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Warfare as remedy: How the *Independent* framed the first US assault on Fallujah

Abstract:

The paper discusses coverage of the first US assault on the Iraqi city of Fallujah in April 2004 on the basis of selected articles from the British newspaper the *Independent*. It incorporates a discourse analysis of 100 articles relating to the preparations of the assault, the initial attack and its outcomes between 01/04-30/04/2004.

It will be highlighted in the paper, how the initial assault was framed by the *Independent* and how civilian casualties, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, as well as violations of international law were represented. Crucial questions were: How did the *Independent* frame the US assault on Fallujah? How did the *Independent* represent civilian casualties? And, how did the newspaper cover the assault in relation to the Geneva Convention and international law?

The paper will rely on a model proposed by Entman (2004) to explain the framing strategies of the *Independent*. As will be argued in this paper, the *Independent's* framing led to the exclusion of other possible remedies. Moreover, crucial historical details about the development of the resistance in Fallujah, which was arguably a legitimate movement that resisted an illegitimate foreign occupation, remained unexplained. Furthermore, some crucial questions were not seriously discussed in the *Independent's* coverage about the assault on Fallujah. These concerned the legality of the attack, under international law, and violations of international humanitarian law which were reported by numerous independent observers and relief organisations.

Key words: Occupation of Iraq; Press Coverage; Framing; Civilian Casualties; International Law; Geneva Convention

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Brutal murder, violent resolve

On 31 March, 2004, a US-vehicle was ambushed by a small group of unknown men in the Iraqi city of Fallujah. The four passengers were brutally murdered and their bodies hauled through the streets. Later, an angry mob displayed the corpses hanging them on a

bridge. The dead were identified as ex-elite-soldiers, mercenaries who worked for the private security firm and US contractor Blackwater (Escobar 2004; Bix 2004; Lindorff 2004; Khan and Jamail 2005). The killings can be viewed as part of a guerrilla war. For months, Fallujah had been a centre of resistance against the US-occupation and attacks on US military had happened on a regular basis (Cockburn 2006: 135-136; 151). Paul Bremer, then head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA),¹ and the White House, considered the ambush as an 'affront to the coalition' and 'challenge to power and resolve of the USA'. Furthermore, the US pointed to the necessity to defeat 'fanatics' and 'terrorists' in Fallujah who they claimed were preventing democratic progress in Iraq. As a result, on 5 April, the US Marines' First Expeditionary Force was ordered to attack Fallujah and 'root out the insurgents who had turned the city into their stronghold' (Allawi 2007: 275-276; Herring and Rangwala 2006: 29).

Prior to the attack, General Mark Kimmitt, the Deputy Director for Coalition Operations, explained the course of action and linked the operational cause to the killings of the contractors. At the Coalition Provisional Authority Briefing (*US DoDefence* 2004), on 1 April, he emphasised that

we will respond. We are not going to do a pell-mell rush into the city. It's going to be deliberate, it will be precise and it will be overwhelming. We will not rush in to make things worse. We will plan our way through this and we will re-establish control of that city...We will hunt down the criminals. We will kill them or we will capture them. And we will pacify Fallujah.

As the *New York Times* reported, on 7 April, Marines encircled Fallujah, closed the main roads and 'drove armored columns into the heart of the city, where they fought block by block to flush out insurgents' (Gettleman and Jehl 2004). The operation resembled a full-scale military attack involving artillery, tanks, jets and helicopters. It was later assumed that at least 60,000 residents of Fallujah's 250-300,000 inhabitants had fled during what was called Operation Vigilant Resolve (*GlobalSecurity.org* n.d.; Jamail 2004a). After a week, local 'medical authorities' reported that more than 600 Iraqis had been killed in Fallujah, many of them women and children (Jamail 2004c).

