

We fight for the future

The rhetoric of children in CNN's coverage of the conflict between the United States and Iraq

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Introduction

In the period preceding war between the United States and Iraq in 2003, a good deal of rhetorical energy was employed by the United States government and its agents in order to convince the population (and to some extent the Western world) of the wisdom of war in Iraq. Six principle interests were promoted, and appeared in CNN's coverage of the conflict: Weapons and weapons of mass destruction, Iraq's non-compliance with United Nations resolutions, the supposed connection between Iraq's government and al Qaeda, that Saddam Hussein was an evil dictator, that Iraq posed a military threat to the United States, and that it was in the United States' economic interests to invade Iraq (Finney, 2010). The categories or "interests," included one, Evil Dictator, which involved references to children and appeared in 36% of news stories on CNN during the period under study, which was mid-January 2001 through mid-March 2003 (Finney). While this finding places the category Evil Dictator in the middle of the pack in terms of interests that appeared in CNN's coverage, it is well worth noting that, in addition to references to children being abused, the category also included references to such dictatorial behavior as abusing other types of citizens (such as the Kurdish ethnic group); failing to properly fund and care for Iraq's civil infrastructure;

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electoral and political shenanigans; and other similar behavior. In short, Evil Dictator as a category did much more than merely quantify the number of times abuses of children appeared in CNN's coverage of the conflict.

Instead, Evil Dictator was a measure of how Hussein's governing style was represented in CNN's coverage of the conflict between the United States and Iraq before war occurred. The book *Knowing is half the battle* (2010) is a principally quantitative content analysis of CNN's coverage in the pre-war period, connecting the coverage to the trajectory of the conflict and suggesting a relationship between the way the conflict was presented and the evolution of the conflict into violence. In the book it is suggested that the way in which a population comes to know a conflict plays a fundamental role in the way a conflict progresses, including its development and resolution. Knowledge of potential threats, interests, tactics, strategies and outcomes influences a country's calculus of what to do, what to expect, and what to hope for.

But dividing the interests that drove the conflict into categories and uncovering their representational proportionality provides only a partial answer to the question of how the conflict was represented. While it can certainly be said that each interest represents a piece of the puzzle, what a quantitative analysis of the interests does not show is their relative importance, the capability of each interest to inspire or capture the public's attention, or their effectiveness as persuasive tools. In this paper, I present the findings of a qualitative, rhetorical analysis of the presentation of children in the text of CNN's coverage of the pre-war period. This research demonstrates that the presentation of children had the opportunity to powerfully persuade the audience in favor of war. In addition, I argue that because of their cultural significance, rhetorical arguments about children have the potential for dramatic effects, even when they make up a relatively small portion (quantitatively) of the overall coverage.

Children as Persuasion

In the introduction to the edited text, *Children and the politics of culture* (1995), author Sharon Stephens references Philippe Aries' conclusion that in Western cultures children exist as "a distinct group and childhood [is] a separate domain, set apart from the everyday life of adult society." Children, because of emotional and physical immaturity, are separated psychically from adults "in order to assure physical care and socialization..." (5). Stephens reiterates the importance of this protected space for children as she writes of the concerns expressed in the

1980s and 90s about lost childhoods; “not only physical assaults on and threats to children’s bodies, but also the threatened spaces of an ideally safe, innocent, and carefree domain of childhood” (9).

That children require protection and, by corollary, that adults have a duty to protect children are deeply held beliefs in Western culture. Stephens forcefully makes this point by connecting it to the maintenance of the modern capitalist state. “There is much important historical work to be done in conceptualizing the role of the child in modernity” (14-15). Referencing Boyden, she notes “the ‘needs of the child’ figure prominently as grounds of the bounded and naturalized domestic space of modernity and for a marked sexual division of labor associated with differentiated spheres of reproduction/consumption and production” (14). In short, capitalist economies need children. The existence of and care for children reinforce public/private boundaries which coincide with beliefs distinguishing between production and consumption, extolling wealth and the generation thereof, and the requirements of work and workers.

At the same time, childhood is a modern phenomenon. Our understanding of childhood as distinct from adulthood is a historically situated discourse, tied to late capitalism and the modern nation state. Jo Boyden supports the conclusion that childhood is tied to Judeo-Christian religious beliefs in his article “Childhood and the policy makers,” which appears in *Constructing and reconstructing childhood*, edited by Allison James and Alan Prout (1997). “Childhood had not been a matter of much concern until the time of the religious reformations, when moralists and theologians began to apply the discipline of doctrine and training to children in the hope of securing converts” (192). Judeo-Christian theology, and the desire to expand the base, supported the notion that children, rather than being exploited for their labor, should be educated and protected.

