

SHIFTING POWER: US HEGEMONY AND THE MEDIA

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Abstract

US hegemony has been the most significant aspect of international relations since the fall of the Soviet Union. The past decade has seen the majority of the world shift under the cultural, economic and military influence of the US. This staggering and as yet unchecked power is in large part gained not through coercion but through persuasion. This ability to convince other actors in the world to act in a way that is beneficial to US interests is consistent with traditional Gramscian notions of hegemony. The content of the global media, as one of the primary disseminators of the hegemon's message inside civil society, should provide insight into the overall debate occurring within it. Thus an examination of the content of the global media leading up to the recent US invasion of Iraq could provide some insight into the relative strength of the global hegemon. The results of this study clearly suggest that the US's "power to define" is in decline and that the hegemon is in the midst of a crisis of authority that could be a sign of its irreversible decay.

INTRODUCTION

There can be little argument that today's world is one that is effectively dominated by one massive superpower. The United States of America is now responsible for more than a third of the global economy and has an unrivalled military, spending more on its armed forces than the next dozen countries combined (*The Economist* 2003:4). As Niall Ferguson (2003:8) recently wrote in *Newsweek*, "The United States is now an empire in all but name".

The US currently spends approximately 399 billion dollars per year on its military, nearly seven times that of Russia and 285 times larger than that of Iraq, the country it has invaded twice since it took on the role of the world's lone hegemon (CDI 2003). Economically, the US is similarly dominant as its 10.4 trillion dollar economy constitutes more than 32% of the world's GDP (World

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Bank 2003). In fact, the US economy is roughly the same size as the rest of the G7 countries combined, and excluding those G7 countries, it is about the same size as the rest of the world's economies collectively (Hofstra 2002). Politically, this dominance is seen in the leading role the US has taken in all realms of international relations, from brokering the Israeli/Palestinian peace process to effectively undermining the credibility of the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto accord by simply opposing them. In addition to this, the US is a veto-wielding member of the Security Council and at the head of virtually every other significant international military or economic body from the WTO to NATO.

Most significant for the purposes of this paper is the US's dominance in the realm of culture and specifically the institutions that govern the global dissemination of information. American, along with British companies, are the primary provider of films, music, television programming and most importantly news for the entire world (Magder 2003:31). In fact, in 2003 CNN alone reached more than 150 million homes in 212 countries around the world (Thussu 2003:118).

However, the pre-eminent position that the US now occupies, economically, militarily and politically around the world has its origins in the collapse of the Soviet empire and the end of the Cold War. Since the demise of the world's only other superpower and the US's main ideological rival, global public opinion has shifted towards the inherent "rightness" of the US worldview. It was generally believed by lesser developed nations that the way to success and prosperity was to emulate the US system and take an active role in the globalisation process. As the US's National Security Advisor Condoleeza Rice (2003:104) recently described the situation, "Nations around the world share a broad commitment to democracy, the rule of law, a market-based economy and open trade".

In effect this shift meant that the majority of the world now agreed on how development could best be achieved. So in essence the US had not only won the Cold War but had in fact won over the hearts and minds of a great many of the world's people and governments and created a globally shared world view.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war, the alliance of markets and foreign policy seemed triumphant. 'Globalisation' was on everyone's lips. The American vision would spread – though perhaps slowly – everywhere as more nations fell under its sway (Samuelson 2003:44).

In reality, it is the fact that so much of the world gravitated towards this American world view, that has largely given the world's only superpower its strength over the last fifteen years. It was believed that by adopting capitalist-market economies, liberal democracy and principles of free trade, the “have-nots” of the world would one day be able to join the “haves” as developed nations (Ibid). This “Washington Consensus” was largely believed to be the most fortuitous and expedient path to development and in turn impacted the soft power that the US held.

This power that the US is now largely thought to wield, in all areas of global-international relations, was described by Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci as hegemony. Gramsci defines hegemony as the “process of moral, philosophical, and political leadership that a social group attains only with the active consent of other important social groups” (Artz & Murphy 2003:1). In this way, a hegemonic class,² (in this case the United States) by owning and controlling the means of production and capital, including mental production in the form of the media,³ are able to support their hegemonic position. Traditionally, hegemonic classes are thought of as a part of the state level of analysis. However, for the purposes of this discussion hegemony will be examined on the macro or international level, and in this scenario, it is the US that occupies the position of hegemonic elite.

From a Gramscian perspective, real power is not achieved through the use of coercive force but rather through convincing the world to see things the way the hegemon wants them to, thereby creating a shared “common sense” (Hallin 1994: 59). It is this shared common sense that led most of the developing nations of the world to follow Washington's advice in many areas of economic development and has also contributed greatly to the “real” as well as “soft” power that the US has enjoyed in recent years.

² At this point it is necessary to briefly discuss and define the concept of class that will be operationalised throughout this paper. While it may be true that the traditional class struggle defined by Marx may be obsolete in the classic bourgeois, proletariat sense, it can still be said that the world is made up of a group that has power and several other groups that have that power impressed upon them. It is this situation consisting of a hierarchical strata of power that we speak of when we talk of ruling or elite classes and subservient classes throughout this paper.

³ Throughout this paper the term “media” will be used as a singular noun defined by the Oxford Dictionary 5th Edition (1995:727) as “The main means of communicating with large numbers of people, especially television, radio and newspapers”.

The adoption of this American common sense by the majority of the world has allowed the US to use more than just its military or economic superiority to achieve its current position as the world's most powerful nation. It has allowed them to use the proverbial carrot more often than the stick when attempting to get their way in international relations. However, this system can last only as long as the audience that is subjected to it agrees to buy into the worldview that they are handed. And for this to happen, they must believe that either the system is benefiting them or that they have no choice. Change inside this system can occur only when the dominant worldview of the hegemonic elites (in this case the US) begins to break down. This ability to convince others to do as the hegemon desires without coercion is possibly the most significant aspect of US power.

It is argued that one of the ways that the US is able to create this shared world view, and maintain its status as global hegemon, is through the use of the Western-based global media system. Most of the world's information flows from the US outward and this propagation of Western based ideas throughout the world is one of the most powerful ways of Americanising global public opinion (Magder 2003:31). This is a system which, when functioning properly, can give the US the unprecedented power to make other global actors think that their interests and those of the hegemon are one in the same. This is hegemonic leadership as expressed by Lee Artz (2003, p.16-17):

Leadership only becomes hegemonic because they convince others to become allies through persuasive political and cultural practices, which necessarily require normalized interpretations best communicated to the masses via the media. Hence, capitalist hegemony needs parallel media hegemony as an institutionalised, systematic means of educating, persuading, and representing subordinate classes to particular cultural practices within the context of capitalist norms. If culture is the ideological cement of society, then, to secure corporate interests, capitalist globalisation needs media hegemony to recruit, tame, and popularise interpretations, information and cultural behaviour complementary to deregulation, privatisation, and commercialisation.

In other words, the global media system is one of the most powerful ways that the US maintains its control of global power through the creation of shared ideas and goals. It is this media system that serves as one of the greatest tools inside the hegemonic process as outlined by Gramsci (1971:177-185).

