

Public Relations and Propaganda in Framing the Iraq War

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ABSTRACT

Public relation and propaganda has remained the tool of government and political parties to promote their recent agendas and try to influence the opinion of people in their favor. The Iraq war was never the exception of this phenomenon; rather it had moved one step further and organized a whole war using media as a medium. The horrific event of 9/11 was in the background of this war and it was a terrorist attack initiated by Al-Qaeda but then President Bush and his administrations established Saddam Husain as the main accuse and used propaganda and public relation to make the U.S. citizen believe the same. This present study will evaluate the step wise role of media and propaganda in Iraq war and try to evaluate the reasons of this war. The researcher had divided this study in three parts i.e. pre-war condition, during war and after war scenario.

KEYWORDS: Iraq war, U.S. propaganda, public relation.

Article Received: 10 August 2020, Revised: 25 October 2020, Accepted: 18 November 2020

INTRODUCTION

The assimilation and role of media, public relation and propaganda during a war is not a new phenomenon that has just emerged out of the box and experts/reviewers started to criticize the same. The public relation department of US military has remained in questionable stature even in the past. Persian Gulf War can be exemplified in this reference, as per the international experts this was the war based on public opinion, as stated in **PRR (1991)** that every war is a two sided coin where on one side lies the warfare itself and on the other side there is a war fought over media. Not only in US lead wars but in the mid-20th century second world war was totally based on the propaganda initiated by Hitler and later on the same was inculcated into general public by his followers, the after effect of this propaganda oriented war resulted in the form of mass murder in millions. Even the generation in centuries to come may never forget this wound on the head of humanity.

As a matter of fact, involvement of media and public relation is not always bad, rather there is a positive side too i.e. if media is considered as a true source of information then this information can make the wars more transparent and clean. In the words of **Bruce Berkowitz (2003)**:

“Today the ability to collect, communicate, process and protect information is the most important factor defining military power.”

So, here it is important to differentiate between public relation and other public communication, in deep somewhere these two are simultaneously used to shape the opinion of people at large and influence their behavior. In case of public relation; it is a kind

of two way process where some amount of interaction at personal or public level is present and on the other hand public communication is the representation of fact by a third party to public at large and credibility of the same depends on the person or channel that is presenting it. It can be said that public communication or propaganda is one way sort of process and in difficult times the governments use the same to spread the sufficiency of said process. Like in case of World War II, the term ‘*Black propaganda*’ was popular, and this was interpreted in the form of *white lies, distortion of information, fake commitments, etc.* taking reference from the past it can be said that in most of the cases propaganda are only partially true.

Background of the Study: Invasion of Iraq by U.S.

International politics framework will always take the reference from the Iraq invasion of U.S. as per the opinion of experts and reviewers there was no substantial justification of this war, as Iraq was never a threat to U.S. in any form. Then on the other hand, due to international rationing of sanctions the military of Iraq was not strong enough to stand for U.S. advanced military. For the sake of discussion it can be said that the loss of people and property, as an aftermath of 9/11 was directly correlated to Iraq and the respective president of USA, Bush wants to target Iraq in place of real offenders i.e. Al-Qaeda (Afghanistan). In lieu of the same ‘GWOT’ (*Global War of Terror*) was initiated and Afghanistan was the first prey of the same, in the meantime all the efforts were made to establish Iraq as number one threat. American media and propaganda experts started to

establish in public that Iraq is having the possession of biological warfare and even nuclear weapons. They also established that Saddam Husain is having direct connection to Al-Qaeda and even to Laden. Then on the other hand this propaganda also included a thin agitation of Shias and Kurds in Afghanistan and established that Saddam Husain was a brutal ruler who had killed/murdered his own people. The bottom line of this invasion was to establish democracy in Iraq and start of new era of development in whole of middle east. It was 20th March, 2003 when U.S.A. launched an attack on Iraq, as a matter of fact it was a group attack i.e. included the allied forces as well. After the invasion was over it was established by various U.S. and international agencies that there were no 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' in the possession of Iraq and in totality Iraq was not a threat to U.S. in real terms. As evident from the in-length enquiry of *Britain's Chilcot* that at the time of invasion i.e. in March, 2003 America was not having any direct threat from then president of Iraq Saddam Husain, this report came out in 2016 and flushed the main reason of Iraq war of U.S.