A ceasefire was declared on 9 April and US forces withdrew from Fallujah on 29 April. The withdrawal was mostly due to political pressure resulting from outrages in parts of the Iraqi political establishment over high civilian casualties, media coverage and Tony Blair's engagement to encourage US president Bush to stop the operation (Allawi op cit.: 276ff.; Herring and Rangwala op cit.: 30). In the end, none of the official military goals had been achieved but a city was devastated.

The initial attack: framing legitimacy

Shortly after the killings of the mercenaries, on 31 March, the *Independent*² indicated, that a military attack could be a possible answer. In a leading article (*The Independent* 1 April 2004: 30), on 1 April, the newspaper emphasised that in 'the United States...condemnation, bitterness and anger will be the predictable, and justified, response...although massive reprisal raids on Fallujah cannot be excluded...'. On 2 April, in an article by Rupert Cornwell (2004a: 34), the *Independent* provided space for Paul Bremer to morally condemn the killings and announce further actions:

In Baghdad, Paul Bremer, the head of the coalition authority, described the killings as “despicable, inexcusable and barbaric”, and “a violation ... of the foundations of a civilisation”. The deaths of the four contractors, he promised, “will not go unpunished”.

It could be argued, that the *Independent* supported the administration. Through linking public emotional sentiments with a massive response and through presenting Bremer’s description, that elevated an act of war to an essentially evil barbarism, harsh measures were encouraged as a solution for the problem.

Later, during the first days of the attack on Fallujah, the *Independent* consequently linked the US-assault to the killing of the US contractors. For instance, on 5 April, Rupert Cornwell (2004b: 18) mentioned ‘the horrific murder of four American private security contractors in Fallujah last week’ emphasising that

the reaction, from the American military in Iraq and in Washington, has been that the incident cannot, and will not, deflect the US from a mission which has the support of most Iraqis. Fallujah, it is argued, was an exception. The perpetrators of the atrocity will be captured and punished.

On other occasions, the *Independent* repeatedly referred to the killings as being the cause for military actions without exploring other solutions. In an article on 6 April, Robert Fisk (2004a: 1) made the following statement:

The US military response to the atrocities committed against four American mercenaries in Fallujah last week has been to surround the entire city... What good this will do “new” Iraq is anyone’s guess. Vast concrete walls have been lowered across the road and military vehicles have been used to chase away civilians trying to by-pass them. A prolonged series of Israeli-style house raids are now apparently planned for the people of Fallujah to seek out the gunmen who first attacked the four Americans - whose corpses were later stripped, mutilated and hanged.

And, on 7 April, the *Independent’s* correspondent in Iraq, Patrick Cockburn (2004a: 4), mentioned the same incident in relation to the assault:

It was impossible to reach Fallujah yesterday after it was sealed off by 1,200 US Marines and two battalions of Iraqi security forces. US commanders have pledged to conduct house-to-house searches to find and punish those who killed four US civilian contractors and hanged their burnt and mutilated remains from the metal girders of a bridge over the Tigris.

The *Independent* constantly explained the US operation as a response to the killings of the mercenaries. Thus, the newspaper presented the official justification for the attack. Although the newspaper appeared to be critical towards the operation - civilian casualties, US-policies and the motives behind the attack were discussed in detail - other problem solutions were not proposed. Therefore, the initial framing gave a significant meaning to the operation as being a legitimate and responsive solution to a crime.

According to Entman (2004: 5), framing can be defined as ‘*selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution*’. In this case, framing led to the exclusion of other possible remedies. For instance, it could have been argued, that a crime committed by individuals, such as the killing of the four mercenaries, would normally be investigated through careful police investigation and not a full-scale military invasion of the city in which the crime was committed. But once the frame was established through repetition, such a conclusion was almost impossible.

After evaluating the history of the resistance in Fallujah, another discourse was possible as well. It could be argued, that the killings were an act of war that was in itself a response to US military actions in Fallujah. Moreover, strong evidence suggested that the resistance in Fallujah legitimately arose as a direct consequence of the US-occupation of the city. Yet significantly, the *Independent* failed to deliver these links.