Related to this, though, is a second important conceptualization of children and childhood stemming from the Western Judeo-Christian heritage and the correlated emphasis on rule of law and individualism. In the “Preface to the second edition” of *Constructing and reconstructing childhood* (1997), the editors note the “widespread acceptance of children’s rights where the ‘best interests of the child’ are taken as the base-line for social and political action” (xi). In the modern, Western state, the entire conception of “children’s rights” is tied to an underlying assumption of individual rights.

While there are certainly other meaningful ways to conceive of childhood and rationales for doing so, these two conceptions – the capitalist nation state and the Judeo-Christian religion have a particular salience today and especially for Western states considering the specter of war. In the same article mentioned

above, Boyden reminds readers that the particular Western conceptions of childhood

have been exported from the industrial world to the south. They have provided a focal point for the development of both human rights legislation at the international level and social policy at the national level in a wide range of countries. It has been the explicit goal of children's rights specialists to crystalize in international law a universal system of rights for the child based on these norms of childhood (197).

Boyden argues that the exportation of these concepts, along with their incorporation into international law implies "that there exists a contractual obligation to guarantee child welfare" (198).

The idea that adults and children are bound in some contractual way helps to create a sense among Western policy-makers that their obligation to children does not end at their own border. Rather, "so confident are the enforcers of international standards that they inhabit the higher moral ground, that they believe unilateral action to be fully justified" (220). Susan D. Moeller similarly finds in *The Hierarchy of Innocence* (2002) that the visual rhetoric of children in conflicts powerfully influences viewers, evoking "an instinctive, even when abbreviated, response" (37). Noting that the image of children may confuse the issues in a conflict, she too finds that "children have become the projections of adult agendas" (37) and that the use of children in visual rhetoric grabs viewers' attention and serves as a moral referent that "lends fervor to" arguments for and against public policy (38-39). Reviewing the "media-developed and politically exploited concept of the innocent child," Moeller concludes that images that focus on children "dramatize the righteousness of a cause," (39) and "verify the horror or wrongdoing of others" (41).

Using Conflict Analysis as an intellectual guide provides additional insight into the significance of children in conflict. As Vincent Stephens puts it in his article "American Infants" (2007), "[v]ernacular notions of children as 'the future' and the nation's most 'precious resources' inform the ways schools, churches, and families initiate children into citizenship and nationhood" (183). As representatives of a culture's future, children are inscribed in the language of investment, denoting their significance and the profound potential trauma that is inflicted upon a culture when children are abused or debased.

The specter of a threat to children looms large in conflict theory. Threats to children, as noted in the previous few paragraphs, are symbolic strikes at the heart of a culture. Threatening children is suggestive of a threat to religious beliefs, to a culture's most precious resources (and future capacities), and to a culture's poten-

tial annihilation. In terms of interests – those things that a party to a conflict care about and seek to redress with the other – threat to children is an important one.

At the same time, threatening children is suggestive of the Other, implying an enemy's differentness, their character, capability for constructive conflict resolution, and the lengths they may be willing to go. All of these have implications for a party's perception of a conflict's potential for positive outcomes. As I wrote in 2010,

The analysis of a party's strategies and behavior can reveal something of its objectives and considerations with regards to other parties in the conflict. For instance, a party that is willing to employ violence to achieve its goals indicates lack of concern toward other parties' well-being, indifference toward that party's interests and apathy with regards to the quality of the relationship between them. A party that is violent against another should not reasonably expect to maintain amicable relations with that other after a conflict is resolved (24-25).

Being faced with an adversary that is willing to do harm to children (even its own children), affects the dynamics of a conflict and the calculus of options and potential for success.

The role of media is therefore significant. The language that is used to describe a conflict, the events that are included (and excluded) in descriptions of the conflict, and the opinions that are offered all play a role in how a conflict comes to be perceived and pursued. Two essential elements – language and information – underpin a conflict party's calculations and, ultimately, the trajectory of the conflict and its potential for turning violent.

The language that is used helps define the terms of the conflict, interests and objectives, and limits the parties that are involved. Language is also crucial to parties' interaction with one another. Language can be used to obscure or clearly define, to present rhetorical rigidity or openness. Language can play an important role in shaping the terms of the conflict to come. Information is essential to conflict processes because false or misleading information can lead to misperceptions about the parties, their objectives and strategies. While it cannot be said that misinformation always has a negative effect on conflict proceedings, W. Philip Davison (1974) notes, "nevertheless, a strong case can be made that, while knowledge is not necessarily a force for peace, ignorance is likely to lead to misunderstanding and conflict – it can impede necessary and prudent action and it can fail to inhibit impetuous and imprudent action" (27).