It is important to note here that truly hegemonic leadership also presupposes a claim by the hegemon that they are in effect acting in the interest of everyone. Based on our earlier assumption that the US is the world's dominant hegemon, this begs the question of whether or not the US is claiming to act in the interest of all the subservient groups it controls. In other words, does the US, at least outwardly, assume to act in the interests of all the nations in the world? The rhetoric of US President George W. Bush as he recently addressed the National Endowment for Democracy at the US Chamber of Commerce would seem to suggest that the answer to this question is a resounding yes. In his statement, where he justifies the invasion of Iraq, Bush expresses how the US is framing its actions as beneficial for the world as a whole.

In fact, the prosperity, and social vitality and technological progress of a people are directly determined by extent of their liberty. Freedom honours and unleashes human creativity -- and creativity determines the strength and wealth of nations. Liberty is both the plan of Heaven for humanity, and the best hope for progress here on Earth (Bush 2003).

This is not to say that these actions are in the best interest of the other actors in the world, but it does suggest that this is how the US is attempting to sell these actions to the global community. Therefore, the US would certainly fit the traditional notion of a hegemonic group, which uses institutions such as the media, and occasionally compromises some aspects of control, to make the subordinate classes feel the system is working to their advantage.

However, some chinks may be starting to appear in this US-led global hegemony. Politically, the world's only superpower appears to be becoming less and less influential in the world's "soft power" game, which simply stated, is the ability to make people do what you want without using force (Magder 2003:30-32). This apparent weakness can be seen in the US's failure to convince the world that its recent invasion of Iraq was justified, and in its apparent inability to peacefully rebuild Iraq and Afghanistan (Ferguson 2003:11). These difficulties point to a serious weakness in the perceived supremacy of the US military while similar failures in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process point to a possible weakening of the US's ability to effectively use "soft power" to achieve their policy objectives. In addition to this, a seemingly softened US stance when dealing with so called rogue states like North Korea, Syria and Iran seems to be emerging, which could also point to a perceived loss of power.

...gone is the tough talk toward Syria. On Iran, too, the administration has increasingly deferred to the United Nations and international Atomic Energy Agency. Even on North Korea, Bush has softened his adamant refusal to negotiate any kind of deal before Pyong-Yang gives up its nuclear program (Hirsh 2003: 34).

Economically, there also appear to be signs of weakness in the hegemon. Some analysts have suggested that a sinking dollar and a strengthening Euro may mean that the US's number one position in the global economy could one day come into question. Furthermore, many of the poor countries of the world that believed US-inspired governments and economies to be the path to development success have been sorely disappointed. As the gap between the rich and the poor countries of the world continues to widen, some evidence of this failure can be found inside the sole remaining superpower's vanquished Cold War foe: "As for Eastern Europe and Russia - the formerly second world - shock-therapy privatisation directed by Harvard-educated economists has brought a 'total economic collapse'" (Kagarlitsky 1997:19). The result of this collapse has been that more than ten times as many children in this region now live in poverty than while under Soviet rule and the "reasonable" standard of living that could be expected under the former Soviet government has now disappeared (European Children's Trust 2000:14). Signs of dissenting voices can also be seen in the growing anti-globalisation movements that have caused a stir at WTO meetings in Seattle and Quebec City in recent years as well as in the emergence of the G21 inside the WTO and the defection of traditional Western allies.

These examples could be seen as a realization that US power is finite and that the empire is overextended (Hirsh 2003:34). It seems at least possible that certain segments of the world are beginning to reject the US common sense that has dominated unchallenged for the last decade and a half.

This possible loss of strength for the American hegemon could be perceived as a weakening of the persuasive power of the dominant US world view or as Sardar (1999) put it, a weakening of the hegemon's "power to define" and therefore its hegemonic power inside global civil society.⁴ This last point is crucial since it is

⁴ Throughout this paper the notion of civil society will refer to Gramsci's definition as it pertains to the hegemonic process. This is defined as the area where common sense is developed through discourse between institutions that are somewhat autonomous from the state (e.g. media, education system, and churches) Global civil society will be understood to be this arena taken outside state borders (Baylis & Smith 2001:210).

discourse within this civil society that generates the consensus that gives the hegemon its strength. Further to this, since the media is one of the most important ways a hegemon defines its worldview, it is reasonable to assume that a decline in the relative power of the hegemon could be visible inside the global media construct. It is with this in mind that the basis for this article was conceived.

In short, if the United States is the dominant hegemonic force in the world and the Western-based media helps to facilitate that hegemonic process and strengthen it, then, if systemic change is going to occur, some change in global media content should be identifiable. So, if the US is losing its hegemonic control and it's globally accepted world view is beginning to be questioned, then this shift should be reflected inside civil society and therefore inside the media.

This problem is both interesting and relevant because the current US hegemony has been defining what is talked about not only around the table at the Security Council but also around dinner tables from Philadelphia to New Delhi. That is because this dialogue is in some very significant ways being shaped by the Western-based media from which it often emanates. So, if this conversation, and the terms it is being discussed in, is created by the West, it is likely leaving out the interests of those in the Eastern and Southern reaches of the globe. This is particularly relevant given world events following September 11th 2001, as the US and its "Coalition of the Willing" have since effectively conducted diplomacy via the barrel of a gun, despite a general global consensus that these actions were wrong.

The general purpose of this article is to apply Gramsci's hegemonic theory to an empirical analysis of media content leading up to the recent invasion of Iraq. Due to the fact that the media is an integral part of the public sphere, it is assumed that a greater understanding of the current dialogue going on in civil society can be achieved through this process. It is hoped that a comparative analysis of the media prior to the recent invasion of Iraq could allow for some speculation about the health of US global hegemony when compared with similar studies of the media prior to the first Gulf War.

GLOBAL MEDIA AND GLOBAL HEGEMONY

The media is a major player in the creation and dissemination of the hegemon's worldview. Therefore, if the media is failing to adequately relay the hegemon's message then this could provide an indication that the hegemon's real power is in

decline. This could then provide an indication that the circumstances for the potential defection of “historic blocs” and the creation of a counterhegemonic movement are in fact in existence. Antonio Gramsci spoke about the need for historical blocs to come together in order to create a hegemonic or counterhegemonic force (although he never specifically used the latter term). This article will analyse the role of global media in this hegemonic process and see if there is in fact the potential for a counterhegemony to emerge through opposing historic blocs. This question will be addressed methodologically through an analysis of the global media through the critical lens of hegemonic theory.

It is often argued in the analysis of hegemonic theory that the media is an institution used by elites to exercise their hegemonic power. According to Thomas Gitlin “the mass media produce fields of definition and association, symbol and rhetoric, through which ideology becomes manifest and concrete” (1980:2-3). It can be extrapolated from this that forces of counterhegemony could also utilize the media in this fashion. If this is the case, signs of an emerging counterhegemony could be spotted by searching for elements of a rejection of the dominant power and its message inside the global mass media construct.

The analysis of differing forms of media and how they react to and report on certain events, can provide a number of insights into how this institution is manipulated by powerful elites, as they attempt to control or “spin” public perception. Ciaran McCullough expresses this relationship between media and its reliance on ruling elites in his book *Media Power*: “...certain groups in society are recognized by the media as accredited sources, and as such they have privileged access to (and greater claims on) media coverage. Their access comes from their institutional power, their representative status, or their claims to expert knowledge” (McCullough 2002:68).

