

Judith Miller, *The New York Times*, and the Propaganda Model

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ABSTRACT *An assessment of Herman and Chomsky's 1988 five-filter propaganda model suggests it is mainly valuable for identifying areas in which researchers should look for evidence of collaboration (whether intentional or otherwise) between mainstream media and the propaganda aims of the ruling establishment. The model does not identify methodologies for determining the relative weight of independent filters in different contexts, something that would be useful in its future development. There is a lack of precision in the characterization of some of the filters. The model privileges the structural factors that determine propagandized news selection, and therefore eschews or marginalizes intentionality. This paper extends the model to include the "buying out" of journalists or their publications by intelligence and related special interest organizations. It applies the extended six-filter model to controversies over reporting by The New York Times of the build-up towards the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the issue of weapons of mass destruction in general, and the reporting of The New York Times correspondent Judith Miller in particular, in the context of broader critiques of US mainstream media war coverage. The controversies helped elicit evidence of the operation of some filters of the propaganda model, including dependence on official sources, fear of flak, and ideological convergence. The paper finds that the filter of routine news operations needs to be counterbalanced by its opposite, namely non-routine abuses of standard operating procedures. While evidence of the operation of other filters was weaker, this is likely due to difficulties of observability, as there are powerful deductive reasons for maintaining all six filters within the framework of media propaganda analysis.*

KEY WORDS: *Propaganda Model, Iraq War 2003, Judith Miller, The New York Times*

Introduction: the five-filter propaganda model

Time and again the media align themselves with state propaganda, most intensely so in times of war (see Boyd-Barrett, 2003a; Kellner, 1992; Knightly, 2002). Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988) developed a five-filter propaganda model to explain this phenomenon, a model that fits well with the sociology of mediated communication. The first filter comprises the large size, corporate *ownership*, and profit orientation of media. Most media form component parts of a small number of giant corporations; their corporate interests, the interests of chief executives and share-holders, generally coincide with the interests of the political and business Establishment. Media are unlikely to undermine the interests of the Establishment. Mainstream media have become increasingly profit-oriented: their goal is to

maximize audience numbers, especially of those audiences in which *advertisers* (whose interests constitute the second filter) are most interested, namely those who have money to spend. Thirdly, media depend heavily on *official* sources. Official sources spend heavily on press and public relations; they are aggressive in promoting favorable images of their corporate activities, and maintain careful control over conditions of media access to personnel, reports, publications, press conferences, and related activities. Precisely because they exercise authority, they are too often assumed to be credible. This links to media reporting routines or journalistic professionalism, more generally. The media find it economical to focus their attention on the people and locations most likely to yield "news," including government agencies, city halls, emergency services, and others that constitute the strongest nodes of what Tuchman (1978) called the "news net."

Fourthly, media fear “flak,” the criticism and punishment that powerful news sources inflict on media and journalists who do not report according to the script these sources prefer. Flak may take the form of the withdrawal of access to prized, authoritative news sources, and of critique, ridicule and humiliation of reporters. Finally, the media share the same broad ideological outlook as their government: Herman and Chomsky referred to this ideological agreement principally in the context of anti-communism. Today, that might be expressed as ideological convergence between the establishment and the media with respect to the supposed benefits of neo-liberal global capitalism.

The Sixth Filter

One area that Herman and Chomsky seemed purposely to eschew was the direct purchase of media influence by powerful sources, or the “buying out” of individual journalists or their media by government agencies and authorities. Herman and Chomsky wanted to demonstrate that media complicity with propaganda did not require “conspiracy theory”—not quite the same thing as demonstrating that conspiracy does not happen. Chomsky is among a group of leftist intellectuals who are principled in their stand against “conspiracy theories”—itself a term that has considerable propaganda value for the marginalization of critiques of establishment behavior—preferring to explain corruption in terms of social systems than in terms of specific human agents. Unlike the celebrated philosopher and leftist, Bertrand Russell, who was a severe critic of the controversial Warren Commission’s finding that Harvey Oswald was solely responsible for the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Chomsky supported the official “lone assassin” theory, and was later critical of Oliver Stone’s movie, *JFK*, which dramatized a very different theory, implicating many establishment agencies.

In the case of media, Chomsky’s stand is peculiar, since there is irrefutable evidence of wide-scale, covert CIA penetration of media—by definition, an illustration of “conspiracy” at work. The mid-1970s Senate (Church Committee) and House (Pike Committee) investiga-

tions of the CIA exposed extensive covert penetration of the media. The CIA had published hundreds of books whose purpose was to undermine the Soviet Union and communism. Some were based on manufactured evidence. The agency owned dozens of newspapers and magazines worldwide. Carl Bernstein, of “Watergate” repute, in 1977 revealed that over 400 US journalists over 25 years had been employed by the CIA, ranging from freelancers to CIA officers working under deep cover. Journalistic collaboration with the CIA ranged from intelligence gathering to serving as go-betweens with spies. Nearly every major US news organization had been penetrated, usually with the cooperation of top management. CIA-penetrated media included Associated Press, ABC, CBS, Hearst Newspapers, *Miami Herald*, Mutual Broadcasting System, NBC, *New York Herald Tribune*, *The New York Times* (NYT), *Newsweek*, Reuters, *Saturday Evening Post*, Scripps-Howard, *Time/Life*, and United Press International. Many prominent journalists, editors, and publishers were implicated. They included William Paley, Henry Luce, Arthur Hays Sulzberger (NYT), Barry Bingham, James Copley (see also Crewdson and Treaster, 1977; Kempster, 1977; Trento and Roman, 1977).

