

Not Vietnam

In 1968, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese army attacked various cities in South Vietnam during the religious holiday of **Tet**. The Americans did not just repel the offensive, they completely destroyed the Viet Cong. However, for various reasons the Press reported the Tet Offensive as a defeat for America. This was a significant factor in destroying public support for America's defence of South Vietnam.

In Iraq, the Americans are doing a very good job of **defeating terrorists** and **training** the Iraqis to do likewise. The Press are once again distorting the news to give the impression that the terrorists are winning in Iraq. They prominently report suicide bombers **killing Iraqis**. But most reporters have not reported counterterrorist operations, preferring to peddle sensationalised, anti-war **doomsaying** instead. A recent poll has indicated that **more than half** of Americans think the Bush administration is losing the battle against the terrorists in Iraq. If America snatches defeat from the jaws of victory in Iraq, the Press will bear some of the blame. Responsible reporters and bloggers must do all they can to counter this tide of pessimism or the Iraqis might pay a terrible price.

Mon, 10/03/2005 - 22:08 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Gen. William E. Odom referred to Iraq

as a "strategic disaster". Is he also "distorting the news"? Or is the press "distorting the news" by reporting on the views of a general?

by a reader on Tue, 10/04/2005 - 02:11 | [reply](#)

Ex-General Odom's Opinion, and the Press's

Do you believe that there is any position on any issue that is not held by some officer, or retired officer, somewhere?

Hardly. And yet not all such opinions are given equal prominence, or endorsement, by the press.

We'll see your retired Lt. General who believes America is being

defeated in Iraq and raise you a serving Ambassador who believed in November 1940 that the Nazis had already won the Second World War, and that **democracy was finished in England and maybe in America too**. And a **retired king** who agreed with him. And for that matter an ex-Defence Minister who believes **the Earth has been visited by extraterrestrials** and that governments, including his own, have been concealing this.

By singling out Odom as if this proved something, you make our point.

by **Editor** on Tue, 10/04/2005 - 03:14 | [reply](#)

It is a market force

and nothing else. I hope you are not promoting an idea of global mass-media conspiracy against american forces in Iraq? We can see similar phenomena just about everywhere. Press is always eager to report bad news and doesn't care about general overview of the readers. No, actually, I am wrong about this. The press does care about our overview in the way "the worse the better". The more things people fear the better. Bad news better sell and only free market economy is responsible for that because you cannot simply force journalists to write what you want. I am not in favor of introducing censorship or nationalising mass-media. I just think that some sort of mechanism has to be invented in order to promote people awareness about positive progress around the world. What we have now is that people en mass are not used to good news, they are not into scientific discoveries, solving political problems etc.. All they want to hear is that there is a problem, but they never follow up developments until the issue is resolved (neither do journalists). People would follow up an investigation of a murder, rape or terrorist attack - this is where it all ends. We prefer to hear statistics on how many women die from breast cancer but any survivor or a successful treatment don't make good news. That's why people are scared of anything hapenning to them and when it suddenly happens just don't to deal with it. They rather turn into hipohondriac, pacifists and so on. This is a very serious social issue.

by **Yuryr** on Tue, 10/04/2005 - 09:26 | [reply](#)

The Soviets could have won

in Afghanistan. I guess their press was "distorting the news" and that is why they lost.

by a reader on Tue, 10/04/2005 - 13:07 | [reply](#)

Re: it is a market force

Yuryr: Rest assured that we are not promoting an idea of global mass-media conspiracy against American forces in Iraq. We have **spoken out** against that conspiracy theory as well as **conspiracy**

theories in general.

However, the 'mainstream media' *are* campaigning energetically against the war. We agree with you that this is a spontaneous, not a coordinated, phenomenon. It does not require a conspiracy for an error to be serious, widespread and persistent, especially in certain subcultures, of which the 'mainstream media' unfortunately constitute an example.

by **Editor** on Tue, 10/04/2005 - 14:10 | [reply](#)

Re: The Soviets could have won

No, it is very unusual for bias in the losing party's media to contribute significantly to the loss of a war. Clearly the Vietnam War is unusual in this regard.

by **Editor** on Tue, 10/04/2005 - 14:17 | [reply](#)

Fit to Print, Fit to be Tied

We the people want our wars won now. Give us what we want, right now, or else give us what we want later, don't want to hear. Good to Bad to Worse.(Law of Inverse Positive Journalism)

Responsible reporting?

People, this is the "news" business. Are our "news" memories that short?

Yesteryear's Front Page Headlines Spoofed:

War Won in Record Time (Washington Post) Iraq Free At Last (New York Times) Unprecedented Arab Unity - Jubilation in the Streets (Baltimore Sun) Saddam Toppled, Hung in Effigy (New York Daily News) Soldiers Throw Candy and Go Home (L.A. Times)

That was before reality set in. The printer's ink dried, the headlines cried, and the presses slowly ossified as "the war news" dragged on.

by a reader on Wed, 10/05/2005 - 05:01 | [reply](#)

Iraq And Vietnam

Editor said " . . it is very unusual for bias in the losing party's media to contribute significantly to the loss of a war. Clearly the Vietnam War is unusual in this regard."