Establishing the degree to which media influences U.S. foreign policy and conflict processes is not as simple as demonstrating a connection between the

presentation of particular situations in media and subsequent action taken by the U.S. government. Media have a much subtler and less direct influence on opinion formation and behavior. Therefore, instead of positing a direct link between media and policy, Davison suggests that

decisions affecting war and peace are made by governments, and the mass media play a significant if limited role in shaping these decisions. They exercise this influence through their ability to cut through bureaucracy and reach governmental leaders directly with information about the world situation; through their capacity to affect official priorities; and through their power to help mobilize public opinion, which decision-makers must take into account (6).

While policy-makers may feel justified in their foreign incursions to protect children, democratic policy-makers are at least theoretically beholden to their constituents when making foreign policy decisions. Media play a role in international conflict precisely because of their informational and linguistic influence on both citizens and policy-makers. This role of providing information about a distant conflict is two-fold. On the one hand, information and language is provided to those who have no direct access to the conflict arena. In addition, political leaders provide information and language in pursuit of their own goals and objectives. This, as is well documented, also explains why policy-makers spend so much time constructing messages about policy and working to persuade citizens.

The rhetorical significations are meaningful in conflict situations. According to Francis Beer, “metaphorical constructions also select by hiding features that could potentially be used to define *different objects*” (227). There is no doubt that the rhetorical terms that are used by government and media to refer to the world and international conflicts are specifically selected for their capacity to denote particular subjects while hiding or overlooking others. W. Phillip Davison (1974) finds that in international conflict situations, these rhetorical devices fall into two categories: vague and value-laden terminology. Vague language is used to obscure meanings and hide the complexity of situations and actors. Value-laden designations, sometimes epithets, do not obscure meaning in the way ambiguous terms and slogans do, since it is usually fairly clear to what they refer, but they do lower the quality of international discourse by offending certain parties and making it more difficult for them to respond in terms of the real issues involved (38).

According to Graham Spencer (2005), the rhetorically vague and value-laden terms used by news media to describe conflict have three general and important effects:

1. They facilitate a particular, constructed, and easy way of seeing the world for domestic audiences. The linguistic and rhetorical devices that are used in mass mediated messages are overly simple, create polarization between opponents, and tend to denigrate opponents.
2. In terms of the actual relations between conflict parties and their willingness and capacity to amicably negotiate the issues between them these rhetorical devices confound conflict processes by offending parties and turning attention away from the substantive issues that underlie conflict.
3. Finally, these linguistic devices “serve to intensify and help exaggerate the ‘emotional stakes of public discourse,’ thereby making it more difficult to discuss and reason the shape of peace and the concessions needed to bring conflict to an end” (19).

In other words, the language used in news accounts call on emotion rather than reason, making clear understandings of the issues more difficult to discern, exacerbating tension between actors, and hampering the rational contestation of issues (19).

Politicians and parties on all sides of a conflict use media, language, and rhetorical skill to promote their perspectives about a conflict. It is this important element of a conflict that this paper seeks to address. Research conducted on CNN’s coverage of the conflict between the United States and Iraq preceding the war in 2003 shows that there were six categories of arguments made in support of the idea that the United States should engage Iraq in war (Finney, 2010). In this paper, I will deal with a subset of the Evil Dictator category by focusing on how children were discussed in the coverage and on the potential significance of the rhetoric used to describe children.

Analysis

President Bush used the occasion of his 2003 State of the Union Address as an opportunity to further his case for war with Iraq. Among the reasons he offered for why the United States should engage Iraq in war was the plight of Iraqi children.

Iraqi refugees tell us how forced confessions are obtained: by torturing children while their parents are made to watch. International human rights groups have catalogued other methods used in the torture chambers of Iraq: electric shock, burning with hot irons, dripping acid on the skin, mutilation with electric drills, cutting out tongues, and rape.

If this is not evil, then evil has no meaning (CNN Coverage).

On its surface, this is a very strong statement about the depravity of the Hussein regime in terms of its willingness to use torture. Regardless of the debate over United States' reported enhanced interrogation techniques (which had not yet come to light at the time of this speech), torture is a concept that remains anathema to U.S. culture. To reference torture in this way was to remind U.S. citizens just how un-American Saddam Hussein was, how unkind he was, and how poorly he treated those whom he was charged to protect. There are also subtle but pointed subtexts embedded in this language that enhanced its effectiveness. Torture, in and of itself, is considered a terrible act, which goes beyond the range of acceptable behavior. However, Bush didn't just state that Hussein tortures, he claimed that Hussein tortured children and made their parents watch, in order to achieve some end. This second layer of torture represents a deeper level of depravity. Bush reaffirmed this divergence from American ideals when he stated "[i]f this is not evil, then evil has no meaning."