The emergence of the resistance in Fallujah: a retrospective

Generally, Fallujah is one of the main Sunni strongholds in Iraq and part of the Sunni dominated al-Anbar governorate located on the western angle of the country. Consisting of 32-37% of the Iraqi population, the Sunnis represent the second largest religious group in the country, outnumbered only by their Shi’a counterparts who account for approximately two thirds of the religious people (*Central Intelligence Agency n.d.; Holmes 2007: 1-3*).

An investigation in Fallujah, by Human Rights Watch (2003), found out that Fallujah used to be a strong and supportive base for the Sunni Ba’athist party and former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, but nevertheless, the organization

did not find overwhelming sympathy for Saddam Hussein following the collapse of his government. Many al-Falluja residents told Human Rights Watch that they considered themselves victims and opponents of his repressive rule.

Journalist Patrick Graham (2004), who investigated the resistance in the Iraqi al-Anbar province, explained these findings. The people of Fallujah, he wrote,

had not been part of what was called, before the war, “the royal family”—the residents of Saddam’s hometown, Tikrit (or, more specifically, his ancestral village, Al Ouja), who had retained almost feudal powers. The rest of the Sunni Triangle was by no means universally pro-Saddam. In fact, a number of the coup attempts against Saddam are believed to have originated here, because its natives held such prominence in the army.

During the Iraq War, no ground fighting occurred in Fallujah although sites in the city were bombed. On 23 April 2003, the 82nd Airborne’s 2nd Brigade approached Fallujah. According to Human Rights Watch (op cit.)

by the time U.S. forces arrived, tribal and religious leaders in al-Falluja had already selected a Civil Management Council, including a city manager and mayor. The quickly-formed local government was having success in minimizing the looting and other crimes rampant in other parts of Iraq. Different tribes took responsibility for the city’s assets, such as banks and government offices. In one

noted case, the tribe responsible for al-Falluja's hospital quickly organized a gang of armed men to protect the grounds from an imminent attack. Local imams urged the public to respect law and order. The strategy worked, in part due to cohesive family ties among the population. Al-Falluja showed no signs of the looting and destruction visible, for example, in Baghdad.³

Thus, military authority was arguably not required. With the arrival of US forces, tensions rose between Fallujah's people and the soldiers who firstly attracted attention through aggressive street patrols. The people were also intimidated by the soldiers' use of binoculars and night-vision equipment. Some rumours spread that the soldiers were even watching Iraqi women drying their clothes, thus seriously offending the community (ibid.). Later on, further home searches heightened the tensions. Simultaneously, a series of demonstrations were held against the occupation of the town (Allawi op cit.: 169). On 28 April, an Iraqi demonstration developed into a brutal incident with terrible consequences. In a shooting, 17 people were killed by US forces.

During the investigation by Human Rights Watch (op cit.), US soldiers explained how they suddenly came under 'effective fire', as they argued, 'from gunmen in the crowd and on the roofs'. They said, they had only responded. On the other hand, Iraqi demonstrators and eye witnesses questioned by HRW said that they 'had been attacked without provocation' and that all the demonstrators were unarmed, although shootings occurred in some neighbourhoods and on the main street. Later, a ballistic report by HRW stated that 'the physical evidence at the school does not support claims of an effective attack on the building' where the troops had taken shelter, thus disputing the soldiers' previous statements (ibid.).

Consequently, thousands of demonstrators joined together on 29 and 30 April to denounce the shootings and 'demand the immediate withdrawal of American forces' (Holmes op cit.: 5). Another 'follow-up demonstration' claimed the lives of three Iraqis who were shot by US fire whereas rebellious incidents continued on a regular basis during May and June.⁴ Moreover, militancy significantly escalated as house arrests and the detention of people from Fallujah into Abu Ghraib prison increased. After these incidents, a growing suspicion emerged towards foreign people entering the city. In late summer, 2003, 'the people of Fallujah were openly boasting that they were in outright rebellion against the occupation'. In the following month, a consolidated resistance with strong ties to the population waved many attacks on US/Coalition troops. Effectively, Fallujah had 'slipped out of Coalition control' (Allawi 2007: 169-170; 275; Holmes op cit.: 6-7). An evaluation of these incidents strongly suggests that Fallujah was not afflicted by 'fanatics' and 'terrorists' as claimed by the US (see Herring and Rangwala op cit.: 29). As Graham (op cit.) observed