In other words the media is constructed in such a way that it is more apt to follow the lead of “legitimate” elites than of dissenting voices. This is not to say that there is not debate within the elite class. However, there are certain underlying principles that are consistent within the elite class and it is these similarities that make up the core of the elite’s worldview. For example, there may be debate inside the elite class about how best to spread liberal capitalism and democracy around the world, but there is no debate about whether or not it should in fact be disseminated. In other words, there is no “macro” argument about the validity of the liberal capitalist system, even if there is an ongoing “micro” debate about how

it is to be implemented. Thus the overriding message that is transmitted to the media by the elite class remains the same.

This relationship, arguably stemming from the economic and cultural framework around the media (Herman & McChesney 1997), makes the analysis of media a key component when examining hegemony in the twenty-first century. It suggests that media content can often reflect the ideas and positions of hegemonic elites rather than of the many differing viewpoints inside global civil society.

Having said this, it was determined that an analysis of the content of certain players in the global media system could shine a critical light on this hegemonic process. As a time frame for this study we chose the week leading up to the most recent conflict in Iraq. This time line was selected for two primary reasons. First, it allowed for an examination of a case where the world's primary hegemonic power was attempting to set limits and define the context of global debate about a single issue. Second, in 1991 there was a similar military conflict in Iraq that could be cross-referenced in relation to the relative growing or shrinking of the hegemonic entity's power to define (Sardar 1999:44; McCullagh 2002:15) .

Of course these two instances are not identical. The 1991 conflict was backed by a UN resolution and involved an Iraqi invasion of a sovereign nation. This difference could be explained by a lack of persuasive ability by the hegemon inside the Security Council and in the public sphere (both aspects of global civil society) but the fact remains that it is still a difference. However, there are certainly enough similarities to assume that some cross analysis could be useful. By doing this, we hoped to gain an insight into the relative control that the world's primary hegemonic power, The United States of America and its allies, had during this period.

For the purposes of this study seventeen daily newspapers from different regions of the globe as well as four major broadcast news networks (24/7) were analysed.⁵ A combination of regional, political, and circulation/penetration considerations

⁵ Empirical sources from the US were: *USA Today*, *International Herald Tribune*, *CNN*, and *Fox News*. Sources from the UK were: *BBC Online*, *The Guardian*, and the *Independent*. Sources from Australia were: *The Australian*, and *Canberra Times*. Sources from Asia and Africa were: *Izvestia* (Russia), *The Hindu* (India), *The People's Daily* (China), *The Daily Yomiuri* (Japan), *Arab News* (Saudi Arabia), *Al-Jazeera Network* (Qatar), and *The African Times* (South Africa). Sources from the Americas were: *Toronto Star* (Canada), and *The Buenos Aires Herald* (Argentina). Sources from Europe were: *Le Monde* (France), *FAZ* (Germany) and *Politiken* (Denmark). All sources were examined for the period March 13-19, 2003.

were used to determine the sample, which included at least one paper from six of the world's continents and incorporated the use of five languages and more than five hundred individual samples.

The concept of framing was central to our analysis of the content of these media outlets and requires further explanation at this point. Our analysis was based on the framing theory outlined by Robert Entman (1991). Entman says frames construct meaning in communication messages (articles and TV news stories) by asking four basic questions:

- 1) What is the problem that is being reported on?
- 2) What is the cause of the problem?
- 3) Who is to blame or praise?
- 4) What is to be done or what is going to happen?

Framing works by using language to send the reader or viewer a specific message and “[t]he use of particular words to describe events and issues represents not merely the choice of a descriptive phrase but also the choice of an attitude towards the event or issue” (McCullagh 2002:23). Some examples of words or phrases found in this analysis that can be considered frame markers are “dictator” (in reference to President Saddam Hussein), “defiant” (in reference to actors) or “collateral damage” as a euphemism for civilian casualties. It is the inherent meaning of these “loaded” terms that helps to send a specific message to the reader/viewer of a story. This message can often carry significantly different meanings based on the language it uses. For example, the US administration would much rather see a debate about the human costs of conflict framed in terms of “collateral damage” rather than in terms of the number of “dead women and children”. This is how the story is framed or in media-speak, it is the “spin” that the content has been given. In this way, the media does not tell people precisely what to think but does tell them what to think about and through loaded language provides a rough ‘frame’ for that debate.

This concept of framing means that the media works as a tool to get a given agent's message across to an audience. This analysis consisted of a careful reading of the selected articles covering the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003, followed by an identification of the ‘frames’ they contained. This question of framing will be addressed by answering the four questions outlined by Entman and listed above. Operationally, for the purpose of this study

we have listed ten categories⁶ that answer Entman's first question: what is the problem. This choice was justified by the fact that our categories were generally taken from Wilhelm Kempf's analysis of the media during the first Gulf War (Kempf 1996:2-10). Therefore, this choice would provide a fairly consistent framework for a comparison and cross-referencing of these two somewhat similar events.

Today's current environment sees one hegemonic power, the US, often working to control or frame the way the entire world talks about and views certain issues. Of course it is an over-simplification to say that there is one simple and overriding ideology operating within the United States. There are a number of variations on the basic principles that encompass the American worldview. In this sense the US is a pluralist nation with a wide variety of views on how to tackle the specific micro problems that it encounters.

However, on a purely macro level there can be no doubt that in the international arena the US acts as a unitary actor displaying one set of concrete core assumptions and beliefs. These include an unwavering support for the general pillars of liberal democracy, capitalist free market economies and transparent and democratically elected governments. In other words, agents inside the US may argue how it is best to spread these concepts throughout the world but they rarely, if ever, question the actual validity of these core ideas (at least not significantly). One example of this agenda is that "[a] global media culture is likely to embody many western capitalist values such as the free market, consumerism, individualism and commercialism" (Jones & Jones 1999:225-232).

Those values, based on core assumptions and beliefs, may not be the same ones shared in every country, but since "[m]ore and more people across the globe are receiving the same message from the same centre of commercial power" (Ibid), the global community is subjected to and influenced by those values and beliefs.

⁶ The ten categories, based roughly on the previous study done by Kempf (1996), are: (1) weapons of mass destruction; (2) effectiveness of the UN, focussing specifically on discussions in the security council; (3) US unilateralism and/or imperialistic actions; (4) the global economy and the impact of a potential conflict on it; (5) domestic spin, that is, the political or economic impacts an invasion would have for individual states; (6) "war on terrorism" and its relationship to Iraq, including articles mentioning 9/11 or Al-Queda link to Iraq; (7) coalition building, specifically regarding a second UN resolution or the debate over the validity of an invasion; (8) technical or logistical aspects of war; (9) human rights and potential suffering resulting from an invasion; and (10) miscellaneous or other themes. Note that while many categories may have been mentioned inside any given article, the cause was attributed to the category referred to most prominently throughout the text.

In other words, state boundaries are becoming more and more porous and vulnerable to the ideas and symbols of the information providers, making them much less culturally self-contained (Webster 2003:59). This shift in how worldviews are created and disseminated has been assessed by some as:

The universal mode of address may be achieved through a dilution of values from a specific culture (often a Western, middle class mode of talking such as CNN) and a unique form of address may be achieved through a specific combination of universally acceptable symbols.... Thus, global media are capable of bridging the gap between the universal and the specific, although they often do so by using a somewhat artificial format (Stald & Tufte 2002:83).

Therefore, understanding the way this international media system works now carries even greater significance when attempting to understand power and hegemony in a global context.

Pragmatically speaking, there can be no doubt that the majority of what we call global media is based in the West and more specifically in the United States. “Western countries predominate in the flow of news and information...and of the Western countries, the United States is easily the most dominant entity in every facet of the world communication system” (Magder 2003:31). The truth of this statement is underlined by the fact that “the United States exports more media products to more places globally than does any other country” (Ekachai, Greer & Hinchcliff-Pelias 1999:146).