Review of Literature

There have been a number of studies in the past that have very clearly established that U.S. media has played a vital role in the invasion of Iraq. From 2004 i.e. the end to Iraq invasion to the enquiry reports of *Britain's Chilcot* in 2016, many of the scholars and political experts have studied the scenario over and over again. Although there were very few studies that have dug deep into the reasons and connection. After the period of cold war Muslim and Islam have emerged as a new generation enemy for western countries. In this context news, media and political propaganda has declared Iraq as threat to rest of the world. Being a superpower at global level there was no agency that may raise question the 'American Version' of Iraq.

Some of the previous studies at national and international level have inspected the scenario of Iraq invasion in their own perspective and presented a number of views in this regard. Some of them are presented here to elaborate the perspective of present study.

Shook et al (2013) have done a commendable work in the field of visual storytelling; his main work was related to the field of television production and reporting. The authors stated that there are different dimensions associated with every event and when it comes to interpretation, these dimensions are discussed again and again; after every discussion a new picture of the same event comes. The authors also stated that world has always believed on the

western interpretation of global events and Iraq war is one of them.

Edward et al (2006) the authors have presented their work in the form of a book that is related to myths of liberal media. They stated that any media house that is working in the form of corporate and seeking for profit, its reporting and delivery cannot be stated as reliable at most of the times. This can be said in the sense of reporting for other corporates and related components. The authors also stated that the news channels with highest T.R.P. have supported the western propaganda on Iraq war. Although many of the media houses have presented the truth but the way of presentation was so that the inclination was more towards the negative presentation Saddam Husain and militancy in Iraq.

Bilmes et al (2008) the authors evaluated the financial aspect of Iraq war and presented the assessment of financial burden and relation of the same with economic and social impact on the country. The authors stated that it was a trillion dollar war and this financial burden may be bore by the common U.S. citizens and that too for years. The number of soldiers U.S. lost in the war has taken months to count and cost of deploying army was initially counted under the head of defense budget but after some time it started to curb the major part of national budget.

Cockburn (2008) the author has evaluated the post invasion scenario of Iraq in 2003. The author stated that during the Iraq war the political scenario of Iraq got distorted during the U.S. Invasion and for some time regional politics emerged in the country, as a matter of fact this regional politics has played a vital role in the decentralization of power and this decentralization has created more chaos in Iraq; in return the stay of U.S. army was elongated in the major parts of the country.

Bennette et al (2007) evaluated the role of American press and description of Iraq war from different perspectives. The literature authored by Bennette et al has explored and evaluated the real time experiences of those journalists that have covered the Iraq war at the first hand. There were a number of evidences in the due course of exploration that pointed out the manipulation of media by the administration of then president Bush. To show the social affluence media was manipulated in the name of corporate ownership and other associated values like patriotism and self-censorship. As a matter of fact these values were distorted to a certain extent during the war.

Research Objective

The main objective of this present study is to evaluate the scenario of Iraq war and identify the role of media and propaganda in the same. Also this study will explore the reasons of Iraq war and its after effects.

Research Methodology

As this present study is based on secondary data and evaluates a true event that has already taken place. Here the task of researcher is to evaluate the scenario of particular dimension of Iraq war i.e. role of media and propaganda in illuminating the flames of war and justifying the western view regarding Saddam Husain and Iraq.

The researcher has gone through a trail of secondary data and the major sources that were explored can be stated as follows:

- Research papers from the journals of national and international repute
- Some of the doctoral thesis on the topics related to media and Iraq war
- Magazine articles (*as available*) from 2003 to present
- Audio and video resources from different websites
- Some book authored on the topic of Iraq war and related responsibility of media in the same

Apart from this the researcher has also contacted some of the media houses to understand the routine reporting system and corporate orientation of such media houses.