Under its later director, Stansfield Turner, the CIA promised to avoid the use of journalists accredited by any US news medium. This self-denying ordinance overlooked stringers and freelancers who were not accredited, however, and did not extend to any foreign-owned media, and included a provision that allowed the CIA to unilaterally make exceptions whenever it wished (Brandt, 1997). The Church Committee’s final report had called upon the intelligence community to refrain from the use of journalists. In practice, the CIA merely curtailed the practice (Houghton, 1996). The Reagan administration had no qualms about returning to old habits, and included an illegal CIA-administered domestic propaganda campaign in support of covert operations in Central America.

A CIA memo quoted by Cockburn and St. Clair (1999, p. 32) explained that the agency maintains “relationships with reporters from every major wire service, newspaper, news

weekly and TV network” and that in many instances “we have persuaded reporters to postpone, change, hold or even scrap stories that could have adversely affected national security interests or jeopardized sources or methods.” This was confirmed by *The Guardian* newspaper in 1991 (quoted by Pilger, 1998, p. 496), whose correspondent Richard Norton-Taylor disclosed that some 500 prominent Britons were paid by the CIA through the corrupt, now defunct, Bank of Commerce and Credit International (BCCI), including 90 journalists, many in “senior positions.” Nor was it likely that such corruption was reserved solely for non-US journalists. In 1996, the Council on Foreign Relations suggested that the CIA be freed from some policy constraints on covert operations, such as the use of journalists and clergy as cover. CIA Director John Deutch argued that American journalists “should feel a civic responsibility to step outside their role as journalists” (Cockburn and St. Clair, 1999, p. 90). A 1997 law, the Intelligence Authorization Act, actually permitted reinstatement of the practice, subject to Presidential approval; in any case, the CIA had reserved the right to use the practice, noting, as Deutch had argued before Congress, that the agency already had power to use US reporters as spies. Given the trillions of dollars, both those properly audited and those that remain undetected by auditors of military budgets (Reuters, 2004), and the importance and value that the intelligence community attributes to manipulation of perception (Miller, 2003), it is prudent to assume that such practices endure, both directly and indirectly. Following the mid-1970s, many propaganda functions were transferred by the CIA and Congress to privately funded organizations, through conduits such as the Ford Foundation and similar bodies; examples included The Asia Foundation, Congress for Cultural Freedom, and the National Endowment for Democracy (Brandt, 1997). In more recent times as in the build up to war in Iraq, we have seen the circumvention of official practices of misinformation by the creation of new units, such as the Pentagon’s Office of Special Plans (Hersh, 2003).

Inclusion of the phenomenon of “buying out”

within the propaganda model increases the element of intentionality within a predominantly structural model (Klaehn, 2003). The original model does not require that individuals consciously set out to deceive the public, although it does not reject that possibility; rather, it focuses on how the political economy of media operations bolsters rather than undermines hierarchical power relations in determining news selection. Filters such as *dependence on official sources* and its sub-set, *routine news operations* might pass off, as relatively innocent, certain kinds of collaborative relationship between journalists and members of intelligence communities. For example, trading of information in the mutual pursuit of otherwise different professional goals has often been acknowledged (see Tunstall, 1974). However, “buying out” suggests the exercise of direct but covert control of news media, not simply as cover for intelligence activity, but for the purposes of state manipulation of public opinion and propaganda, a degree of fusion between state and news media practices that goes beyond the dynamics of everyday political economy. I shall argue that, while this element is much less visible or accessible to researchers than evidence of other news filters, many sources concerning intelligence and perception-shaping for the survival of political systems and the maintenance of social control (e.g., see Bamford, 2002; Curtis, 2003), suggest such a phenomenon is to be expected, if not assumed.

Against the Call of Duty: the US invasion of Iraq, 2003

There is evidence that many journalists go well beyond, or rather *against* the call of duty, in their collaboration, direct or indirect, with third parties, whether these be government agencies or public relations/disinformation agencies. The 2003 US invasion of Iraq presented several examples. Commenting on US television coverage of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the then Director-General of the BBC, Greg Dyke, criticized their “unquestioning,” “shocking,” and “gung-ho” coverage (Burrell, 2003). He said America had “no news operation strong enough or brave enough to stand up against”

the White House and Pentagon and that since 9/11, many American networks had “wrapped themselves in the American flag and swapped impartiality for patriotism.” He further noted how one media group, Clear Channel, was using its airwaves to organize pro-war rallies. NBC News correspondent, Ashleigh Banfield, criticized the networks for showing a bloodless war, one that glossed over the horrors of battle, and for merging entertainment value with news (Grossman, 2003). *Harper Magazine’s* John MacArthur said of media coverage of the toppling of Saddam Hussein’s statue in Baghdad that the networks swallowed whole “absolutely a photo-op created for Bush’s re-election campaign commercials” (quoted by Morgan, 2003). Referring to his 1992 book, MacArthur continued that US government public relations specialists were still concocting bogus stories to serve government interests, and credulous journalists stood ready to transmit them.

How far could these and similar charges be explained away by Herman and Chomsky’s five filters, and what evidence was there that something more direct might be at work? During the 1991 Gulf War, CNN had allowed Pentagon “trainees” into the CNN newsroom in Atlanta. Prior to the 2003 war in Iraq, CNN news head Eason Jordan asked the Pentagon, in effect, to vet and approve ex-military men that CNN hoped to use as analysts, the equivalent, noted Howard Rosenberg (2003) of the *Los Angeles Times*, of consulting with the White House in advance about political or policy experts it planned to use on the air. CNN Chairman Walter Isaacson had instructed his international correspondents in Afghanistan, 2001, to downplay stories of death and destruction caused by American bombing, for fear that this would undermine popular support for the US military effort. To ensure that every CNN report always included a justification of the war, Davis prescribed specific language for anchors to read after each account of civilian casualties (Martin, 2001). Speaking of the US campaign in Afghanistan in 2001, Rena Golden, the executive vice-president and general manager of CNN International claimed at a 2002 conference that the media had been reluctant to criticize anything in the war that was obviously sup-