However, global media outlets are still controlled by the same elites who held this power when the media was state centric. So, in essence, a small group of wealthy Westerners are controlling the flow of information for the majority of the world. And for the most part they still operate with the same fundamental goals in mind, simply carried over to the international scene. In other words, they are market-driven businesses, which must adhere to the demands of a fast-paced and competitive media industry. Therefore, the global media is providing a bridge between the hegemonic state’s local issues and the consciousness and worldview of the rest of the planet (Silverstone 2002:107). Thus, it seems clear that the entire non-Western world is receiving news that originates (at least partly) outside of its state borders and is disseminated through the filter of a major Western media corporation. It can thereby be inferred that this “news” arrives pre-

packaged, accompanied by its own ideologies, assumptions and views about the world.

ANALYSIS OF THE MEDIA DURING THE TWO GULF WARS

Initially, all twenty-one of our media sources were examined together to glean macro results about how the war in Iraq was framed. Then they were broken down in specific ways in order to discern micro results. Firstly, we wanted to observe the way in which the US and, to a lesser extent, the other countries in the “Coalition of the Willing” tried to justify the invasion of Iraq. Secondly, we wanted to examine the way the media of the world presented their news stories and how they framed them.

These questions were primarily answered by examining the responses to the two questions, *what is the cause of the problem* and *who is to blame*.⁷ However, prior to examining the specific results of this most recent study it is useful to look at some of the findings from media studies of the first US-led invasion of Iraq in 1991.

In Wilhelm Kempf 's 1996 study of media content during the first Gulf War he found that the US-led coalition is blamed 38.8% of the time, while Iraq is blamed in 61.2% of the articles (Kempf 1996:4-5). Kempf found that the media primarily blamed Iraqi aggression as the cause of the war and that this explanation was rarely or never questioned. Iraq’s claim of having historical rights over Kuwait’s territory was often mentioned, but its credibility was usually doubted or denied. The media spent very little time trying to explore the possibility of the anti-Iraq coalition being motivated by the same selfish interests ascribed to Iraq. On the contrary, the press depicted the members of the coalition as acting with the main purpose of liberating Kuwait and only rarely was the alliance suspected of acting to secure a supply of oil and stabilize petroleum prices around the world. So, from these results it can be inferred that the US hegemon had a secure grip over the global public perception of the conflict.

⁷ “Who is to blame” is divided into five categories: (1) US/UK and the “coalition of the willing”; (2) Iraq/Saddam Hussein; (3) Unwilling and active opposers [e.g. France, Russia, Germany, Canada] (4) UN i.e. the ineffectiveness or powerlessness of it; (5) Neutral/miscellaneous i.e. articles neutral in their views or blaming other nations or actors not mentioned above. See previous footnote for categorisation of causes.

A similar study by Nohrstedt and Ottosen found the following attitude patterns towards main actors in the first Gulf War.

TABLE 1. ATTITUDE PATTERNS TOWARDS MAIN ACTORS IN FIRST GULF WAR

ACTORS	% Positive	% Negative	% Balanced
George Bush	20	4	76
Saddam Hussein	4	34	62
Mikhail Gorbachev	12	4	84
John Major	13	0	87
Francois Mitterand	8	8	84
J. Perez de Cuellar	10	0	90
Norman Schwarzkopf	40	1	58
Bill Clinton	17	17	67

Source: Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2000:192

A conversion of the above table leaves us with an overwhelmingly positive attitude for the representatives of the 1991 anti-Iraqi coalition (total of 41 positive percentage points for its leaders, compared to just 12 negative), a positive attitude for the UN Secretary General (10 to 0), and a decidedly negative depiction of Iraq's President (34 to 4). In general, Nohrstedt and Ottosen find that media in the first Gulf War never actually strayed too far away from the hegemon's propaganda line.

Nohrstedt and Ottosen suggest that "if the homeland of the media is involved in the conflict, news reporting is expected to function as a propaganda channel of the nation-state" (2000:250). However, there may be varying degrees of support for a conflict (from the media) depending on the significance that the conflict has for the nation in question. If the dominant superpower is an actor in the conflict, its propaganda is likely to find its way into news content and, by virtue of the power of the hegemon's media, generally set the agenda for media around the globe. Thus, the dominant power's propaganda is reiterated, wittingly or not, by all the rest. Nohrstedt and Ottosen also note that selective omission of events follows the same pattern of dependency on the hegemon's interest (Ibid). The one thing that both of these studies seems to point to is that the US was able to "spin" the perception of the conflict around the world in its own terms and that the hegemon's power to define was alive and well.

These results are in stark contrast to those gathered from the study of media content prior to the most recent conflict in Iraq. Leading up to the United States' recent invasion of Iraq the US government attempted to frame the need for an invasion of Iraq in two ways. One was the link the Bush administration tried to show between Saddam Hussein's Iraq and WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction). The other was the connection between Iraq and the "War on Terror," including implied links to Al-Qaeda, Osama Bin-Laden and the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US. The results in this recent study show that the media of the world (including the United States and its allies) actually used those two ways to frame their news very rarely, at 3% and 1% respectively (Chart 1).⁸ So, even though these two aspects were the main reasons that the US president and the Western-based "Coalition of the Willing" gave for the invasion of Iraq, they were almost never discussed in the media.

Instead, the world media was more apt to see the invasion and ensuing occupation linked to issues such as human rights abuses and US unilateralism. In this way it is obvious that the US was not able to use their hegemonic power to convince the world to look at the conflict through their lens. In fact, the hegemon was often framed as the aggressor and as morally bankrupt.

This study also investigated whether there was a decline in the ability of the US regime to both direct and deflect blame for the conflict away from themselves and towards other actors. The findings show quite clearly that while this was the case during the first Gulf War, it was certainly not the case this time. In fact even inside the US's own media, 21% of the stories blame the US and the Coalition of the Willing for the conflict in Iraq. This is more than the amount of blame put on the non-helpers (countries like France and Germany that opposed the war) at 17% and is only marginally higher than the 30% attributed to Iraq (chart 8). What can be deduced from this is that the US government was unable to set the agenda not only in the global media but also in its own back yard.

The results of this blame game are even more illuminating when the entire world's media is taken into account. The global media, including the US and other coalition countries, blamed the US and the coalition in 45% of the stories, compared with Iraq at 17% (chart 3). Not surprisingly, the unwilling countries blamed the US in 56% of the stories and only blamed Iraq in 12% (chart 4).

⁸ Statistical breakdowns of the media prior to the most recent Gulf War are presented in graph form at the end of the article.

Within the media of the “Coalition of the Willing”, countries who actually support the US in their case against Iraq, 40% of the articles put blame on the US, whereas Iraq is only blamed in 21% of the cases (chart 5). The fact that Iraq is only blamed half as often as the US firstly suggests that the media within the coalition is not convinced by US attempts to frame Iraq as the problem. Secondly, it shows a trend in global public opinion going against the US, again showing that US credibility in the media and therefore inside civil society could be in decline.

One major conclusion is clear from the results of this examination of the media. When compared to the studies of the last Iraq war an apparent decline in the US’s credibility is observed. This is clear because there has been a noticeable shift in the power of the US to define problems and attribute blame. Where in the first Gulf War Iraq was primarily blamed for the conflict, in this recent study it is the US that is primarily cast in a negative light. Also, and perhaps most important, the results suggest that there is dissent inside the US coalition and perhaps within the hegemon itself.