Rhetorically, this statement recalls Western beliefs about economy, culture and religion. Torturing children suggests that their value is not in the maintenance of valid social structures or the future of the nation, but rather the short-term maintenance of power for power's sake. It suggests that Hussein had no interest in Iraq's excellence or future, because to believe so would mean that children should be educated, socialized, and empowered. Instead, according to Bush's statement, Hussein used children to maintain his illegitimate grip on the citizens of a country who would otherwise go against him. The need to torture citizens in the first place is predicated on the need to control an unwilling population. Bush's use of language that describes the methods of torture furthers his rhetorical argument; to describe torture in vivid detail is to create images of those acts in the minds of audience members.

As early as 2001, President Bush's Secretary of State, Colin Powell, employed similar themes in an interview about weapons of mass destruction with CNN's Richard Roth.

We believe it is necessary for peace in the region, and to protect the children of the region, to protect the citizens of the region, for Saddam Hussein and his associates to come forward and then to allow inspectors in so that they can verify that these weapons are no longer there that they claim are no longer there. And so I'm sure this will be a subject that the Secretary General will discuss with the Iraqi representatives (U.S., Britain launch air strike).

In most cases, the concept of weapons of mass destruction was used to indicate a threat to the United States and in reference to the 9/11 attacks. The Bush

Administration frequently argued that a Saddam Hussein with WMD posed a similar (if not more serious) threat than al Qaeda did. But in this case, Powell extended the range of the threat of WMD to include regional citizens and especially children. Powell went on then to reaffirm the threat to children in the region when he stated

[...] We have sympathy for the people of Iraq; we have sympathy for the children of Iraq. We see a regime that has more than enough money to deal with the problems that exist in that society, if only they would use that money properly; if they would see that all of the people of Iraq are benefiting from the money that they have – more money than they had 10 years ago (U.S., Britain launch air strike).

In this statement, Powell affirmed that responsibility for the plight of the Iraqi people (and children) was the fault of Saddam Hussein. At question here were the sanctions levied against Iraq by the United Nations. The question of who was to blame for sanctions is a recurring one throughout the coverage, but in Powell's view, the fault is Hussein's.

Powell argues on one hand that Hussein was responsible for the sanctions and that if he would only let inspectors conduct inspections, the sanctions could be lifted. However, in the later statement, he argued that even with sanctions, Hussein had enough money to adequately care for Iraqi people – but that he chose not to. Like with President Bush's statement above, Powell argues that Hussein's lack of care for the citizens of Iraq was a driving U.S. interest. The United States, in Powell's rhetoric, is a benign state, interested in protecting the people of Iraq and the region.

The tone of Powell's language seemed incredulous of Hussein's intransigence and selfishness. When Powell stated “[...] if only they would use that money properly; if they would see [...]” he is suggesting that Hussein's behavior was not understandable, that it was not rational, which further implicated Hussein and suggested war. Claims such as this undermine questions about alternatives to war. When Powell asserted that Hussein had WMD, behaved irrationally, and was unwilling to fulfill his obligations to the Iraqi people, the implication was that he was threatening and that he could not be trusted to fulfill his obligations to the international community. To accept that these terms are accurate is to accept that negotiation and diplomacy are inappropriate methods to resolve a conflict. Someone who does not make rational decisions or who fails to fulfill their obligations cannot be trusted to negotiate in good faith.

In both the above cases, Bush Administration officials are seen to support the idea of war against Iraq in order to protect children and citizens from an evil

dictator who does not care for them and who has threatening weapons. In neither case do the speakers consider that war may be more damaging to Iraqi citizens or children. However, this idea is taken up when CNN's Larry King interviewed a panel of Christian leaders and supporters of the war in the spring of 2003.

JOHN MACARTHUR, GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH: I think it's always difficult when you consider the loss of life. Any loss of life is...

KING: All people are the same.

MACARTHUR: Yes, because every soul is precious.

KING: So the Iraqi child is not more important than the American child in the eyes of God.

(CROSSTALK)

MACARTHUR: Absolutely. But I really find myself on the other side of the fence from what we've just heard. I don't think we're starting a war. I think a war already started. The only question is what are we going to start a war that has already started.