all the civilian deaths would have caused a population anywhere to react: on Bloody Sunday in 1972, for example, only thirteen Irish Catholics were killed by British troops, but the incident set off decades of fighting. In the Sunni Triangle, an honor-based tribal society where revenge killings are integral to the culture, the cycle, once started, was almost impossible to stop. And it was only when the occupation was presented as a binary choice—you are either with us or against us—that the Sunni circled the wagons.

Considering the coverage of the *Independent*, Sunni resentments were somehow acknowledged. For instance, in its leading article (*The Independent* 5 April 2004: 24), on 5 April, the newspaper wrote that

the bitter resentment of sections of Iraq's minority Sunni population was demonstrated in the barbaric slaying of American workers in Fallujah last week...it demonstrates that Mr Bremer's heavy-handed approach to civil liberties has been monumentally ineffective in stabilising the security situation.

However, the newspaper failed to give any deeper historical explanation concerning the events in Fallujah in 2003. Thus, the reader was not informed why the people of Fallujah could have been resisting US policies. Furthermore, it was not discussed that the killings of the contractors could have been interpreted as an act of war which followed other, brutal measures of the US military. According to the *Washington Post*, the mercenaries were considered to be among 'the most elite commandos working in Iraq' presumably aware of the situation around Fallujah (cited in Khan and Jamail op cit.).

But how can the *Independent's* performance be explained? According to Entman (op cit.: 23) media 'coverage might neglect, for instance, to provide explicit evaluations of the related event or issue' because news reporting regularly 'exhibits such voids in framing, gaps that audiences may fill by using tacit understandings...or that they may simply ignore' (ibid.). Significantly, framing enhances 'the salience of an interpretation and evaluation of' a different aspect of reality (ibid.: 26). This was what effectively had happened. Thus, the *Independent* failed both to explore adequately the deep, fundamental causes behind the developments in Fallujah and to discuss adequately peaceful solutions to the crisis.⁵

Turning the tide: critical frames in the *Independent*

After the attack, the *Independent* established counterframes that challenged official US policies.⁶ Military tactics, the outcomes of the assault and the rationale of US/Coalition policies were critically evaluated. Take for example Cockburn's (2004b: 1) piece, on 8 April, that presented horrifying descriptions of the situation in the city under attack:

AN AIRBORNE assault on a mosque killed at least 40 worshippers attending prayers in the city of Fallujah yesterday... The aircraft fired a rocket and a bomb into the compound of the Abdul-Aziz al-Samarrai mosque.

Witnesses said the attack came as worshippers gathered for afternoon prayers. Improvised hospitals were set up in private homes to treat the wounded and prepare the dead for burial...

Overall civilian casualties in Fallujah are not known but 16 children and eight women were reported to have been killed when US aircraft hit four houses on Tuesday, according to Hatem Samir, an official at Fallujah hospital.

On 9 April, another article by Cockburn (2004c: 5) suggested that US military tactics were indiscriminate and had severe consequences. Moreover, eyewitnesses pointed to what could have been the rationale of attacking Fallujah:

AMERICAN MARINES besieging Fallujah, west of Baghdad, have killed 280 Iraqis and wounded more than 400 in fighting this week, the doctor at the city's hospital said yesterday.

The city of 300,000 people on the Euphrates has been under attack from ground and air since the beginning of the week, during which it has been sealed off from the outside world.

The figure for the number of dead and wounded is likely to be even higher said Dr Taher al-Issawi at the small local hospital. "We also know of dead and wounded in various places buried under the rubble but we cannot reach them because of the fighting," he said...