ETHICAL VS. UNETHICAL HEGEMONS

During the Cold War the US was cast in a competitive role against the other dominant hegemon of the time, the USSR. This meant that there was an inherent legitimacy or “rightness” to the US worldview as it was simply held up as a credible and logical alternative to global communism. This allowed the US to hold its subordinate blocs together simply by framing their positions as necessary to oppose the inherent wrongness of the “evil empire” (Mansbach 1994:414). This situation changed after the end of the Cold War as the US no longer had a natural enemy and their worldview had seemingly won out over the communist alternative. As Francis Fukuyama put it, the world had reached “the end of history” and the values of democracy and liberal-capitalism espoused by the West were now the only remaining legitimate worldview (Fukuyama 1992). This allowed the US and the Western democracies that made up the core of its hegemonic bloc to have a certain amount of leeway with the rest of the world. US common sense was assumed to be the path to development and progress around the world (Augelli & Murphy 1988: 125-140; Shaw 1994:11; Hallin 1994:59).

The question that is to be posed at this time is whether or not that “honeymoon period” is over. It must now be asked whether the US has effectively acted as what Gramsci referred to as an ethical hegemon since the end of the Cold War.

However, before this question can be answered, a better understanding of the difference between ethical and unethical hegemonies is required.

Gramsci describes an ethical hegemon as one that aspires and works to raise the subservient historic blocs under its control to its level (Augelli & Murphy 1988:125-140). By this Gramsci means that the blocs that make up the hegemon's power base must be lifted economically, politically and culturally to that of the elites. An unethical hegemon, in essence, is one that has failed to listen to the subservient blocs in global civil society. Thus, the dialogue between the hegemon and the blocs is one-way and top-down in nature. Gramsci says that if this happens, the blocs that have submitted to the hegemon, through discourse and compromise in civil society, begin to defect and reject the hegemon's worldview. It is at this time that a hegemon can be considered to be unethical in nature (Ibid). To determine whether the US global hegemony is unethical or ethical is a subjective task at best. However, the simple fact that the economic and cultural disparity between the US and the majority of the world is growing, leads one to believe that a case could be made for the position that the US is in fact an unethical hegemon (McGrew 2000).

Furthermore, the US has in the past stated that one of its goals was to maintain the economic disparity that exists in the world (Pilger 2003:120). Similarly, many of the international organizations and institutions that the US leads are often cited as helping to increase this gap between the US and the rest (Li 2001:51-57). These facts combine to make it a reasonable assumption that at least some of the blocs that make up the US hegemony may view their hegemon as unethical. It is only when the hegemon has been found to be unethical that a counterhegemony can potentially emerge (Downing 2001:15; Augelli & Murphy 1988:125).

Conditions for an emerging counterhegemony are described as the point where historic blocs begin to defect from the hegemon and have the potential to come together in opposition to it (Ibid). At this time the defecting blocs will have to go through the same hegemonic process in state or global civil society where they suppress their micro goals and come together to focus on their common macro goal (Ibid). In this case that macro goal would be rising up and opposing the unethical hegemonic power of the US. The hegemon then has two choices: (1) it can make concessions and begin to listen to the subservient blocs, thereby assailing their concerns and reintroducing them into the hegemonic structure; or (2) it can ignore these demands. If the hegemon chooses to ignore them, the

subservient blocs will challenge the hegemon, who will in turn lose its power base.

It has been suggested by some academics that the most likely time for structural change inside a system is during a time of crisis (Molotch & Lester 1974:235-260). This is because during a crisis, events unfold unexpectedly and at too quick of a pace for the hegemon to adequately frame issues that are to be discussed in civil society (Ibid). The inability to adequately frame hegemonic discourse then leads to the emergence of more opposing views, which in turn diminishes the hegemon's power to define (Hallin 1994:55). If this is the case, then this dissenting discourse should be observable inside the media during a time of crisis or conflict. It could be argued that with the current global situation, where there are a number of unpopular US-led conflicts, we have reached this time of crisis.

This fact, combined with the knowledge that the media is one of the primary tools for discourse inside civil society, links the emergence of dissent in the media to the emergence of counterhegemony or at the very least, the possible defection of historic blocs. The question then becomes whether or not we are seeing signs inside the global media, and elsewhere, that this defection is indeed beginning to take place.

CONCLUSION

As previously stated, the general purpose of this article is to apply Gramsci's hegemonic theory to an empirical analysis of media content leading up to the recent invasion of Iraq. Because the media is an integral part of the public sphere, it is believed that a better understanding of the current dialogue going on in civil society could be achieved through this process. It is hoped that a comparative analysis of the media prior to the recent invasion of Iraq could allow for some speculation about the health of US global hegemony. In theory, one would assume that an effective hegemon would be able to dictate the parameters of a debate inside global civil society in terms that they choose. The general picture formed from this empirical study of the media, is that there were and are several debates surrounding the war. In essence, the fact that there was no global consensus suggests that the US was unable to control the discourse leading up to the war and frame the situation to its advantage. It is also significant to note that when compared to the first conflict in Iraq the onus of blame allocated inside the global media has shifted. Where in the first Gulf War it was Iraq who shouldered the

majority of the blame, during the recent invasion it was the US that was primarily determined to be culpable. This fact alone suggests that the credibility and therefore the hegemonic power of the US could be in decline.

In short, the debate reflected in the media does not follow the agenda put forth by the US and its allies. The WMD debate, which the “Coalition of the Willing” used as a pretext to invade Iraq, is a non-issue even to the majority of the media from the coalition itself. Japan is the sole exception, which might have to do with Tokyo’s own WMD concerns about the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Surprisingly, the WMD issue matters much more to Al-Jazeera and Arab News than to the rest of the media, excluding the Japanese-based Daily Yomiuri. Proximity and refutations could play a role in their concern with the topic. The alleged links between Iraq and different terrorist groups, another key reason given by the US for the invasion, are outright dismissed by the media, even in the US. The human cost of the eventual war ranks seventh among the ten categories in the study. Despite the efforts of the *Toronto Star*, *Arab News* and *African News*, the casualties of the coming war do not get much attention in the media.

The topical analysis of the media in the scope of this study seems to give credence to the hypothesis that the hegemon and its allies, despite commanding an enviable media influence, were not able to swing the debate towards “their” issues. The results seem to pose the question, could this be the beginning of the end of the hegemon’s power to define?

The analysis of the blame assigned to the actors in the political drama preceding the war seems to be consistent with such a view. The “Coalition of the Willing” is deplored in half of the articles. The articles that either divide the blame more or less equally between all sides or remain neutral come in second place. Iraq comes third in this order, being blamed for the conflict only one third as many times the “Coalition of the Willing”. The “unwilling”, that is Germany, France, Russia and company are the target of scorn in just one-tenth of the articles. The United Nations seem to attract the least criticism (less than 4 percent, while being the topic of nearly three times more stories), which seems to confirm the hypothesis from the topical analysis: people around the world question the global sheriff (the US) more than the world city hall in the form of the UN.

