots. *New York Times*, p. 1.
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- Hedges, C. (1991, January 21). WAR IN THE GULF: SAUDI ARABIA; On the Kuwait Border, Iraqi Shells Empty a Town. *New York Times*, p. 1.
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### **Articles Stating the President is Not Meeting Wartime Goals: 33 articles**

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- Sciolino, E. (1991, January 19). WAR IN THE GULF: Iraq; Raids Said To Cut Power In Baghdad. *New York Times*, p. 10.
- Cowell, A. (1991, January 19). WAR IN THE GULF: Jordan; In Jordan, the Iraqis Regain Respect by Striking at Israel. *New York Times*, p. 1.
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Hedges, C. (1991, January 24). WAR IN THE GULF: Marines; Finding Life's Meaning in Winds and Rains of War. *New York Times*, p. 13.

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WAR IN THE GULF; Pentagon's List. (1991, January 20). *New York Times*, p. 18.

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**Phase 2: U.S. Defeat/Iraqi Troop Withdrawal  
February 26 – March 26, 1991**

Total Number of Articles: 103  
Total Number of Valid Articles: 79  
    Editorial: 0  
    Letter to editor: 0  
    No category fit/unbiased: 24

**Articles Published on the front page of the *New York Times*: 12 of 79 – 15.19%**

- Apple, R. W. (1991, February 26). WAR IN THE GULF: Combat; U.S. Cites 'Tremendous Success' in Kuwait Action. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Tyler, P. E. (1991, February 26). WAR IN THE GULF: The Overview; Iraq Orders Troops To Leave Kuwait But U.S. Pursues Battlefield Gains; Heavy American Toll In Scud Attack. *New York Times*, p. 1.
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- Shenon, P. (1991, February 26). WAR IN THE GULF: Armored Column; Vast Armada Of U.S. Tanks Rolls Into Iraq. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Apple, R. W. (1991, February 27). War In The Gulf: The Overview; Allied Units Surge Through Kuwait; Troops Confront Elite Force In Iraq; Bush Spurns Hussein's Pullout Move American and British Troops Gird for an Iraqi Last Stand. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Rosenthal, A. (1991, February 27). War In The Gulf: The President; Allied Units Surge Through Kuwait; Troops Confront Elite Force In Iraq; Bush Spurns Hussein's Pullout Move Surrender Demand. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Friedman, T. L. (1991, February 27). WAR IN THE GULF: NEWS ANALYSIS; The Rout Bush Wants A Disorderly, Humiliating Iraqi Surrender Will End Hussein's Power, Officials Believe. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- WAR IN THE GULF: KUWAIT CITY. (1991, February 28). Joyous Kuwaitis Hug Allied Troops. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Shenon, P. (1991, February 28). WAR IN THE GULF; Iraq Elite Routed, U.S. Soldiers Say. *New York Times*, p. 1.

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Kagay, M. R. (1991, February 26). WAR IN THE GULF: Poll; Public Shows Support for Land War. *New York Times*, p. 17.

WAR IN THE GULF; 51,000 Refugees to Get Year's Reprieve in U.S. (1991, February 26). *New York Times*, p. 17.

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Lewis, P. (1991, February 27). WAR IN THE GULF: UNITED NATIONS; Soviet, at U.N., Sides With Allies On Setting Terms for Cease-Fire. *New York Times*, p. 22.

Miller, J. (1991, February 27). WAR IN THE GULF: THE ARABS; Saudi Envoy Warns Arabs Who Backed Iraq. *New York Times*, p. 19.

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Haberman, C. (1991, February 27). WAR IN THE GULF: THE REBUILDING; Kuwaitis Plan Big Restoration Effort. *New York Times*, p. 22.