In this passage, Pastor MacArthur absolves the United States and the Bush Administration from responsibility for whatever harms that may have been inflicted upon Iraqi citizens and children in a war. Even though he argued that all children are equal, he also claimed that because the United States was already engaged in war, it should not be held responsible for harms that may come as a result of invading Iraq.

Forgetting for a moment the factual error that MacArthur states regarding the Iraqi regime's involvement in the War on Terror, the implication of this kind of statement is that the calculus of morality is changed in war. Rather than advocating for peace, or even to protect children, as one might expect from a Christian leader, MacArthur seemed to accept that casualties are a fact of war and that as such, the extension of casualties to Iraqi citizens and children should be a less significant part of the United States' calculations than others – such as protecting the United States from Hussein's WMD.

Evangelical Christian leader, psychologist, and war supporter, James Dobson, made a similar argument when he appeared on *Larry King Live* in February 2003.

KING: We're back with Dr. James Dobson. A listener called in and we got cut off or something, but the essence of the question was, before I go back to the next caller, is you're against abortion...

DOBSON: I am.

KING: ... yet in favor of a war in which Iraqi children will die.

DOBSON: Yes.

KING: How do you balance that?

DOBSON: Well, the reason that I'm in favor of the war with Iraq is to save lives...

KING: But children will die and...

DOBSON: I'm sure they probably will, but certainly fewer of them than if we allow this man to have nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction...

KING: But it's still the killing of a child which you regard as a sin. Abortion is a sin. The killing of one child is a sin.

DOBSON: It certainly is and I wish that it were possible to take Saddam out without killing anyone.

But it's like surgery for cancer. There are times when you have to undergo something that's very painful and very life-threatening in order to accomplish the better good.

(Interview with James Dobson)

Like MacArthur, Dobson argues that the calculation of risk to reward favors war because, even if children die in the war, their deaths would prevent Saddam Hussein from getting WMD and nuclear weapons. Like MacArthur, Dobson is mistaken about Hussein's capacity, and confused about the consequences of Hussein's perceived threats. The threat of nuclear weapons and WMD was not a threat to Iraqi citizens and children, it was supposed to have been a threat to the United States. If Hussein were to have WMD or nuclear weapons, it is unlikely that he would have used them against Iraq because doing so would threaten him personally.

But to suggest, as MacArthur and Dobson did, that Hussein's WMD and nuclear capacity override the needs of the children in Iraq, is also to suggest that those children are threatened by those weapons, and to further implicate Hussein's irrationality and lack of care for Iraqis. In response to King's assertion that Iraqi children would die as a result of war, Dobson states "[...] but certainly fewer of them than if we allow this man to have nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction [...]".

Another important point in these two passages is that Dobson and MacArthur distinguished between adults and children in their statements. This line of reasoning conforms to the literature presented earlier in this paper about the special care that is afforded to children in Western theology and culture. Children are due special treatment, according to this concept, and King, Dobson and MacArthur all drew bright lines between children and adults. King, it appears, did so in an effort to challenge Dobson and MacArthur, as if to ask "if you're against killing children (abortion), then how can you be for war?" And while neither Dobson nor MacArthur really respond to this line of questioning, they both agreed that in this case, the killing of children was justified.

In his interview, Dobson uses the false analogy of cancer to explain why war was necessary and just. "But it's like surgery for cancer. There are times when you have to undergo something that's very painful and very life-threatening in order to

accomplish the better good.” Metaphor is a common technique used to help audiences understand complex concepts through recognizable ideas, but in this case the metaphor that Dobson uses has rhetorical implications beyond mere explanation, but fails to contain adequate conceptual equivalence.

The idea that Saddam Hussein is a cancer implies that, like cancer, Hussein is threatening and that he can do nothing but harm. The term dehumanizes Hussein, removing him from the realm of human complexity and the potential for good. This is a clear example of how value-laden language helps relieve American audiences from the emotional guilt associated with assassinating Hussein. In similar fashion, it assuages the guilt associated with the killing of innocents who are nearby or associated with Hussein (i.e., Iraqi citizens). As with surgery for cancer, wherein sometimes the surrounding tissue must be removed, the metaphor implies that the “collateral damage” that occurs during war is necessary to remove the cause of the conflict. The metaphor of surgery as war has additional implications that further reduce emotional guilt through the implication that war will be carried out as precisely as modern surgery. Like the metaphor “surgical strike” for bombing, the use of the term surgery as a metaphor for war suggests that war can be carried out with pinpoint precision, that like a surgeon, bombers and soldiers will be able to protect the country, the citizens, the children, and the innocent while attacking only that which is evil or bad.