ported by the vast majority of the people. CNN’s top war correspondent, Christiane Amanpour, said in September 2003, that “the press was muzzled, and I think the press self-muzzled. I’m sorry to say, but certainly television and, perhaps, to a certain extent, my station was intimidated by the administration and its foot soldiers at Fox News. And it did, in fact, put a climate of fear and self-censorship, in my view, in terms of the kind of broadcast work we did” (Johnson, 2003). These examples indicate what is at times an astonishing and deliberate degree of collaboration by media with the propaganda objectives of the administration, enough that would lead some people to suspect that an element of “buying-out” was at work, although alternative explanations (e.g., “excessive” patriotic zeal, or the controlled trade-off between support and access to information) are available. Fuzziness of motive is a persistent problem in applying the Herman and Chomsky filters to specific instances of coverage, and is also encountered with the proposed addition of “buying-out” as a sixth filter.

The Case of *The New York Times* 2002–2004

By late June 2003, it was increasingly clear to most commentators that the Bush administration had lied about weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq in order to justify the March invasion. A *Washington Post* (WP) story (Kurtz, 2003) dissected the stories of Judith Miller of the *NYT* arguing that Miller had acted as conduit for stories originating in US military and intelligence agencies. Miller was connected to right-wing and pro-Zionist think tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute, Hudson Institute, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and Middle East Forum. She had cultivated a relationship with Ahmed Chalabi, a convicted embezzler and head of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), a US-financed exile group with close ties to the Pentagon’s civilian leadership. Miller functioned as liaison between the US military and the INC. Chalabi had provided her with misleading information that was to form the basis of many front-page *NYT* stories concerning WMD. Yet Miller never quoted Chalabi in those stories and both State Depart-

ment and CIA officials had expressed concern that the INC fabricated intelligence of WMD to encourage a US invasion. Shafer (2003) noted that “our WMD expectations, such as they were, grew largely out of Miller’s stories,” although this explanation seems to underplay the strong possibility that elements within the administration had used Miller’s stories to strengthen their own endeavors to shape official intelligence in ways that would support the case for war. Miller also played a key role in ensuring the continuation of the work of the Mobile Exploitation Team (MET) Alpha—whose mission was to find WMD and in which she was an “embedded” reporter—after the unit had been ordered to withdraw. Miller regularly threatened army personnel that she would report decisions about which she disagreed to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld or Undersecretary Douglas Feith. Among her stories was one she had authored from the MET Alpha Unit, without further corroboration and subject to military approval, reporting the claims of an unnamed Iraqi scientist alleging that Iraq had destroyed its WMD before the invasion, and had cooperated with Al Qaeda, claims that seemed unlikely even at the time. Miller also reported the US military’s discovery of two “mobile bio-warfare labs” later identified as vehicles for providing hydrogen for balloons used to direct artillery fire. Other discredited Miller pieces included a story on the Bush administration’s allegations that Iraq was attempting to purchase aluminum pipes to assist its nuclear weapons program, and reported discoveries of radioactive materials, and a chemical complex.

Vann (2003) comments that though Miller filed “news reports based on anonymous sources and hearsay, which subsequently proved false, they served a hidden political agenda and played a direct role in promoting an illegal war,” at the very same time that the *NYT* had publicly fired a junior non-political reporter (Jayson Blair) for copying details and quotes from other news sources. But Miller was not disciplined. Indeed, by mid-September 2003, a Miller bylined story appeared, alleging a “senior U.S. official” was about to lay WMD charges against Syria, another of the Middle

Eastern countries long targeted for US aggression by the neoconservative cabal that had effectively seized power in the wake of 9/11, 2001. Writing for *Editor & Publisher*, William Jackson (2004) mused whether Miller had once again been chosen to leak questionable material for a special interest within government and whether Miller had previously secured a “very unusual clearance for a journalist, granted by some Pentagon authority.” Jackson noted there had been no follow-up *NYT* story amending the errors of previous speculative Miller claims. Vann concludes that the *NYT*, along with all other major American media, is “implicated in the business of fronting for intelligence agencies, the military, the White House and other segments of the state apparatus.”

The significance of the Judith Miller and of other *NYT* stories is best understood, I believe, if we chronologically trace the topics of critique and counter-critique before considering what the evidence and arguments suggest about the relevance and applicability of the propaganda model.

Almost one year following the invasion, a substantial critique by Michael Massing in the *New York Review of Books* dissected the *NYT*’s Iraq coverage (Massing, 2004a). The critique concerned Judith Miller and her dubious reliance on Ahmad Chalabi and on defectors for sources of WMD information, without appropriately verifying these sources, indeed sometimes even after the credibility of sources had been compromised. Massing also critiqued *NYT* coverage and press coverage in general. He noted that in the period before the war, “US journalists were far too reliant on sources sympathetic to the administration. Those with dissenting views—and there were more than a few—were shut out. Reflecting this, the coverage was highly deferential to the White House.” Those with “dissenting views” included many top nuclear, intelligence, and other experts, both inside and outside of the administration and government agencies, whose views were sometimes “iced out,” marginalized and buried deep. Instances included *NYT* treatment of the preliminary report on January 9, 2003, from the head of the UN’s International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