Evaluation of U.S Invasion of Iraq

The outset of Iraq invasion was set up just after 9/11 i.e. the Americas topmost politicians started to give aggressive statements against Iraq and direct involvement of Saddam Husain in this brutal terrorist activity. In the due course of time these statements turned up in the form of propaganda and this propaganda was based on three main issues, which were:

- There are a number of biological weapons in the possession of Saddam Husain
- Iraq was going to develop nuclear bomb
- Al-Qaeda network of terrorism was directly related to Iraq (*Strategic and Operational level*)

Some of the prominent politicians of U.S. like Cheney, Rumsfield, etc. and Bush himself use to deliver a speech and the main part of speech was based on 9/11, Iraq and Saddam Husain. At the first instance this speech was relayed on radio and then at

the second level executives of different agencies use to amplify the effect in different talk shows on a number of news channels, then finally these talk shows become the headline of local newspapers next morning. **Lester (2002)** The cumulative effect of the same resulted in the form of consensus in American public that 9/11 originated from Iraq and Saddam Husain was the main culprit; they started to believe that invasion of Iraq was the only remedy to deal with the same.

In Sept. 2002 'Pew Research Center', conducted a poll and the main parties to this poll were CNN and USA, results stated that more than 60% of the American citizen were agreed to the point that Iraq invasion should take place Saddam Husain should be prosecuted for his deeds. Then in the end of 2002 CNN and Los Angeles Times conducted and poll and came with the similar type of public opinion. **Dadge (2006)**

The whole even of Iraq invasion can be understood clearly in three phases:

I. Phase 1 (Pre-Invasion)

After 9/11 a media propaganda was staged by U.S. government officials and the same was generally based on lean sources of information. **Efron (2002)** There were minimum number of people and media houses who have evaluated the scenario in its true sense, like Chicago Daily Herald in its edition of 15th Sept. 2002 that there were no concrete evidence to initiate a war against Iraq. Some other newspapers also came up with same issues and questioned the assertion of U.S. intelligence just before the war. **Hanania (2002)** most of the media houses in U.S. were in support of this invasion and also verified the statements of different government officials on their respective news channels. Most of the newspapers have reviewed the speeches and interviews of such officials positively and consciously supported their thought process against Iraq. As a matter of fact, in no time, Bush administration was having the highest level of support to invade Iraq and prosecute Saddam Husain, as a result of this family members of thousands of 9/11 victims started to agitate on the roads of New York to avenge them. These people never understood that they were supporting a vague cause to invade Iraq and their perception was the result of a propaganda initiated by U.S. Government officials and media houses.

As mentioned above, researcher do not want to establish that Saddam Husain was a saint, as a matter of fact he was a dominating and cruel '*Dictator*' who had ordered the killing of thousands of his own people and anyone who is not agreed to his point of

view, rather in some of the cases he prosecuted a number of his own relatives for *'not so relevant'* reasons. **CESR (1996)** presented a report on situation of Iraq, prior to this war. The report stated that more than 80% of Iraq's population was having access to water and medical facilities that included lab testing and immunization of children. Basic cost of living was in control and no additional taxes were imposed on general public. Education/literacy programs for women and children have started taking shape.

Going a step further, Bush administration propagated that Saddam refused the U.S. 'Weapon Inspectors' to enter Iraqi armory and returned them back to U.S. and this was the *'Last nail in the coffin'*, just in few weeks White House was flooded with memos and drafts for preparation of war. **David (2006)** as a matter of fact it was discovered at a later stage that Saddam refused the inspectors to visit their armory for inspection, Tony Blair and Bush had deliberately established this notion. This statement was released in media and media start rolling this without verification of facts and the testing of assertions, most of the readers and audiences believed this and taken as granted that Saddam was a culprit and strict action should to taken, and that action was invading Iraq. **Borger (2004)**.

II. Phase II(Invasion)

The invasion was glorified over U.S. media, media houses like MSNBC and few other even started a countdown of 48 hours, this was the time period that Bush gave to Saddam Husain to leave Iraq. Even some of the newspapers i.e. Washington Post, New York Times, etc. issued a warning to Saddam for destroying the WMD and other biological warfare so that the U.S. government may re-consider the thought of invasion. **W.P. (18th March, 2003)**. Many of the media barons like Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, etc. started to publish headlines like

'make the middle east safe for democracy';

'to minimize the war's human and material costs, and to ease Iraq's economic and political reconstruction' and

'peace isn't possible in evils face'.