While it is not surprising to see Arab News as the primary carrier for criticism of the “willing”, it is worth noting that the coalition is getting some of its toughest treatment from the American *International Herald Tribune* the Danish *Politiken*,

the Canadian *Toronto Star* and the Australian *Canberra Times*. With *Politiken* and *Canberra Times* published in member countries of the anti-Iraqi coalition, the results seem to point to a significant fault line both between and within the countries comprising the West. The results seem to say that the US-led coalition was unable to convince its own media, let alone that of the world, of the rightness of its invasion.

The defection of the majority of the West seems even more interesting given the backdrop of the careful pronouncements in the media from Russia and China. While generally disapproving of the US-UK push for war, *Izvestia* and *People's Daily* acknowledge, both tacitly and explicitly, that confronting the US openly would be a mistake. Calculations of economic and geopolitical factors colour the debate in these media in pragmatic shades. Given that both Russia and China had their own concerns, like issues of terrorism, oil prices and trade relations, it is not surprising that the media in those countries remained fairly balanced in their critique of the situation.

When these empirical results are analysed through the lens of hegemonic theory, some intriguing assumptions and conclusions can be made. It can be said that there has been a significant shift in global public opinion against the US between the last Gulf War and the current invasion of Iraq. It has also been shown that the US is the primary global hegemon. Next, the way the US uses the media to disseminate its own worldview has been explained. Furthermore, the appearance of dissenting global opinions inside the world media has been shown to be a reflection of the discourse going on inside global civil society.

If this is in fact the case, then one can assume that this dissent inside civil society could be an early sign of historic blocs underneath the US hegemony beginning to defect. In other words, we could be witnessing the decay of US hegemonic power. This does not mean that this decay is in any way permanent or irreversible, but it does mean that more and more the US is being framed as an unethical hegemon. This fact, combined with the global crisis presented by the ongoing situation in Iraq, could be said to provide the conditions for the coming together of these defecting blocs. Further to this point it can be said that this coming together of historic blocs is one of the early signs of a cohesive counterhegemonic force.

However, having said this there are still a number of variables that would have to occur for this counterhegemonic scenario to play itself out. Firstly, these dissenting blocs would have to come together and put their individual concerns

aside in favour of focusing on their shared macro goal (opposing the unethical hegemon). This in and of itself is a monumental task that is almost impossible to comprehend, but it is a necessary condition for a counterhegemonic movement. Gramsci envisioned this process on a state level but since it has been shown that there is a global hegemon, these same requirements would have to be met on a global scale. Secondly, the US would have to ignore these dissenting blocs and fail to usurp their concerns and make them their own, thereby disrupting the cohesiveness and effectiveness of the counterhegemonic movement. Even so, it can certainly be said that the conditions are ripe for the emergence of a counterhegemonic force to confront the US global dominance. Due to this situation the hegemon is now faced with a critical foreign policy choice. The US can either begin to listen to the concerns of the blocs that make up their hegemony or they can ignore these criticisms and undermine their own legitimacy and power in the process. If the US begins to fail in the arena of consensus making inside civil society, the inherent rightness of their worldview comes into question and the universality of American common sense is undermined. How to confront this crisis of authority is one of the most important choices that the world's only superpower and ruling hegemon will. This choice will determine whether or not a counterhegemonic force will rise to power, or if the US will hold onto or tighten its grip on the world.

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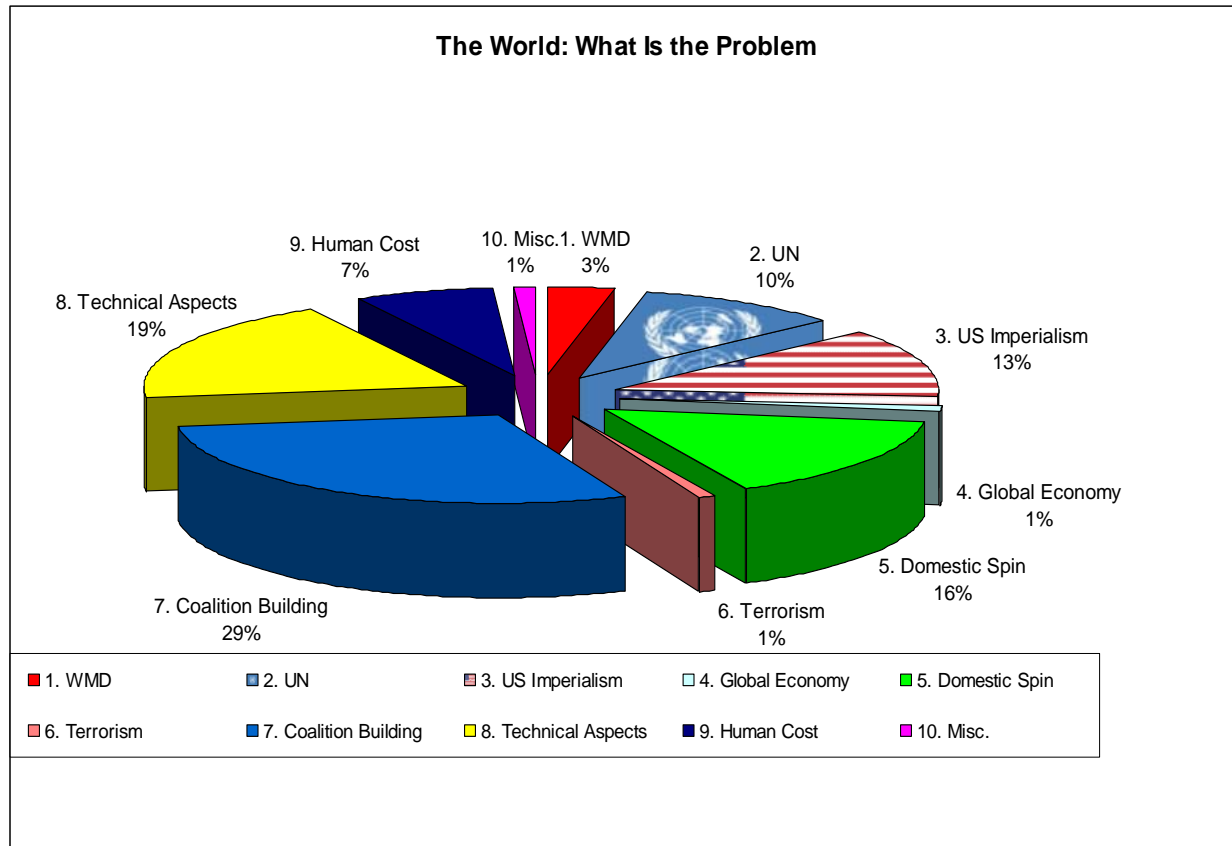
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RESULTS INTERPRETATION CHARTS⁹

CHART 1. TOPICAL DISTRIBUTION OF ALL UNITS IN THE SAMPLE



⁹ The source for charts 1-5 and chart 8 is the authors' own empirical data.