"It is barbaric what is happening at Fallujah," said Abdul Rahman Khalil, a smartly dressed engineer working in the oil industry...

Many Iraqis say the Americans are killing people who have done nothing in an act of collective punishment for the death of the four US civilians killed and mutilated in Fallujah last week.

After civilian casualties and the indiscriminate US military tactics became public, the United Nations envoy to Iraq, Lakhdar Brahimi, and other leading Iraqi politicians, criticised warfare in Fallujah as 'collective punishment' pursued by the US military (Murphy 2004; Chandrasekaran 2004). These sentiments as well as explicit Arab media coverage increased pressure on the CPA. Moreover, Sunni politicians and Tony Blair pushed Bremer and the White House to negotiate a ceasefire (Allawi op cit.: 276-277).⁷ Consequently, a ceasefire was officially declared on 9 April. Robert Fisk (2004b: 37) critically commented on the stalemate in the *Independent* on 10 April

The destruction of houses of "suspects", the wholesale detention of thousands of Iraqis without trial, the cordoning off of "hostile" villages with razor wire, the bombardment of civilian areas by Apache helicopter gunships and tanks on the hunt for "terrorists" are all part of the Israeli military lexicon.

In besieging cities - when they were taking casualties or the number of civilians killed was becoming too shameful to sustain - the Israeli army would call a "unilateral suspension of offensive operations"...And yesterday, the American army declared a "unilateral suspension of offensive operations" around Fallujah.

In this piece, Robert Fisk exposed military euphemisms. He suggested that US forces indeed had killed many civilians who were misleadingly labelled as 'suspects' or 'terrorists' to justify the operation. The article also indicated that a ceasefire was, from the US/Coalition point of view, not the preferred option. But because critical public discourses threatened to damage the US image, the operation became 'too shameful to sustain' and had to be halted.

Assessing policies in Iraq, the assault on Fallujah was part of a broader political campaign aimed at defeating various 'insurgencies' in the country with the increasing use of military force. The resistance in Fallujah was only part of a wider and complex Sunni rebellion rooted in the al-Anbar governorate. Significantly, the uprising belonged to a 'nationwide insurrection against the occupation' involving important parts of the Shi'a community as well. Generally, the rebellions had been reinforced by various factors. After the ending of the Iraq War, the US-coalition and the CPA had essentially failed to establish security and lay the foundation for reconstruction in Iraq.⁸ Moreover, the Iraqi

population developed strong sentiments towards what they regarded as a brutal and foreign occupation that 'lacked legitimacy' (Herring and Rangwala op cit.: 20-21, 26-31; Allawi op cit.: 266, 173-185; Cockburn 2006: 102, 108, 151).

By discussing these developments, the *Independent* focused rather more on tactical than fundamental questions. In a leading article (*The Independent* 12 April: 24), on 12 April, the British political leadership was condemned for its overall policies in Iraq and the outcome of the attack on Fallujah. The editorial called Tony Blair and other British political leaders to account for not effectively interfering in Iraq. The newspaper stated that after 'this costly week of violence' in which 'more than 600 Iraqis and 50 US soldiers have died' Blair had 'learned nothing from recent developments in Iraq' (ibid.). According to the newspaper, Blair also had grave misconceptions about 'the insurgents' who were to a great part supported by 'ordinary Iraqis' and who revolted because of 'the dire state of their country' and the Coalition's failure to 'bring security' to Iraq (ibid.). Finally, the writers pointed out that the whole invasion and occupation had become a 'misguided intervention' (ibid.). Significantly, fundamental questions concerning the legality of the used policies in Fallujah and Iraq were not discussed.

As these examples indicate, coverage of the *Independent* was diverse, representing different and sometimes contradicting viewpoints. Strikingly, coverage was congruent on one fundamental issue: International law.