Apart from this Pentagon deputed a number of journalists that were embedded with the U.S. troops to their way to Iraq and the main task of these reporters were to cover the war events of war in different areas of Iraq, but the restriction was they have to publish only the approved material from war officials and white house executives. **Jensen (2003)** Then there was a restriction on their movement as well i.e. they were allowed to move with the troops

only and they cannot visit anywhere else, the reason given for this was that the terrorist may abduct them and use the hold-up for their demands. **Kurtz (2003)**

Then Pentagon also recruited some Public Relation offices who were supposed to manage the reporters, tell them the location of ongoing war sites, liaison for high profile interviews and taking of photos. *CNN* and *Al Jazeera* were the biggest supplier of war related news and event and they remained with the troops from beginning to end of the same.

This war has promoted a number of media houses in and brought them the frontline, even some of them were rewarded for their *'true coverage'* of the war. As a matter of fact they have sold the outrage of war in the form of emotions, patriotism, hatred, etc. and the audience and readers have bought the same with open hands. But in lieu of the same they forgot the duties and ethics of true journalism and started to act as mouthpiece of government officials and Public Relation officers from defense. **Parlez (2003)** it was found in the process that the reports and articles published were in the form of report and not well researched edited news article, most of the times evaluation of backgrounds and journalist's research was not there. *Yellowtimes.org* was the first site that was debarred for some time from presenting war related news because they had showcased the fatalities from U.S. troops during the war, and *'breach of contract'* was established as a reason for the same. **Hart (2005)** then in some time MSNBC joined the base and come up with a thought that this is the war with biggest story embedded in it and it is the duty of every journalist to cover the same and after this a number of other channels i.e. ABC, CBC, NBC, etc. joined the gang.

One of the greatest disgrace that was brought into light was the treatment to prisoners in Abu Gharib Prison, only a few still photos were declared from the prison but still those photos have brought forward the inhuman-torturing of prisoners and even death, the photo of the dead bodies of Saddam's son i.e. Uday and Qsay were the most naked, questionable photos. Then another event was the abduction of young reporter *Jessica Lynch* during the contact of Nasiriyah, she lost her way in the action and arrested by Iraqi soldiers. This event was distorted so many times and in so many ways that even *Washington Post* reported that *Jessica Lynch* was a soldier and killed in action till her last breath. Lynch was rescued in April, 2003.

These are only a few examples of unjustified glorification of war related events and there were many such events that were not so important but were glorified in relation to success of U.S. troops.

III. Occupation Phase

After the war was over, in terms U.S., an interim government was formed in Iraq and considered as a lawful body that was supposed to represent the Iraqi people. This event was also glorified in a hurry for example the *New York Times* stated this as '*The American Experiment in Iraq-An attempt to bring self-rule*' later on *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, joined the league and glorified the same in their own terms. **Kessler et al (2004)** Even the Prime Minister of this interim government in Iraq i.e. Ayad Alawi considered himself as a leader of such government that was in control of U.S.

Then on the other hand U.S. troops were still there in Iraq with a so called stature of peace keeping force, but after the war many of the resistance groups were created in different parts of Iraq and gradually they were attacking the U.S. soldiers, U.S. media again propagated that the current nationalism of Iraq is supporting the resistance by all means. Now in such a scenario the U.S. government was not having any answer to this resistance as the interim government was already formed and the American Media had already declared it as a democratic rule. **Friedman (2004)** This was the time when media houses from all over the world started to question the political stability of Iraq and started to find the reasons for the same, also the Bush administration remained in question for the so called WMD, Biological weapons, etc. which were never discovered.

CONCLUSION

Media has remained the integral part of every war fought and the stipulated role of media is to present the true picture of war to general public and also to support the army of home country, but the Iraq war was an exception to this phenomenon. There is no one in the world i.e. any news agency or media house that was in support of Saddam Husain or the horrific trail of 9/11. As a matter of fact no one ever had thought of that these two dimensions may have some kind of linkage as well, including the American citizens, until and unless people from Bush's administration publicize the same. For time being they were having the control over national media houses and newspapers and this made the whole country believe that Saddam Husain was behind the 9/11 attacks and he should be prosecuted for the same. This was the '*Black Propaganda*' of U.S. government and a war led by the same. Osama was never arrested, WMD never found but still the formation of interim government was considered as success of U.S. in Iraq i.e. mission accomplished, but the emergence of resistance groups and killing of American troops were few questions that remained

unanswered. In real terms it can be concluded that U.S. Media given up on ethics and social responsibility and became a medium of spreading the so called propaganda of U.S. government.

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