that the IAEA, "after weeks of intensive inspections, had found no sign whatever of any effort by Iraq to resume its nuclear program." This story, which refuted previous front-page *NYT* claims (e.g., concerning Iraq's alleged importation of aluminum tubes, that the US administration wrongly claimed were linked to a nuclear weapons program), was buried on page A10. There had been considerable disagreement within official and expert circles as to the nature of WMD evidence and how to interpret it. Some stories captured the intensity of disagreement, as in the case of a *NYT* front-page story by Thom Shanker and Eric Schmitt on October 24, about the Office of Special Plans (OSP), set up by the Pentagon to search for data to support the case for war. The OSP was identified by Foer (2004) as an important source for Judith Miller stories. None the less, Massing wrote, "most investigative energy was directed at stories that supported, rather than challenged, the administration's case." Particularly prominent, positive, front-page treatment was accorded by the *NYT*, *WP*, and other US mainstream media, to Colin Powell's speech at the UN on February 5, 2003, many of whose claims would be disavowed, even by Powell himself, one year later. The *WP* did run a critical piece (by Walter Pincus and Dana Milbank) in mid-March 2003, but this was relegated to page A13. If nothing else, Massing concluded, "the Iraq saga should cause journalists to examine the breadth of their sources," and wondered whether journalists were too dependent on high-level officials instead of cultivating lower-ranking people within government bureaucracies. Reporting of the war, Massing also noted, had occurred within a general climate of intimidation, in the White House and among right-wing media outlets such as Fox News, Rush Limbaugh, and the *Weekly Standard*.

On May 26, 2004, nearly one year after the industry publication, *Editor & Publisher*, had called on the *NYT* to reassess Miller's work, and three months after the Massing critique, the *NYT* ran a piece under the byline "From the Editors" and actually written by executive editor Bill Keller, apologizing for aspects of *NYT* coverage (The Editors, 2004). The apology acknowledged the *NYT* had run stories that de-

pendent at least in part on information from a circle of Iraqi informants, defectors, and exiles whose credibility later proved highly suspect. Among these names, that of Ahmad Chalabi, leader of the US-supported INC, was singled out. Two months earlier, on March 25, Keller, had posted a contribution to the website of *NYT* public editor Daniel Okrent (of whom, see more below) largely defending the work of Judith Miller.

So what had gone wrong? In part, Keller diverted the blame to enthusiastic endorsement of dubious claims by US administration officials who had been convinced of the need to go to war. His apology did not finger individual journalists. Instead, it singled out six stories for particular comment—of these, it happened that Judith Miller was involved in four of them, having written two and co-authored the other two with Michael Gordon. The apology also found that editors "at several levels" were also to blame, editors who should have challenged reporters to be more skeptical and to weigh the allegations of Iraqi defectors in the light of defectors' strong desire for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Editors should have curbed the temptation to rush scoops into print. Keller acknowledged that dramatic claims, some emanating from within the administration, of the existence of WMD, received prominent display, while more questioning, follow-up articles were buried in inside pages, if they appeared at all. And where qualifying information *was* included in stories, it was often buried deep inside them. In some cases the *NYT* made no attempt to check the veracity of claims it should have verified.

Following Keller's apology in the name of *NYT* editors, the paper's public editor Daniel Okrent further examined the issue, on May 30, 2004. Okrent identified Judith Miller as the author or co-author of some of the stories that had been most faulted by Keller as well as by critics of the *NYT*, but was at pains to demonstrate that the failure was "institutional," not individual. Okrent noted that the executive editor during the period in question, Howard Raines, had later resigned in the wake of a scandal concerning *NYT* reporter Jayson Blair, who had fabricated stories (although none of

these concerned WMD or Iraq). In correspondence with *Los Angeles Times* media reporter Tim Rutten, Raines noted that *many* journalists had been engaged in the WMD stories, not only Judith Miller, and referenced “un-bylined editors who worked with them” (Raines, 2004).

Okrent expanded on the severity of *NYT* failures: coverage had been “credulous,” much of it “inappropriately italicized by lavish front-page display and heavy-breathing headlines,” while other, more challenging perspectives had been played quietly. Like Keller and Raines, Okrent pointed to unnamed editors that “make assignments, accept articles for publication, pass them through various editing hands, place them on a schedule, determine where they will appear (and) ... assign follow-up pieces when the facts remain mired in partisan quicksand.” Justifying his claim that the problem was “institutional,” Okrent appealed to five factors, in particular: the “hunger for scoops,” that inhibited skepticism and caution; “front-page syndrome,” characterized by exaggerated assertiveness; “hit-and-run” failure to follow-up on or check otherwise surprising developments or claims; “coddling sources” even when the importance of protecting source anonymity in the case of sensitive information was outweighed by the public’s need to be able to evaluate source credibility; and “end-run” editing that allowed some reporters to work “outside the lines of customary bureau management,” and protected from the substantive queries of concerned colleagues. Okrent noted in passing that the public had never been told that the *NYT* had hired Chalabi’s niece from January 2003 to May 2004 to work in its Kuwait bureau.

Not only were the *NYT*’s apologies tardy, but many critics found them unsatisfactory (see, e.g., BuzzFlash, 2004; Gitlin, 2004; Jackson, 2004; Massing, 2004; Mitchell, 2004; Parry, 2004; Solomon, 2004). Critics asked why the apologies had come only *after* Ahmad Chalabi, by this time under suspicion for passing US secrets to Iran, fell precipitously from White House favor. They queried why Keller’s apology had appeared deep inside the newspaper, on page A10, and argued that the *NYT* hardly seemed to understand the full magnitude of its culpa-

bility: *NYT* stories had been used by Administration officials, for example, to justify their intent to go to war. Nor had the newspaper proposed to penalize any editors or reporters in any way, as had occurred for example in the case of Jayson Blair. Massing complained that Keller (unlike Okrent) had not mentioned nor critiqued specific authors such as Judith Miller or David Gordon. Solomon (2004) ridiculed the *NYT*’s posture of hurt, wounded professionalism, arguing that *NYT* editors were neither “taken in” nor “misled” but had wanted to “trumpet what they were told by certain dubious sources, and they proceeded accordingly ... disinformation, on behalf of a war agenda, served up on the front page, time after time, in the guise of journalism.”