International law: unable to be framed

The Fourth Geneva Convention (n.d.) prohibits collective punishment and the destruction of personal property by the occupying powers and, generally, demands the protection of the life of civilians.⁹ As reports in the *Independent* illustrated, a very high number of civilians were killed, property was bombed and the use of 'collective punishment' was indicated. Nevertheless, the Geneva Convention was not even raised as an issue by the newspaper.

Relief workers, journalists and civilians who were in Fallujah during the assault reported, in April 2004, of excessive and deliberate targeting of civilians by US snipers leading to the shooting of women, men and children as well as ambulances. Furthermore, observers reported the blocking of the main hospital by US troops and the prevention of civilians to leave the city (e.g. Jamail 2004a; Jamail 2004b; Wilding 2004: 13; BBC News 2004; Shifrin 2004; Holmes op cit.: 31-61; Soldz 2007); all acts that violate the Geneva Convention (*The Fourth Geneva Convention* op cit.).¹⁰ Other reports indicated the use of cluster bombs and flechettes (Khan and Jamail 2005; Soldz op cit.). The use of these weapons in populated areas is a violation of the Geneva Convention as well (see Article 51, Protocol I, 1977). The following paragraph was published by human rights activist Jo Wilding (op cit.) in the British newspaper *The Guardian* in mid April, it delivers an impression of the situation:

People have been under bombardment for the last eight days. A lot of people are trapped in their houses still - despite the ceasefire - without food, without water and terrified to leave. Food and medical aid is now arriving but the problem is getting the aid around the city. A lot of it is delivered to the mosque, but then getting it to the hospitals, past the American snipers, is proving to be impossible. The main hospital apparently has been destroyed by bombing and the second largest is covered by US snipers - the Iraqis call it sniper alley. So Iraqi people are not able to get to and from the hospitals...

We saw two kids arriving with their grandmother, they had all been wounded by gunfire, they said by American snipers, while they were trying to leave their house to flee to Baghdad.

An elderly woman with a wound to the head was still carrying the white flag she had been holding when she was shot. They were all saying it was American snipers shooting...

We saw mainly bullet wounds for the majority of civilians. Families are getting injured when they try to leave the house, trying to escape for Baghdad. A bullet goes astray or it gets them in their house. Then a lot of people are injured from shelling. They get hit by shrapnel that gets into the house.

Also, many of the reported incidents were arguably “crimes against humanity” or “war crimes” as defined by section 7 and article 8 of the International Criminal Court (ICC) statute (see Shiner 2005: 99-100). For instance

...‘intentionally launching an attack in the knowledge that such an attack will cause incidental loss of life or injury to civilians or damage to civilian objects (...), which would be clearly excessive in relation to the concrete and direct overall military advantage anticipated (Article 8 (2)(b)(iv)’ (cited in Shiner op cit.: 100).

Idealistically, the execution of “war crimes” and the violation of international humanitarian law, such as the Geneva Convention, should be investigated, by the press, and by an independent body, to hold the perpetrators accountable.

Standards that were used in the past to try war criminals open way for further possible discussions concerning the incidents that happened in Fallujah: According to the Nuremberg Principles, which were established during the Nazi Trials in 1945, the ‘wanton destruction of cities’ constituted a war crime for which the Nazis were convicted (Article VI b, Nuremberg Tribunal, 1950).¹¹ During a court hearing in The House of Lords, in 2006, Lord Bingham of Cornhill reviewed important evolutions ‘leading to the criminalization of aggression’. In his finishing statement he concluded that ‘whatever the state of the law in 1945, Article 6 of the Nuremberg Charter has since come to represent general international law’ (cited in Villa 2006).