The rhetorical strength of the metaphor also indicates where it falls down. As a human being, Hussein and his behavior should not be reduced to purely bad intentions. It is indisputable that Hussein did bad things, but to assert that he was purely bad goes too far. This line of coverage however, is visible in a number of ways throughout the period under study. For instance, the quantitative data showed numerous stories detailing the Bush Administration’s arguments against Hussein. Very few corresponding arguments appeared that presented Hussein’s perspective (Finney, 2010).

The metaphor for surgery for war is also inappropriate. Despite the U.S. military effort in the last few decades to create and maintain a rhetorical connection between war and surgery, the technology of war lacks the same precision. This conclusion is supported by Simon Rogers of *The Guardian*, who reported 114,212 civilian deaths associated with the War in Iraq as of January 2012 (Rogers, 2012). Collateral damage is a reality of war that will not go away.

Finally, the Dobson and MacArthur interviews highlight the difference between language and information about a conflict. In both cases, the speakers’ perspectives were premised on erroneous beliefs about Hussein’s capabilities and potential threat. They were informationally deficient. But at the same time, they

were linguistically and rhetorically rich. As religious leaders, Dobson and MacArthur were used to represent the Christian theological perspective, which provided them with a significant level of ethos.

As war seemed more and more imminent, different threads began to immerse in CNN's coverage of children in Iraq. In addition to the focus on the plight of Iraqi children under the Hussein regime, the coverage began to consider the potential threat to children from the probable invasion. In early March 2003, CNN covered this issue from Baghdad:

RYM BRAHIMI, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Fredricka, Iraqi officials here are saying that the fact that U.S. and Britain want to push for a resolution despite strong opposition by a lot of other member countries shows that their goal is not disarmament but they're intent on pursuing a war no matter what. And so, Iraqi officials here are preparing for a war, which many say privately they believe is inevitable, while at the same time trying to avert it.

In terms of efforts to prepare for a war, a lot of things have been going on here, Fredricka. The UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, has been working with the Iraqi government to help malnourished children have a better chance of surviving a war. They've been distributing therapeutic meals. They've also been distributing high-protein biscuits at child community care centers in order to make sure that those that are more vulnerable, those children, and among them the malnourished – the UNICEF here says 85 percent of Iraqi children are malnourished – well, to make sure they have a better chance (U.S. backs off).

On its face, this passage appears to be presenting an Iraqi perspective, which is critical of the U.S., and its intention of going to war. The first paragraph references Iraqi officials who (privately) say that war is inevitable. This apparently critical perspective makes the Iraqi case that the United States is less interested in its stated interests (removal of WMD) than it is in invasion itself. However, the second paragraph diminishes this critique considerably by implicating the Iraqi regime's responsibility for the plight of Iraqi children and pointing out the need for Western intervention to protect Iraqi children.

In the second paragraph, the key point is made at the end: that 85% of Iraqi children are malnourished. With this statement, the journalists suggested that Iraqi children were in harm's way under Hussein and that the potential war could actually benefit the children. By focusing on malnourishment rather than violent harm, the story implied that the Western intervention would help Iraqi children become healthier, that Western intervention was already taking place in anticipation of the war and that without it, Iraqi children would continue to be in bad shape.

Referring back to the first paragraph, the second justified the implication that the United States and Britain are pushing for war, despite significant opposition. That the significant majority of Iraqi children were already malnourished, and that the Iraqi government was unable or unwilling to provide for Iraqi children, suggests that Western intervention (be it war or aid) was necessary for their survival.

But who was to blame for the plight of Iraqi children? According to Colin Powell, it was Hussein and his reckless spending. According to President Bush, it had to do with Hussein's need to maintain his grip on power. However, it is also clear that the sanctions placed on Iraq after the Persian Gulf War in 1991 did have a negative effect on Iraqi children. In September 2002, the question of blame was posed to CNN correspondent Jane Arraf:

ARRAF (voice-over): At a Baghdad hospital, the congressmen were face-to-face with tragedy. Like many of Iraq's problems, it's difficult to know what to do. There's no available drugs or surgery to help this woman's 19-day-old child. (on camera): This is part of the biggest children's cancer ward in Baghdad. Every day new children are admitted here. Doctors say there's not much they can do for them. They say every day at least one child here dies, most of them unnecessarily.

In this introduction, the plight of Iraqi children was personified and individualized. The 19-day old child was taken to stand in for the plight of all Iraqi children. The phrase "like many of Iraq's problems [...]" implied that the scene is typical.