Parry (2004), writing for Consortium-news.com, found that the apologies did not confront the “elephant sitting in the middle of the American journalistic living room,” namely journalists’ fear of being labeled “liberal” or even “anti-American” and seeing their careers suffer, a fear, Parry maintained, that inhibited journalists from going against how conservatives want the news presented:

Working journalists recognize that there is far less pressure from the left, certainly nothing that would endanger their careers. Plus, they know that many of their senior editors and corporate executives personally favor Republican positions, especially in international affairs. (Parry, 2004)

Parry recalled how in the mid-1980s many *NYT* correspondents shied away from covering the Iran-Contra scandal rather than face angry White House denials and from fear that the *Times* executive editor, Abe Rosenthal, sympathized with the Reagan-Bush Central American “anticommunist” policies. Parry suggested in passing that for high-level reporters it is attacks from the administration that instill most fear, while at lower reporting levels it is fear of conservative retaliation from within their own media institution that carries most punch. Parry argued that this leads to a pattern of media lack of interest in Republican scandals such as Iran-Contra, or even participation in the smearing of investigative journalists who dare to look into them, as had been experienced by Gary Webb

of the *San Jose Mercury News* when he disclosed that the Reagan–Bush administrations had protected cocaine traffickers working with Nicaraguan contras. Parry concluded that what Okrent labeled the “front-page” syndrome almost always matched up with Republican interests. “When stories might make conservatives look bad, the *NYT* insists on the strictest journalistic standards or ignores the stories outright. Conversely, when stories parallel conservative interests, almost anything goes.” The *NYT*’s apologies, therefore, failed to address the larger issue of the “pro-conservative” tilt that is most likely to protect journalistic paychecks. This view was implicitly supported by Eric Boehlert, writing for *Salon.com* in May 2004 that the “suspicion is that the press has become increasingly fearful in a conservative political climate because it’s afraid to appear unpatriotic—or liberal—by dwelling too heavily or realistically on negative images of the war.”

Franklin Foer, writing in June 2004 for *New York Metro.com*, looked in detail at Judith Miller’s career, noting her high-ranking connections throughout the Middle East, her biography of Saddam Hussein, and her early interest in chemical and biological warfare, quoting *NYT* colleagues who were frustrated and perplexed that Miller continued to be the *NYT* voice on WMD. Miller had cultivated strong sources (Foer notes that these often became her friends) among the neoconservatives, and because “she kept printing the neocon party line, the neocons kept coming to her with huge stories and great quotes, constantly expanding her access.” Favored by the Pentagon who allowed her to be “embedded,” during and after the war, with MET Alpha, in the search for WMD, she had accepted tight restrictions, including pre-approval of her pieces. Foer notes that some *NYT* editors raised “serious and consistent doubts” about Miller’s stories, but that top editors “continually reaffirmed management’s faith in her by putting her stories on page 1.” He quoted a former editor as saying that in the months before the war, Raines “consistently objected to articles that questioned the administration’s claims about Iraq’s links to Al Qaeda and September 11, while never raising a doubt about Miller’s more dubi-

ously sourced pieces about the presence of weapons of mass destruction.” Foer identified various possible explanations: that top editors may have been inspired by Miller’s potential as a *NYT* response to competitor *WP*’s star reporter, Bob Woodward; that for a period of time, due to staff turnover, Miller had almost no high-level supervision from editors with investigative experience; and that she may have had a “benefactor at the top,” namely an understanding with Arthur Sulzberger, Jr. (whose family owns the *NYT*), with whom she had worked when both arrived at the Washington bureau in the late 1970s.

NYT apologies found echo in various breast beatings of the journalistic community. For example, the former political editor of the *SJMC*, Philip J. Trounstein, charged in an article for *Salon.com* (March 2004) that the media “were complicit in gathering support for the war.” The media watchdog institute, FAIR!, found that mainstream networks had frozen out critics, and that Fox News had played a special part in propagating claims of Iraqi WMD. *NYT* White House reporter Elisabeth Bumiller in January 2004 claimed (quoted by Aday, 2004) that the mainstream media, intimidated after 9/11, had become “very deferential,” loathe to challenge the President to his face. Walter Pincus (quoted by Massing, 2004a) of the *WP* noted that his paper’s editors “went through a whole phase in which they didn’t put things on the front page that would make a difference.” Writing in *Editor & Publisher*, in March, William Jackson (2004) complained that even after the *London Daily Telegraph* on February 19 disclosed Chalabi’s admission that the US administration and press had been deliberately misled, not one single national paper had followed up on this story a month later. *Los Angeles Times* columnist Robert Scheer, at a conference at UC Berkeley in March (Coburn and Yu, 2004), charged that “this has been the most shameful era of American media. The media has been sucker-punched completely by this administration.” *NYT* Baghdad Bureau chief said journalists had “failed the American public by being insufficiently critical about elements of the administration’s plan to go to war.” A conference of journalists in June 2004,

at the Museum of Radio and Television in New York, was likewise contrite, dwelling on the phenomenon of media cowering in the face of administration bullying and intimidation.