If one considers the illegality of the *Iraq War*, by standards of international law,¹² other argumentations gain importance. First of all, the US/Coalition presence in Iraq could be questioned in general because it had no legitimacy.¹³ Michael Mandel, member of Lawyers against War, argued even further. He cited a judgement of the judges of the Nuremberg trials which ‘declared the crime of aggressive war to be “the supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole”’ (Mandel 2005b). According to this legislation, it could be argued that the attacks on Fallujah, and their outcomes, were part of the ‘accumulated evil of the whole’, because they were causally linked to an initial and illegal war and thus a crime *per se*.¹⁴

The question remains, why none of these issues were mentioned or even discussed by the *Independent*? A possible answer is that media tends to reflect elite discourses. Entman (op cit.: 154) suggests that media and elites ‘usually ignore or denounce views that penetrate the sphere of deviance, or...that are culturally incongruent’. To express deviant ‘notions would mean trying to convince colleagues and citizens of what is basically un-

thinkable to them'. Moreover, common 'motivations work against the spread of such ideas—expressing them can endanger political and journalistic careers' (ibid).

According to Herman and Chomsky (1988: 298), the media carries out a "societal purpose" which is to 'defend the economic, social, and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state'. In practise, media 'serve this purpose' in multiple ways, 'through selection of topics', 'filtering of information' and 'framing of issues' (ibid.). Thus, essential questions are not raised. Even being very critical, the media accepts 'the nominal objectives of the state as real...as the state always proclaims benevolent aims and responsive and defensive behaviour' (Herman 1992: 5).

Conclusion

The *Independent's* coverage of the first US assault on Fallujah was inconsistent. This result seems to be supported by other research. Although different studies found out that the *Independent*, during some periods of time before the *Iraq War*, represented a point of view that was rather consistent and against war,¹⁵ there is evidence supporting the fact that its coverage has been inconsistent over time. For instance, in a study about the Gulf War, Keeble (1997) documented how the *Independent* changed its political stance. According to Keeble (ibid.: 94-95), immediately after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, on 2 August 1990, the newspaper 'stood out against' the military build-up while backing a diplomatic solution of the conflict. Suddenly, on 20 August, the editors changed their position to support a military intervention (ibid.: 94-95). Later, after the official ending of the Gulf War, the *Independent* switched again, by rallying against a war-option during the '1993 and 1998 attacks on Iraq' (Keeble 2004: 51).

As findings of this study suggest, the newspaper changed its position over time as well. The initial US attack on Fallujah was framed in accordance with US/Coalition interests. By taking the murder of the US contractors as a starting point of the narrative, the causes of the resistance remained blurred. In fact, it was not mentioned that a legitimate uprising against an illegitimate foreign occupation could have happened. Rather it was the opposite: the framing was largely supportive to the US-rationale behind the attack and did not fundamentally question the operation. Because other problem solutions were not represented, warfare appeared as an appropriate remedy. Moreover, the attack on Fallujah was repeatedly attributed to a brutal murder, thus the people of Fallujah got indirectly linked to the perpetrators. Therefore, a whole population seemed worthy to attack.

Later, the *Independent* developed a position that was arguably against warfare and in favour of ending the siege. Coverage of the assault was critical and diverse, reflecting the situation in the city and delivering important details on casualties and conditions in Fallujah. Moreover, the newspaper tried to debunk the political goals behind the attack. Besides, current findings suggest that the writings of Robert Fisk and Patrick Cockburn particularly contributed to the *Independent's* diverse and critical reporting. This, by challenging the official justification of the assault and delivering detailed descriptions of the situation in Fallujah. Significantly, Fisk's and Cockburn's reporting seemed to be more critical and sometimes even contrary to the *Independent's* regular news reporting's and editorials' stances thus revealing a contradiction inherent to the newspapers daily reporting.

The *Independent's* critical position towards the siege is commendable. Nevertheless, its initial reporting did not question adequately the military solution - which had terrible

consequences for the people of Fallujah. Eventually, some crucial questions were not seriously discussed in the *Independent's* coverage about the assault on Fallujah. These concerned the legality of the attack, under international law, and violations of international humanitarian law which were reported by numerous independent observers and relief organisation.