(voice-over): The U.S. Democrats, among them Representative Jim McDermott, a child psychiatrist, were taken around the wards and told many of the children would have a chance if it were easier to import chemicals needed for radiation. (UNINTELLIGIBLE) used to teach history. Now she takes care of her son Mohammed (ph), who is not getting two of the drugs he needs for his leukemia. In a country where U.N. experts have said over half a million children have died under trade sanctions, the tour of the Monsignor Teaching Hospital (ph) is a first stop for many visitors. REP. JIM MCDERMOTT (D), WASHINGTON: If being used means that we are telling the world about what the realities are for Iraqi children, then I'm glad to be used.

While also about the plight of Iraqi children, this story was about a group of American congressmen, who traveled to Iraq on a mission to convince Hussein to allow inspections in order to clear a path away from war. During and following their trip, the congressmen were publicly criticized by the Bush Administration and a variety of commentators for giving comfort to the enemy and undermining the war effort.

ARRAF: The congressmen say the last thing Iraqis need to deal with is the prospect of war.

REP. MIKE THOMPSON (D), MISSISSIPPI: Any time anyone talks about the possibility of war – I'm a combat veteran of the Vietnam war. I don't like war. I don't want to see war anywhere. And certainly don't want my children or grandchildren to participate in it. And anything I can do to stop war from happening, I want to be part of that.

ARRAF: The delegation is pinning its hopes on Iraq letting U.N. weapons inspectors in and the U.N. eventually lifting sanctions. Iraqi foreign Minister Nahji Subri (ph) reiterated that the inspectors will be back next month. Too late, though, to resolve any of the unfolding tragedies on the cancer ward of Baghdad's Monsignor Hospital (ph). (END VIDEOTAPE)

While the congressmen were in Iraq in order to advocate against war, the coverage of their work reflected a less anti-war perspective. In the preceding section, though Rep. Thompson claims to be anti-war, his quotation was undermined by the journalist's skepticism. She described the congressmen as "pinning their hopes [...]" which implies that they lacked control or authority, and at the same time suggested, with the phrase, an element of whimsy or dreaminess. The phrase "pinning one's hopes" is reminiscent of a teenager in love, someone who is not serious. As is sometimes the case with critics of war, this phrase feminized the congressmen and represented them as naïve and immature.

ARRAF: Aaron, it's really hard to get across the true depth of despair in that hospital. And despair that has been there for over a decade. But we talked to the doctor who is the chief resident there, a truly horrible job, and he said now he feels somewhat hopeful at least that there may be a chance of averting war. Because, with delegations like this congressional one, at least Americans may be starting to listen to Iraqis – Aaron. BROWN: I'll ask the members of Congress this in a little bit when we talk to them, but let me ask you first since you are there and you reported this for awhile. The fact that there are many deaths and that there's great hardship, is that necessarily the sanctions or is that the government withholding revenue that it does get from that oil it's allowed to sell?

ARRAF: Well, that is a huge, very complicated question and very difficult to answer. Most people have had trouble answering it over the past decade. But the bottom line is, it doesn't really matter. In the point of view of a lot of people, there are children who are dying. This is indisputable. The U.N. certified this (Congressmen take debate).

The segment ends with the question – who is responsible? – and the journalist states that it is a question that is neither answerable nor necessary to answer. The fact of children dying is what is important, not who is responsible for their deaths.

Not answering the question of responsibility further embeds the coverage in Western beliefs about the protection of children as a required service and the need for intervention to protect children. That children were being harmed is the central element here. For some (unmentioned) reason, Iraq was not capable of caring for its children. In failing to indicate responsibility, but pointing out the problem, CNN makes no overt judgment on how to resolve it. Rather, they leave that to the audience. One may, it is presumed, follow the naïve teenagers-in-love, who have been accused of providing propaganda support to the enemy by promoting an anti-war perspective, or support the president.

In a very different vein, another group of children appeared in CNN's coverage of the conflict between the United States and Iraq – the children of U.S. soldiers who were either deployed or awaiting deployment.

WOODRUFF: How hard is it to be a military family, left behind when the big ships leave? I went to Norfolk, Virginia, to find out. It is the biggest naval base in America. And if the home front has a front line, this is it. You see the families and the navy exchange on base. Mothers in small groups with their children. Dads with toddlers in tow, all suddenly single parents. That carrier pulling out is the "Harry S. Truman." It left three months ago. Greg Herron's dad is on board. He's a nuclear electrician. Greg is proud of the model of the "Truman" that he built with his dad, but you can tell he's worried (Britain proposes benchmarks).

