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When 'good' conflicts go bad: Testing a frame-building model on embeds' attitudes toward government news management in the Iraq War

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Abstract

Scholars have debated how successful the government was in managing coverage of the ground war in Iraq through the embed system, but few have surveyed the embedded journalists themselves to discover the degree they believe their press freedom was restricted. This study compares results from a survey conducted of embedded journalists in late 2005 and early 2006 to one conducted in early 2004 to examine whether embeds' opinions toward press freedom have changed over time and whether they believe government news management has increased as criticism of the Iraq War has increased and public support has declined. It also tests the hierarchy-of-influences model by examining the degree to which individual, journalism routines, external and cultural factors significantly predict attitudes toward press freedom and perceptions of censorship after controlling for demographics and political ideology.

Keywords

embedded journalists, frame-building, framing, freedom of the press, Iraq War, news management

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While critics of the Pentagon's decision to embed reporters with troops in the Iraq War conceded that the government relied considerably more on management techniques than outright censorship to control media coverage during the ground war, some wondered whether the government would have clamped down more on the press if the ground war had not gone as smoothly (Paul and Kim, 2004). Skeptics did not have to wait long to find out. As the effort to oust Saddam gave way to attempts to maintain peace amid sectarian violence and declining public support, so have complaints that the government has attempted to control the press (Bedway, 2007; Strupp, 2005). Therefore, it is important to determine whether embedded reporters perceive that the government has stepped up efforts to control press coverage in the Iraq War.

While scholars have debated how successful the government was in managing coverage of the ground war through the embed system, few have surveyed the embedded journalists themselves to discover the degree they believe their press freedom was restricted. The one study that did explore how much embeds perceived that the government tried to censor the press (Johnson and Fahmy, 2009) was conducted before the rise of sectarian violence and the subsequent increase in criticism of the press by the government for its war coverage. No study has compared journalists' perceptions of news management in the Iraq War over time.

Most studies that have examined press attitudes toward press freedom, government control and news management have been largely descriptive (Wyatt et al., 1994, 1996), not examining factors that might affect these attitudes. This study employs a frame-building model to explore factors that may have influenced embedded reporters' perceptions of press freedom and the degree they believed the government managed press coverage.

This research compares results from a survey conducted of embedded journalists in late 2005 and early 2006 to one conducted in early 2004 to explore whether their opinions toward press freedom have changed as well as whether embeds contend they have experienced increased government attempts at news management as criticism of the war efforts have increased and public support has declined. This study also examines the degree to which (1) individual-level factors, (2) journalism routine factors, (3) external factors and (4) cultural factors significantly predict attitudes toward press freedom and perceptions of government news management after controlling for demographics and political ideology variables.

Frame-building

Scheufele (1999, 2000; Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007) notes that framing studies typically focus on one of three distinct processes: frame-setting, frame-building and individual-level outcomes of framing. Frame-building explores how both intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence how journalists frame a particular issue. While gatekeeping explores factors that influence the production and selection of news (i.e. Gans, 1979; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Tuchman, 1978), frame-building looks at factors that influence the structural factors of news in terms of framing.

Frame-building researchers have stressed internal factors that influence how journalists frame issues: individual characteristics of reporters, journalists' ideological or political orientations, professional values and journalistic routines (Scheufele, 1999, 2000; Zhou and Moy, 2007). Zhou and Moy explain that the frame-building process mainly centers on journalistic professionalism rather than interactions between the political system, the public and the media.

However, frame-building researchers have increasingly looked at external factors that can influence how journalists frame the news, including organizational pressures and restraints, government policies and stances, pressures from public opinion and interest groups and cultural influences (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Scheufele, 1999, 2000; Zhou and Moy, 2007). Research found external factors might play a particularly important role in framing international news (Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad, 2000; Zhou and Moy, 2007). In particular, interest groups and politicians have considerable success in getting journalists to adopt their preferred interpretive frame for established issues, including foreign policy. On relatively new issues, however, public opinion might exert a greater influence because journalists have no established perspectives to follow (Zhou and Moy, 2007).

Wartime illustrates the importance of frame-building. During times of war it is anticipated that journalists will bend the rules of objectivity and support the troops as well as the government's war policy (De Beer and Merrill, 2004; Fahmy, 2005, *in press*; Fahmy and Kim, 2008), although scholars discovered this was not always the case in Iraq War coverage (see Entman, 2006). Also, government regulations and policies during wartime have a major impact on what gets covered and what does not. While scholars have focused on how external factors have influenced war coverage, journalists themselves view intrinsic factors as being more important. Embeds contended that professional values and norms had the greatest influence on how they reported the war, while external factors, such as familiarity with the Arabic language and the Iraqi culture, had little perceived influence on their coverage (Fahmy and Johnson, 2005). A study of news editors found similar results (Shin et al., 2005). However, research suggests that journalists may have underestimated the influence of external forces such as government policy on their values. For instance, while journalists argue that they did not practice self-censorship in covering the war, they adhered to government regulations on embedded reporting, such as withholding sensitive stories on troop movements or about an upcoming military campaign (Johnson and Fahmy, 2009).