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- Brinkley, J. (1991, February 27). WAR IN THE GULF: WORLD REACTION - ISRAEL; Approval as Allies Press the Offensive. *New York Times*, p. 22.
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- Applebome, P. (1991, February 27). WAR IN THE GULF: THE MOOD; Savoring a Scent of Victory but Wondering About When the Guns Go Quiet. *New York Times*, p. 23.
- Johnson, D. (1991, February 27). WAR IN THE GULF: THE MOOD - DENVER; Old West Idea In a New Era. *New York Times*, p. 23.
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- Lorch, D. (1991, February 28). WAR IN THE GULF: Kuwait; For a Jubilant Crowd in Kuwait City, It's Victory Signs, Tears and Kisses. *New York Times*, p. 6.
- Sciolino, E. (1991, February 28). WAR IN THE GULF: Iraqi Leader; Hussein's Errors: Complex Impulses. *New York Times*, p. 10.
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### **Articles Stating the President is Not Meeting Wartime Goals: 8 articles**

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Sack, K. (1991, March 11). Cuomo Scolds G.O.P. for Assailing Democrats on Gulf War. *New York Times*, p. B1.

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Gordon, M. R. (1991, February 28). AFTER THE WAR: Military Planning; U.S. Plans a Bigger Presence in Gulf. *New York Times*, p. 19.

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#### **Articles Stating the Military is Not Accomplishing Wartime Missions: 7 articles**

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King, W. (1991, February 28). WAR IN THE GULF: Black G.I.'s; Powell to Study Complaints By Harlem Unit in Gulf War. *New York Times*, p. 13.

Alterman, E. (1991, March 4). DIALOGUE: The Gulf War's Aftermath Is the Vietnam Syndrome Dead?; No, Hussein Was One of a Kind. *New York Times*, p. 17.

Apple, R. W. (1991, March 10). AFTER THE WAR: Politics; Another Gulf War? *New York Times*, p. 16.

#### **Articles Highlighting Wartime Casualties: 4 articles**

Apple, R. W. (1991, February 26). WAR IN THE GULF: Scud Attack; Scud Missile Hits a U.S. Barracks, Killing 27. *New York Times*, p. 1.

Lorch, D. (1991, February 27). WAR IN THE GULF: THE SCUD ATTACK; Twisted Hulk of Warehouse Tells a Grim Story of Death. *New York Times*, p. 18.

Terry, D. (1991, February 27). WAR IN THE GULF: THE REACTION; Pennsylvanians Weep For Sons Killed by Scud. *New York Times*, p. 18.

Terry, D. (1991, February 28). WAR IN THE GULF: The Families; Scud's Lethal Hit Takes First 3 Female Soldiers. *New York Times*, p. 13.

### **Phase 3: U.S. Post-War Policies May 30 – June 30, 1991**

Total Number of Articles: 11

Total Number of Valid Articles: 8

Editorial: 0

Letter to editor: 0

No category fit/unbiased: 3

#### **Articles Published on the front page of the *New York Times*: 0 articles**

#### **Articles Stating the President is Meeting Wartime Goals: 4 articles**

Rosenthal, A. (1991, June 7). Shedding Tears, Bush Tells Baptists of Praying as Gulf War Nears. *New York Times*, p. 14.

Sciolino, E. (1991, June 9). Gulf War Affects Fate Of Hostages. *New York Times*, p. 10.

Bernstein, R. (1991, June 9). Will the Gulf War Produce Enduring Art? *New York Times*, p. 22.

U.S. Posts a Trade Surplus From Gulf War Payments. (1991, June 12). *New York Times*, p. D8.

#### **Articles Stating the President is Not Meeting Wartime Goals: 0 articles**

#### **Articles Stating the Military is Accomplishing Wartime Missions: 1 article**

Bernstein, R. (1991, June 9). Will the Gulf War Produce Enduring Art? *New York Times*, p. 22.

**Articles Stating the Military is Not Accomplishing Wartime Missions: 1 article**

Potshots at Gulf War Intelligence. (1991, June 29). *New York Times*, p. 22.

**Articles Highlighting Wartime Casualties: 2 articles**

Greenpeace Count Puts Dead From War in Gulf at 200,000. (1991, May 30). *New York Times*, p. 6.

Gonzalez, D. (1991, June 10). 2,000 at St. John's Mark the Gulf War. *New York Times*, p. B4.

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