I disagree. In many important ways, Vietnam and Iraq are far from analogous -- particularly from the crucial military standpoint (e.g. there was very real and continuing support for Vietnam from China and the Soviet Union constituting a deep rear area; and popular support (while not as strong as those opposing the Vietnam war supposed, still formidable, coming as it did at the tail end of

decades of opposition to the French colonialists)). Iraq isn't another

Vietnam, and that's why, in my view, there is a far superior chance of being successful in Iraq. If the US puts the same level of effort and resources (and sacrifices) into Iraq as it did into Vietnam for over a decade, we stand a good chance of leaving with a stable, relatively democratic government in perhaps the most strategically important region in the world. Did the media play a role in Vietnam, undoubtedly, but it was for the reasons stated above (and for other similar fundamental military, political and historical reasons) that Vietnam ended as it did. Would the outcome have been different if the US had continued (for how long?) to prosecute the war with greater vigor -- who knows -- I certainly don't. While the question can be debated without end, the use of the Vietnam analogy is, in my view, neither correct, nor helpful in the case of Iraq.

by **Michael Bacon** on Wed, 10/05/2005 - 16:13 | [reply](#)

Spooferd?

Spooferd means you made them up, right?

by **Editor** on Thu, 10/06/2005 - 00:20 | [reply](#)

Correct

Spooferd as a fairly accurate approximation of the headlines of the times. Now they would read differently.

by a reader on Thu, 10/06/2005 - 04:31 | [reply](#)

Re: Correct

Here is the archive of the New York Times. It is searchable by date. Presumably the period that you consider to be 'before reality set in' is the period immediately after the fall of the Saddam regime? (Coalition forces invaded Iraq on 20 March 2003. Baghdad was captured on 9 April, which was also the day that Saddam's statue was pulled down live on television. President Bush declared major military operations to be complete on 1 May.)

To illustrate your point, could you please link us to a few New York Times headlines at about that time that have the same triumphalist tone as the ones you have made up?

by **Editor** on Thu, 10/06/2005 - 11:29 | [reply](#)

Certainly

Give me a moment. Remember the New York Times is not representative of the "mainstream media" but just one of many news sources. Remember also that people who write the stories do not write the headlines for the stories. Remember also that separate from that there are editorial boards. Please note that the press is in the business of selling newspapers. Good news gets one day of coverage. Bad or worse news can be covered again and again. People read bad news stories and dwell on them, the press

gives us what we "want". The press headlines tend to start with Good/or Bad, but the stories, especially the stories about war tend to go from triumphant to mediocre to not good at all, time inverse to positive journalism. Give 'em what they want. A line from a 10,000 Maniacs song.

Vietnam and Iraq are totally different wars. Human nature is not different and neither is the news process as to what sells papers. Both Vietnam and Iraq as war stories, separate from any on the ground reality, are subject to the phenomenon of time inverse positive journalism.

Responsible reporting is done by individual reporters. What gets published, what makes the front page generally has little to do with responsible in depth reporting, but rather with what is "news", the new, and the corresponding knee jerk human response to it.

by a reader on Thu, 10/06/2005 - 17:58 | [reply](#)

April 10, 2003 NYT

The first 5 of 120 Results

A NATION AT WAR: ARAB-AMERICANS; Iraqis in the U.S. Celebrate Hussein's Seeming Downfall ... make a new Iraq." In a ... enthusiastic about the war to topple Mr. Hussein. ... for them the war is personal. All seemed ...

April 10, 2003 - By DANNY HAKIM (NYT) - A NATION AT WAR: THE PLAN; Speed and Flexibility

... southern cities of Iraq that had never been anticipated ... , that the war is not over yet. ... officials are concerned Iraq may try to destroy...

April 10, 2003 - By MICHAEL R. GORDON (NYT) - International - An Analysis - A NATION AT WAR: COMBAT; U.S. FORCES TAKE CONTROL IN BAGHDAD; BUSH ELATED; SOME RESISTANCE REMAINS

April 10, 2003 - By PATRICK E. TYLER (NYT) - International - A NATION AT WAR: TUMULT; Cheers, Tears and Looting in Capital's Streets

... advocates of a war to topple Mr. Hussein had ... the headquarters of Iraq's National Olympic Committee, ... feared places in Iraq. "Touch me ...

April 10, 2003 - By JOHN F. BURNS (NYT) - International - A NATION AT WAR: NEWS ANALYSIS; A High Point in 2 Decades of U.S. Might

... . The Iraqi war itself, American alliances with Triumph in Iraq, if the whole nation ... the first gulf war, was incomplete; the

...

It is appropriate to stop there and not clutter space.

by a reader on Thu, 10/06/2005 - 18:36 | [reply](#)