On June 20, 2004, the *WP* followed the *NYT*'s example when *WP*'s ombudsman, Michael Getler, critiqued his newspaper's war coverage. Getler claimed it was now "clear" that the press, as a whole, did not do a very good job in challenging administration claims. He did not find the *WP* as guilty as the *NYT*, but noted that a few front-page stories that "possibly raised the prewar temperature," had received undue play, although he argued that the stories were carefully hedged and reflected concerns at the time by unnamed official sources. Getler's main concerns were that too many *WP* stories (but not all) that *did* challenge the official administration view, appeared inside the paper rather than on the front page—"the number of challenging stories ... put inside the paper was ... frequently to me, dismaying;" and that too many public events (e.g., anti-war demonstrations) in which alternative views were expressed were either missed, underreported or poorly displayed. Massing, in an article for the *New York Review of Books* in June 2004 (Massing, 2004b), was less kind to the *WP*, and to its star reporter, Bob Woodward. Massing criticized the "reluctance of the *Post* as well as other news organizations to challenge the administration's case for war."

Following Getler's critique of *WP* coverage in June, 2004, the paper published a more comprehensive, self-initiated investigation in August by staff writer and media expert, Howard Kurtz, entitled "The *Post* on WMDs: An Inside Story." Kurtz had previously dissected *NYT*'s WMD coverage by Judith Miller. His principal finding was that the *Post* too often gave prominent front-page display to Administration viewpoints, while burying contrary views and evidence on inside pages, if at all. Many excuses, cited by those who talked to Kurtz, seem astonishingly lame, implying that stories suggesting the Administration was exaggerating the evidence on which it based its decision to go to war, were on the same level as everything else. Excuses included: war was inevitable anyway, too many other stories competing, oppo-

nents of war were a "minority," insufficient space on the front page, intelligence stories were "difficult to edit," fear of looking silly if weapons were ultimately found in Iraq, sceptical stories might trigger hate mail, insufficient alternative sources. Most controversial, perhaps, was the view of a former assistant managing editor but later disowned by the paper's executive editor, Leonard Downie, Jr (see Mitchell, 2004), that the paper is "inevitably the mouthpiece for whatever administration is in power. If the president stands up and says something, we report what the president said.

Critiquing Kurtz, Danny Schechter (2004) wondered whether such "mea culpas" were a case of what "the CIA used to call a 'limited hang out.' That phrase translates as 'you concede a little to hide a lot.'" Schechter considered that the *WP*, like the *NYT* and the TV networks, were guilty of much more than what they had conceded. They had failed, for example, to identify the real agenda for the war, the Israeli connection, the imprecision of "precision" bombing, and the use of weapons hardened with radioactive depleted uranium. Their failures continued after the war, as in the delay to report the Abu Ghraib atrocities, and their apparent lack of interest in civilian casualties in Fallujah and Najaf. Writing for the *Toronto Star*, Antonia Zerbisias, detected a continuing lack of conviction and outrage, that compared poorly with the *WP*'s coverage of the Nixon Administration and the Watergate scandal; instead the *WP*, she said, "had served largely as the White House's megaphone on smoking guns and mushroom clouds while muting, or stifling, dissent and contradictory evidence." As Schechter, once more, complains "We are talking about policies that led to thousands of deaths and a newspaper whose editorials and op-ed page sounded like an extension of Donald Rumsfeld's office.

Continuing Shortcomings

Some critics failed to find re-assuring evidence that much had changed in the wake of such press "mea culpas." Even after worries about dependence on defectors began to surface, Jackson noted in *Editor & Publisher*, on 10 March,

2004, that not a single national paper had yet seen fit to follow up on the admission by Ahmad Chalabi in the London *Daily Telegraph* on February 19 that disinformation about WMD had achieved the end he and his colleagues had sought, namely the US overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Massing found that the *NYT* coverage of the war during the spring and summer of 2004 continued to manifest some of the problems already acknowledged by its editors. The *NYT* had downplayed its initial story on April 29 about abuses at Abu Ghraib with a modest story at the bottom of page A15, without incriminating photos. When the story finally made it to the front page on Saturday May 1, without accompanying front-page photos, it was under the headline “Bush Voices ‘Disgust’ at Abuse of Iraqi Prisoners,” thus focusing not on the abuses themselves but on the President’s response to them. True, the *NYT* editor had explained to readers that the paper had held off earlier publication of photos until it had established their authenticity, an explanation that Massing found unconvincing, since the photos had already been verified by military officials. Overall, Massing argued, with reference to three detailed examples of significant stories that *NYT* had downplayed or obscured, there was a deliberate attempt by the paper to keep bad news off the front page, “especially when it reflects poorly on the Bush administration.” The *NYT*, charged Massing, seems “cautious and complacent.” With few exceptions, “its editors have purged the front page of any signs of blood or death; reports of US casualties are usually relegated to inside pages, and photos seem selected more for their visual appeal than for what they might reveal about the terrible realities of war.” Massing acknowledged that the *NYT* did run good reports on stories once they had been ratified as important already, and that some editorials on Iraq had been withering in their critique of US actions. By contrast with the *WP*, however, *NYT* coverage was leisurely.

Massing proceeded to identify structural limitations in the approach of American journalists to war. In particular, he took to task the practice of embedded reporting, with reporters accepting the protection of marine units in

Fallujah, for example, in return for agreeing to certain ground rules and not reporting on US combat deaths while, by contrast, Al-Jazeera had a correspondent and crew inside the city and several times a day was filing dramatic reports of the fighting. US correspondents, Massing argued, tended to compromise their access in return for security, failed to make this fact clear to their readers, relied too heavily on Iraqi journalists, and had inadequate or no knowledge of the local language. Also, too many American journalists framed the war in the same way as American officials, were more likely to accept official US claims as facts than they did claims from non-US sources, failed to balance points of view of the US military and its supporters against points of view from Iraqi insurgents and citizens, and failed to demonstrate independent verification of official sources.

Applying a Six-filter Propaganda Model: a discussion

What lessons can be drawn from these and similar analyses of *NYT* and other mainstream media coverage of the war in Iraq, in evaluating Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model? I will summarize my conclusions with reference to the main filters of the Herman and Chomsky model, together with my proposed sixth filter.