CHART 2. TOPICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE NEWS FROM US-BASED MEDIA

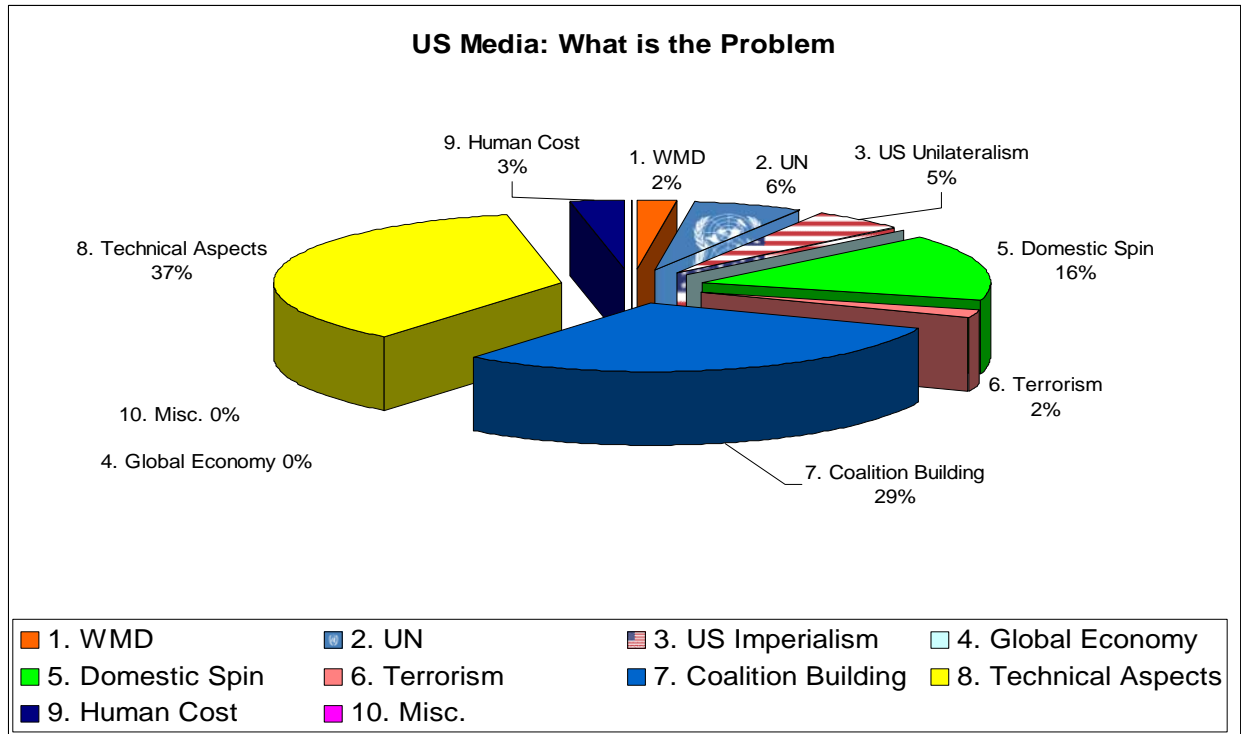


CHART 3. BLAME DISTRIBUTION FROM THE TOTAL SAMPLE

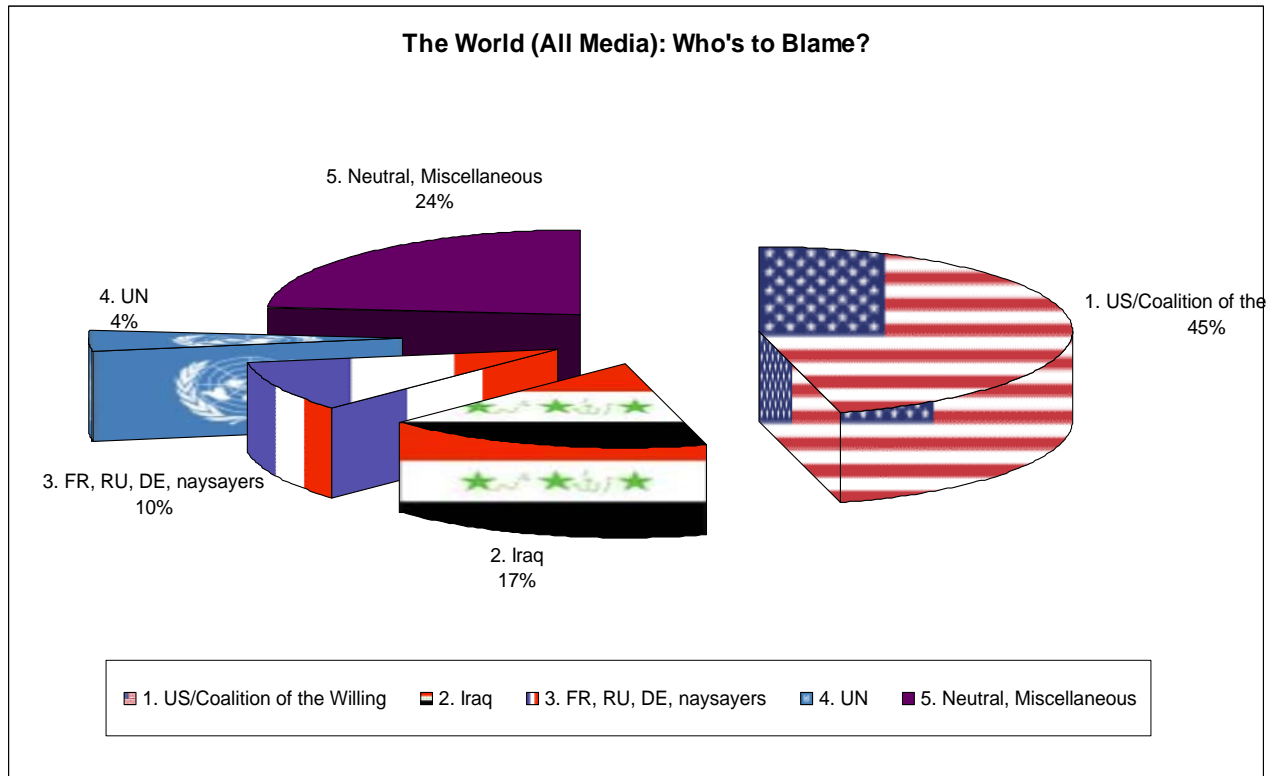


CHART 4. BLAME DISTRIBUTION - COUNTRIES OPPOSING THE US INTERVENTION

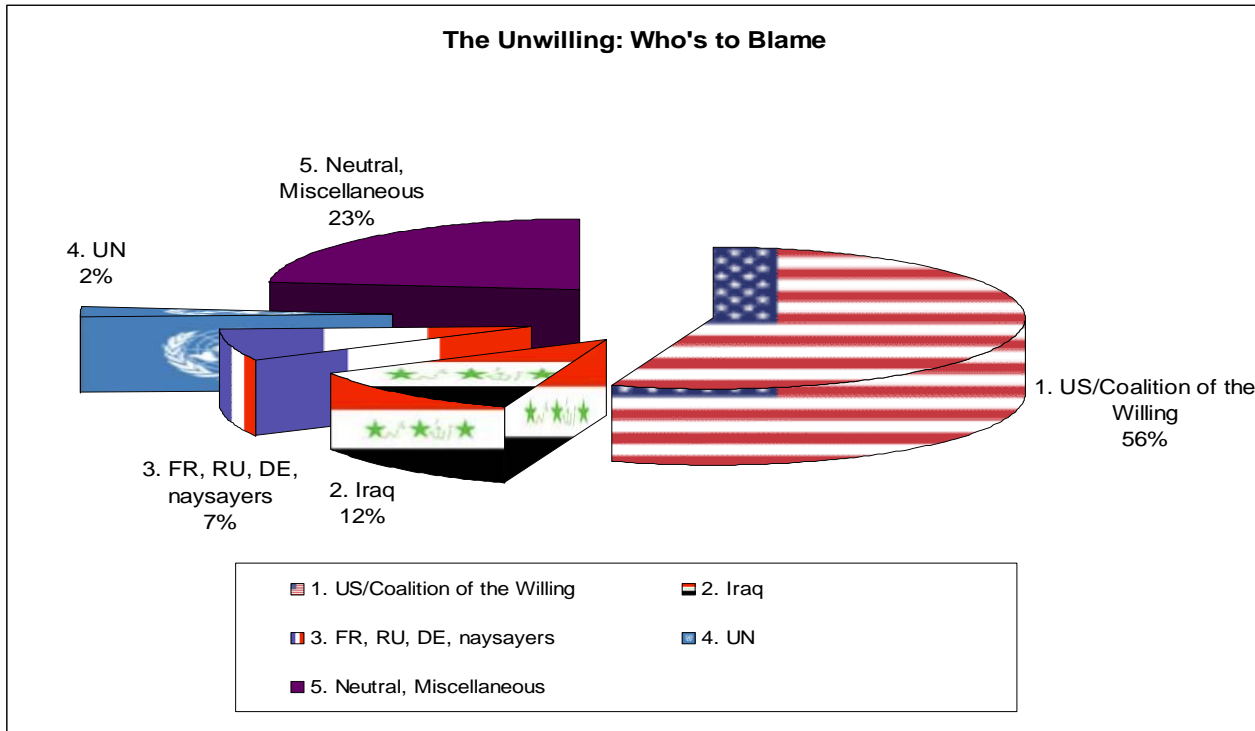