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- ¹ Shortly after the official ending of the Iraq War, on 1 May 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) came into power under the implementation of UN Resolution 1483 on 22 May 2003. It was lead by US civilian administrator Paul Bremer. Resolution 1483 effectively gave the US and UK the status of occupying powers (Allawi 2007: 105-106; Boyle 2005).
- ² In this study, I focused on press coverage of the British newspaper the *Independent* between 1-12 April to explain the initial framing of the attack. For the discussion of the *Independent's* coverage of issues concerning international law and the Geneva Conventions, I studied press coverage between 5-30 April.
- ³ I firstly discovered this paragraph in an earlier article by Khan & Jmail (2005). Some of my arguments in this chapter are inspired by their report.
- ⁴ Graham (2004) observed that 'according the main hospital, at least forty civilians and police were killed and sixty to seventy wounded in the area around Fallujah during the first six months of the occupation'.
- ⁵ Nichols and McChesney (2005: 37) argue, that to assess the performance of a media system (and journalism) it is necessary to analyse 'how the press system enables the citizens to monitor the government's war-making powers' because 'war is the most serious use of state power: organized [sic], sanctioned violence'. Therefore, it is important to evaluate 'how well [war] is under citizen review and control' which 'is not only a litmus test for the media but for society as a whole' (ibid.). Although the US/Coalition was officially not engaged in a war in Iraq, during the occupation, I consider the above notion as appropriate. In my point of view, the attack on Fallujah was an act of war in the sense of being 'most serious use of state power: organized [sic], sanctioned violence' (ibid.).
- ⁶ A counterframe provides an alternative interpretation of events to that provided by the government (Entman op cit.: 17). The establishment of a counterframe stems from the journalists' 'motivations to include oppositional readings of foreign policy in their stories...when the event or issue is ambiguous' in the sense that interpretations of events are 'conflicting or unclear' (ibid.: 14; 18). This process is also related to the ability of government officials to manage their media relations and the significance of elite opposition towards the government's policies (ibid.: 72-73). As will be shown, elite opposition was significant in this case, thus encouraging the establishment of alternative interpretations. Counterframes can have policy repercussions if they attain 'sufficient magnitude to gain wide understanding as a sensible alternative to' the official government interpretation of events (ibid.: 17).
- ⁷ For a detailed discussion on the political reasons for the ceasefire see Allawi (op cit.: 276ff.).
- ⁸ On the role of the US behind what can be described as a process of deconstruction of the Iraqi society see Schwartz (2006).
- ⁹ For status, obligations and responsibilities of the US and UK as occupying powers see Shiner (2005: 100). See also Boyle (2005), who argued that at least since the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1483, the US and UK 'have been the belligerent occupants of Iraq subject to the Four Geneva Conventions of 1949, the Hague Regulations of 1907, U.S. Army Field Manual 27-10 (1956) or respectively its British equivalent, the humanitarian provisions of Additional Protocol I of 1977 to the Four Geneva Conventions of 1949, and the customary international laws of war'.
- ¹⁰ For information on Western journalists and civilians who reported out of Fallujah see Soldz (2007).
- ¹¹ See Boyle (2004).
- ¹² According to Mandel (2005a: 33), the number of legal experts who condemned the Iraq War as a violation of international law was by far higher than those who defended the war as legitimate. For an overall discussion, why the Iraq War was arguably illegal under international law, see Mandel (ibid.: 27-58) and Curtis (2004: 33-46).
- ¹³ This argument was significantly weakened through UN Resolution 1483 which formally legitimated the occupying powers.
- ¹⁴ For an overall discussion of these matters see Mandel (ibid: 27-33).

¹⁵ For instance, a study by Couldry and Downey (2004: 269; 272) that analysed press coverage during a week (27/01/2003-02/02/2003) in the build up for the Iraq War found out that ‘*The Independent* adopted a consistently anti-war position across genres with Robert Fisk spearheading its coverage and analysis of the conflict’. Similarly, Keeble (2004: 51) concluded that, ‘the *Independents* (the daily and Sunday), carrying prominently the dissident views of foreign correspondent Robert Fisk, were the most hostile’ newspapers towards the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

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