Corporate Ownership and Profit Orientation

The *NYT*’s own *apologia* strongly suggests that an overall “corporate” point of view was imposed on Iraq war coverage. Many of the identified weaknesses must be laid at the door of very senior personnel, people we can reasonably expect to represent whatever key interests lie behind the newspaper. Some of the paper’s editorials were at least occasionally more critical than its news coverage; and it is undoubtedly true that some op-ed contributors (notably, Paul Krugman and Maureen Dowd) regularly represented strongly divergent points of view. Arguably these would have been insufficient to contest the general pro-administration *frame* within which news of Iraq was presented and which would most likely establish in the minds of readers the “facts” that they

could assume to constitute the bed-rock for an understanding of what was going on. The inclusion of criticism on editorial pages would be necessary for the paper to maintain a credible claim to the provision of diversity of viewpoint and independent analysis, and thus satisfy the substantial population of liberally-minded readers among its predominantly middle-class, New York readership (the basis of its appeal to advertisers, see below), while at the same time arguably serving the interests of the administration in particular and those of the establishment more generally through hegemonic framing of the war on the paper's news pages.

Advertising

Evidence from other sources indicates a relationship between war coverage, corporate interest, and advertisers' interest, suggesting an explanation for the observed downplaying of negative images of war (from the perspective of the United States). For example, Hart and Hollar (2004) noted that when war with Iraq began to seem imminent, "media companies fretted over how to 'serve' their advertisers, who worried that news about death and battle would not put their consumers in a shopping mood. *U.S. News & World Report's* solution, as reported by *MediaWeek* (February 24, 2003) was to "create a new war-free zone in which buyers can be assured their ads are next to less-traumatic fare, including stories on health, science, business and culture."

Over-dependence on Official Sources

There is copious evidence from the above accounts that the *NYT* and other news media were overly supportive of administration perspectives in the run up to the invasion and, indeed, during and for a long time following the invasion. The notion that the press leans too much on official sources, as suggested by the propaganda model, is amply supported (see also Moeller's 2004 study of media coverage of weapons of mass destruction, as well as source studies by media research institutions such as Poynter, and FAIR!). Nor is this because the press had no other sources to turn to: it is clear

that there was considerable disagreement among authoritative sources, even within the ruling establishment itself. The existence of alternative perspectives, emphases, and lines of questioning that were marginalized or ignored by mainstream news sources including the *NYT* is easily accessible by monitoring self-styled "alternative" media such as radio's *Pacifica News Service*, the weekly *Nation*, or websites such as *Anti-War.com*, *Buzzflash.com*, *Democrats.com*, *Indynews.com*, or *Truthout.org*, as well as from mainstream Arab-World sources such as *Al Jazeera* or *Al Arabiya*. Alternative perspectives typically included the extent of casualties, both military and civilian, damage to infrastructure and other negative outcomes of war for civilians, possible war crimes on the part of invaders, administration complicity in the conditions leading to war or foreign policies of the United States and its allies that contributed to the problems of the Middle East, war profiteering by major corporations close to the administration, and so on (see Boyd-Barrett, 2003b).

Debates about the adequacy of coverage of the war in Iraq, its prelude and aftermath, often do introduce issues about general media reporting routines, although they also raise issues about whether the term "routine" should be interpreted as standard, approved journalistic procedure, or whether it also encompasses notable departures from the standard and approved, even if such departures are not very unusual. Elaboration of the propaganda model, therefore, needs to focus as much on *departures* from the routine as on *conformity* with routine. For example, standard, approved journalistic practice suggests that claims from one source are balanced against claims of alternative sources (and as many alternatives as possible) and that, where possible, the journalist should personally seek verification of claims against material evidence, and that precedence be given to credible sources (by which journalists more often than not mean "authoritative" sources who are, by definition, usually "official" sources). Part of the business of establishing credibility is to quote name and position of source alongside other relevant evidence. Often, where the information is judged by the

journalist to be significant, but the source is unwilling for his/her identity to be revealed, journalists and their editors may allow sources to retain anonymity, and journalists may fall back on identifying the category of source (e.g., "diplomatic sources said..."). Although this is far from ideal (why should not journalists attempt greater transparency in their writing in explaining why they make these kinds of choice?), it is common practice. Other ways in which "routine practice" favors establishment propaganda is the adoption of such conveniences as "embedded reporting" or "press pools" often in war situations, where journalists trade a diminution in independent and uncontrolled access to sources in return for personal safety. Also, certain features of conventional news style, such as the "inverted pyramid" structure, have been identified by Moeller (2004) as privileging official sources, who tend to be first to command the attention of journalists and who achieve prominent positioning within the hierarchy of sources.

In covering Iraq, there were many instances of media departures from the routine, of stories that were not adequately balanced or appropriately verified. Newspaper public editors like Okrent tried to account for these by appeal to excessive journalistic zeal in favor of some norms (e.g., achievement of a scoop; "front-page" syndrome) at the expense of others. "Routine" applications of concepts of "newsworthiness" would have suggested, in some cases, much greater *timeliness* of coverage than actually occurred, or more (or in some cases, less) prominent *positioning* in the newspaper. Where departures from the norm can be identified with reference to standard journalistic practices, and where such departures seem to work in favor of the administration or establishment interest, then these may be better understood as indications of the filters of corporate interest, convergence of ideology, perhaps even of covert penetration, at work, rather than merely indications of "excessive zeal."