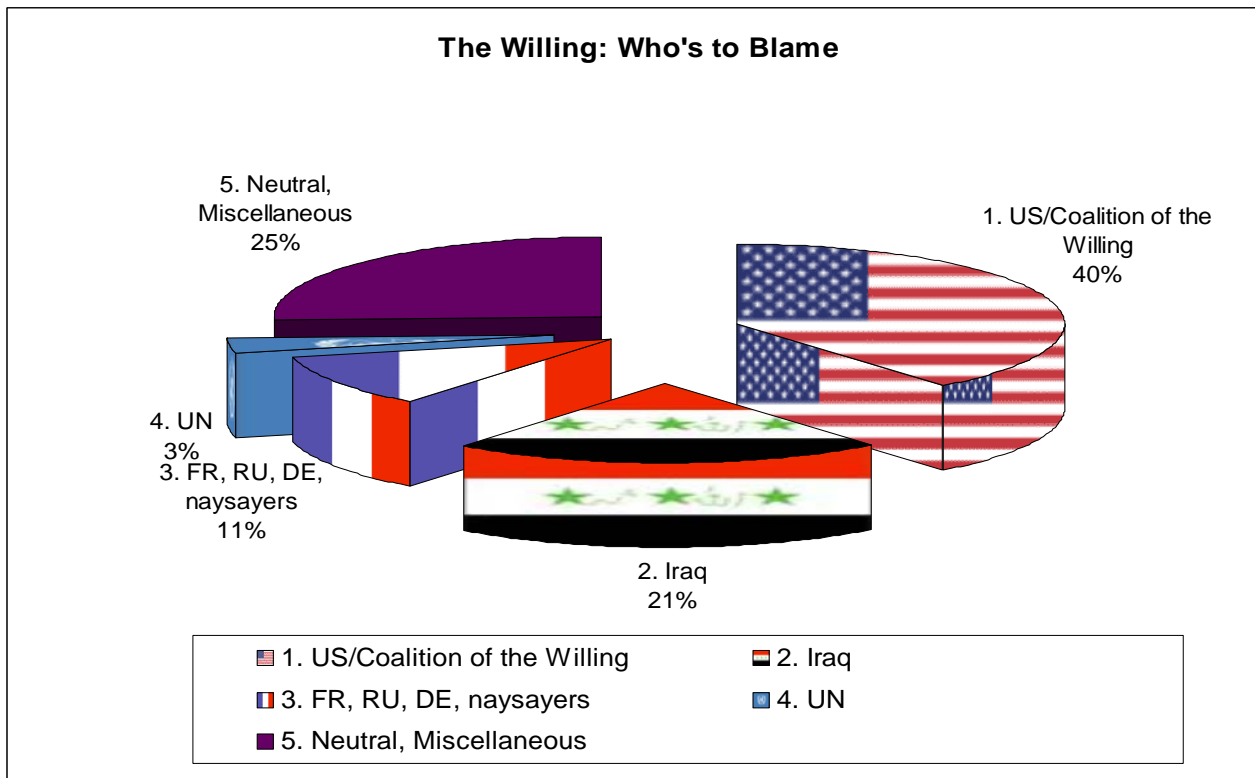
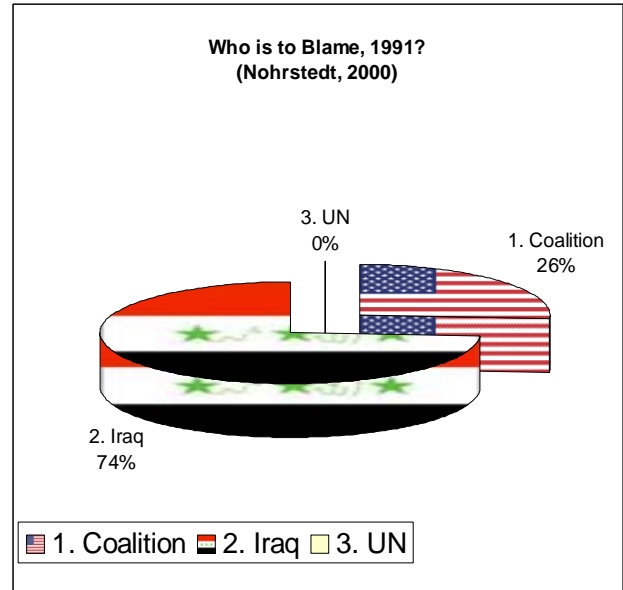
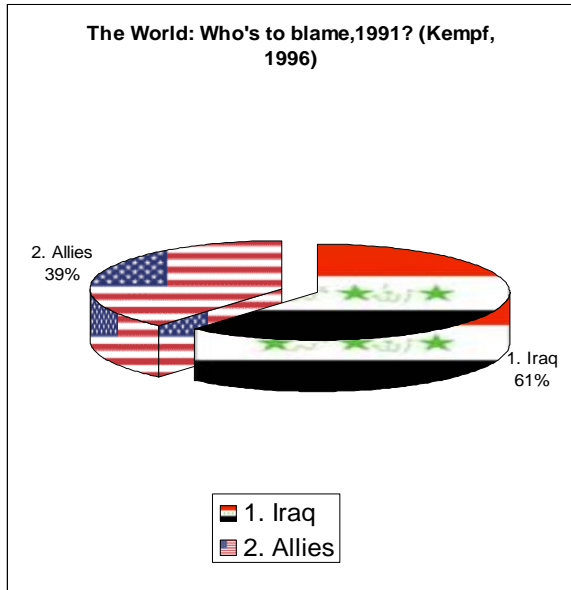


CHART 5. BLAME DISTRIBUTION FROM THE 'COALITION OF THE WILLING'.



CHARTS 6 AND 7. BLAME DISTRIBUTION DURING GULF WAR 1991



Source: Kempf (1996)

Source: Nohrstedt (2000)

CHART 8: BLAME DISTRIBUTION IN THE STORIES FROM US-BASED MEDIA.