In the introduction to this story in March 2003, Judy Woodruff set up a very personal, individualized account of what it was to be related to a U.S. soldier facing deployment. With the phrase "Greg Herron's dad is on board," Woodruff created identification with both the soldiers and the children, noting the hardship that both faced, as well as the significance of their sacrifice, when she stated that the soldiers' spouses are "suddenly single parents."

The personal identification with U.S. soldiers was furthered later in the story, when Woodruff quotes another member of that family, Greg's sister, whose on-air message to her father was

And from 10-year-old Katie, a simple message for dad.
KATIE HERRON, DAUGHTER: That I love you.

The story then displayed an interview with a man whose wife was being deployed and a tour of the Navy Family Support Center, which provides assistance for the families of deployed soldiers.

WOODRUFF: The work of readjusting the families and much more takes place here at the Navy Family Support Center, near the base. As we walked through, we met a woman and child with a remarkable story. This is 2-year-old Nicole. Her mother is a single parent serving now in the Gulf, and with no other family who could care for the child, Dee Crosby and her navy husband agreed to act as Nicole's parents until mom returns.

The subtext of this story is that the United States cares for the families of its soldiers and that it takes care of children. Through the personifying and informal phraseology, audiences were called upon to identify with the soldiers, and to feel kinship with them. Through the representation of soldiers' children, audiences come to understand the tremendous sacrifices that soldiers made and, through this identification, the appropriateness of the U.S. mission in Iraq.

Conclusion

This analysis is not intended to be representative of the totality of CNN's coverage of children related to the conflict between the United States and Iraq. Instead, it is designed to highlight the rhetorical strength of the arguments made about children, by those who advocated for war between the two countries in the spring of 2003 and to argue that in conflict situations, rhetoric about children has the potential to transcend numerical insignificance and become an important part of the dialogue.

The rhetoric in each of these stories demonstrates Western cultural beliefs about the special position and perceived need to protect children. Stories that mention Hussein's torture of children, those highlighting the threat that he posed to their health, and stories extolling the U.S. military programs for the families and children of soldiers all strongly suggest that there is a duty to protect children, that Hussein was either unwilling or incapable of upholding that duty, and that the United States was and could. Supporting these arguments were the overt and subtle arguments distinguishing between Western and Iraqi treatment of children.

That Hussein was unable or incapable of taking care of Iraqi children was a focal point in these stories. In some stories, he was merely unable to maintain their health because of his selfishness and unwillingness to cooperate. In others, he was presented as willfully harming children in order to attain political objectives. In either case, that Hussein was not capable of maintaining their safety was a key part of the argument in favor of war. Even for the two Christian leaders who

advocated for war – the assumed fact of Hussein's threat to children overrode any threat that an invasion might pose.

These arguments about children presented the Iraqi president as a man who rejected basic U.S. and Western cultural principles while acting out against the same people he was charged to protect. Presentation like these, which highlighted Hussein's atrocities against children suggested that his power was predicated on fear and abuse, that he was willing to kill, that he killed indiscriminately without regard to guilt or innocence, and that he killed those who were powerless. This last feature is related to our cultural understanding of the special place for children in society. To implicate this transgression implies that Hussein was someone who obstructed people from their rights, making them helpless while simultaneously behaving violently against the helpless. These interests strike at the core of American values, and through their assertion Hussein was stripped of his humanity, while those who would thwart him were imbued with integrity and authority.

The strength of these rhetorical arguments is due to the use of terms that are value laden and vague. In this paper, I have analyzed the terms and phrases used to describe the events leading up to the Iraq War and through this analysis I have demonstrated that the language about conflicts are human constructions that are both influenced by and have influence over the social world. Terms such as evil, terror, torture, and weapons of mass destruction denote particular meanings for audiences and in the social mind. These terms carry weight about the nature of the enemy and the self, as well as the state of the world and the relations that compose it.

Because these stories dealt with children, the arguments carry special strength. The neglect and abuse perpetrated against children strike audiences as more significant than when carried out upon adults. They remind viewers not just of Hussein's depravity, but also of his regime's threat to the future of humanity. Their representation reminds the audience of the responsibility to protect ourselves and, more importantly, to protect our future. They recall deep cultural beliefs and biological mandates. These arguments about children have the potential to be stronger than the threat of WMD or economic strangulation because they speak directly to these core beliefs. In a global sense, this research reveals the crucial role of semantic warfare in structuring physical warfare, and in doing so, it highlights the need to reach a deeper understanding of the role of the media as a precursor to conflict.

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