Fear of Flak

Copious critical and self-critical observations and admissions of many journalists, including

seasoned and high-ranking journalists, as recounted above, occurred in the aftermath of the invasion and the non-appearance of WMD, and these provide evidence of journalistic fear of flak from official news sources. Developing this dimension of the propaganda model further, such sources also indicate there is fear of flak from top editors and from voices in the right-wing media, a dimension that is largely overlooked in the original Herman and Chomsky model. Additionally, there is direct evidence from the televised press conferences of leading administration officials such as President George W. Bush, vice-president Dick Cheney or Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld of how such sources frequently use their privileged voice and elevated position on the podium to embarrass journalists who ask the "wrong" kind of question, or adopt the "wrong" tone, and to marginalize or ignore journalists who they think are unlikely to conform.

Ideological Convergence

In the face of the existence of dissent even within the establishment, the fact that the *NYT* endeavored to support the *administration's* perspective, by marginalizing alternative *authoritative* sources, and by more often awarding the administration's perspective with the prominence of front-page treatment, suggests that the *NYT* exercised conscious and voluntary choice in siding with the administration. Voluntary promotion of administration perspectives would suggest a convergence of value, viewpoint and ideology between the *NYT* on the one hand, and the policies of the administration on the other, and this too would confirm the propaganda model. Furthermore, there are many indications that the intervention of *editors* and, in particular, of top editors is absolutely essential for the achievement of a consistently pro-administration tilt, and is indicative of the play of forces that emanate from the upper corporate or establishment sources that control (at least some of) the media. It is at these levels that top appointments are determined, and that the criteria for what constitute the desirable features of top editorial management are set.

"Buying-out"

As one might expect, there is no direct evidence of covert intelligence penetration of the *NYT* here, since by its very nature the tracks of such evidence are well covered and rarely disclosed. This case-study is also complicated by evidence of significant conflicts between members of the intelligence community and of the administration, for example surrounding allegations from the intelligence community, and reported by journalists, of undue pressure from the White House to find evidence of WMD or other evidence that would support the case for invasion. Thus, even if one takes it as read that there is significant penetration of media by the intelligence community, it would be wrong to assume that this is a monolithic, homogeneous influence on news selection and news flow, since there are many different elements of the intelligence community (National Security Agency, Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, to name but a few), while additionally there are intelligence agencies from many different nations that might potentially have an interest in placing agents within the US media or purloining the loyalties of existing US media journalists.

The dimension of conflict between different components of the national security complex may also relate to the increasing evidence of dissension, even within the mainstream media, that became apparent in the aftermath of the US occupation of Iraq. It could be argued that, by that time, significant US objectives had been met (e.g., control over oil supply, establishment of new military bases, formation of a puppet administration), and that therefore dissension within the press no longer worried the establishment. Alternatively, following Gramsci (1971), we might say that growth of dissension within the dominant coalition created spaces for the revelation of such dissension within the media. There is more than a suggestion, in the case of *NYT* coverage of Iraq, of a cosy relationship between individual journalists and official sources, including intelligence sources, for example between Judith Miller and Ahmad Chalabi, or between Judith Miller and the Pentagon, such that the relationship seemed to work very

clearly to promote the perspectives, not to say the *lies*, of the administration as to the reasons it advanced for the invasion of Iraq. Reporters who have significant professional and personal high-level access to foreign elites in areas of the world that are prioritized among administration foreign policy goals, whose ideological views are consonant with those of the administration, might be predicted to have considerable appeal to administration agents within overt and covert contexts. Also, the degree and consistency of top editorial manipulation of news frames, while it could be explained simply in terms of recruitment and promotion policies on the part of corporate and commercial interest, could easily be read as indications of possible penetration of the journalistic community or cooption of journalists by the intelligence community or other special interests, particularly since we know that this has occurred in the past. This assertion can be justified by appeal to David Miller's observation (Miller, 2003), supported by substantial evidence, of the development throughout the 1990s and 2000s of a much more aggressive official attitude within the military and political establishment towards information as *weaponry*. The sheer importance for success, in conflict situations of this magnitude, of being able to shape and manipulate public perception, when aligned with (1) the commitment of vast public resource (much of it evading satisfactory audit) to the military-industrial complex, (2) the green light afforded the intelligence community by previous administrations to allow media penetration, and (3) the incontestable historical record of such penetration, makes it highly likely, if not certain, that wide-scale and deep penetration occurs.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of widespread mainstream US media support for the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 has attracted considerable journalistic as well as scholarly comment. As such, this event offers an important test-case for the applicability of Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model. With reference to the events of 2003, therefore, I have offered a preliminary assess-

ment of the continuing usefulness of that model, and found much evidence that suggests it has continuing viability. The model has strong deductive appeal, and for some of the filters that Herman and Chomsky identify, it is relatively easy to find convincing evidence of these filters at work, while for other filters, including the newly proposed sixth filter of the "buying out" of journalists or their employers by intelligence or related special interest agencies, evidence tends to be more indirect and circumstantial, but not so much so that their deductive appeal is significantly weakened. To date the model perhaps places too much emphasis on routine news operations (within the broader category of dependence on official sources) as against significant *departures* from the routine. Where evidence strongly suggests that degrees of collaboration between media and propaganda sources have occurred, it is still often difficult to assign the evidence with certainty to specific

filters. There is insufficient precision in characterization of some of the filters. For example, the first filter references profit orientation, which is in many ways inseparable from the second filter, namely the interests of advertisers. The filter of over-dependence on official sources should perhaps be recognized as a sub-set of a broader issue about media reporting routines (or ideas of journalistic professionalism). Some filters of the propaganda model, by their very nature, constitute a significant challenge of observability: they tend to fall within the compass of what may be described as the "black box" within whose darkness occur some of the operational transactions that probably must occur for the implementation of Herman and Chomsky's political-economic determinants. Penetration of this "black box" remains, for the most part, a major challenge to those who would seek further operational confirmation of the propaganda model at work.

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