The embed process and news management

While scholars and political observers agree that the government typically has not censored the media during the Iraq War, they argue about the degree to which embed policies shaped coverage and led the media to present a largely positive view of the war effort. As criticism of the war effort has been mounting, so have reports that the US government has attempted to censor and control the coverage (Strupp, 2005). However, it is unclear the degree to which these isolated cases of government control have affected reporters' overall perceptions of the level of freedom in reporting the war.

The press was barred from the US invasion of Grenada in 1983 and the invasion of Panama in 1989. The military strictly controlled the press during the Persian Gulf War in 1991 through 11 press pools that went out in the field to gather information and pool notes, photos and quotes. Stories were sent back to headquarters in Saudi Arabia where they were distributed to other reporters. Military officers accompanied the pool reporters and reviewed stories for sensitive information. Reporters were not allowed to go out on their own to gather information; much of the information came from frequent press briefings where the government fed the media a steady supply of pro-US news. It is hardly surprising, then, that media critics and scholars had little good to say about that media coverage (Pavlik and Rachlin, 1991). As *Newsweek* media critic Jonathan Alter (Pavlik and Rachlin, 1991) said: 'The sad truth is that we "covered" the war but we didn't "report" the war. There was very little independent journalism until the last hours of the conflict.'

The embed system employed was designed to improve military–press relations and to improve journalistic accuracy by allowing them to be stationed with the troops themselves (Shepherd, 2004). Also, advances in satellite technology allowed journalists to escape censors and broadcast live, making it difficult to directly censor or manage content (Livingston and Van Belle, 2005). However, the government realized that stationing reporters with the military would help win the information war by dominating the information environment. The embeds would come to identify with those who they are covering and write from a coalition perspective (Kahn, 2004).

Indeed, critics charged that the main purpose of the embed system was to shape coverage. Because journalists would be stationed with military units and would be dependent on them for food, shelter and transportation, the reporters would come to identify with those who they were embedded with and would present the news from a pro-coalition perspective (Ganey, 2004). Indeed, observers criticized what they saw as overly patriotic coverage that portrayed the military as welcomed liberators of Iraq. Also, the press did not take an active watchdog role by questioning the government before the war began on issues such as the existence of weapons of mass destruction (Aday, 2010; Fahmy et al., in press). Indeed, several studies have found that embedded coverage of the Iraqi invasion was overwhelmingly positive (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2005; Haigh et al., 2006; Pfau et al., 2004, 2005), although Aday et al. (2005) found coverage was largely neutral.

But while the embed system came under criticism from several fronts, interviews and surveys with journalists generally praised the embed system for providing them greater access to information and for allowing first-hand reports of the war in real time free of censorship or government control. Specifically, Johnson and Fahmy (2009) found that more than six in 10 journalists (62.1 percent) indicated they experienced *no* or *little* military control and more than 70 percent said that the public largely enjoyed their right to know during the war.

However, about 20 percent did indicate that their coverage was restricted, explaining it was because military and journalistic objectives did not always coincide. For instance, military personnel tried to divert the media from aspects of the war that did not project a favorable image, such as showing images of injured or dead American soldiers (Johnson and Fahmy, 2009).

The embed system after the fall of Baghdad

In the year after the fall of Baghdad, reporters could roam relatively freely through the streets, shopping at the markets, eating at restaurants and talking freely to Iraqi citizens (Memcott, 2006). But the rise of the insurgency movement in 2004, and the beheading of Nicholas Berg in May 2004, created fundamental changes in reporters' abilities to report the war ('Into the Abyss', 2006). Indeed political observers suggest that a host of individual-level factors (i.e. declining public and journalistic support for the war), journalism routine factors (i.e. relying on translators to gather information), external factors (i.e. the increased danger of reporting the war, stiffer controls imposed by the government) and cultural factors (i.e. an increased familiarity with the Iraqi culture) may have altered how journalists covered the war after the invasion phase of the war as well as their perceptions of how much freedom they experienced covering the occupation stage.

External factors, in particular, may have inhibited media coverage. The rise in suicide bombers and roadside bombs, which accompanied the rise of the insurgents, made travel extremely hazardous (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2007), limiting attention to certain stories such as narratives of victims and survivors and stories about resistance fighters and jihadists (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2007). Worse, journalists became targets of the insurgents and criminal gangs. Reporters Without Borders (2009) reported that 225 journalists and media workers have been killed in Iraq as of March 2009, making it by far the most dangerous war for journalists to cover. The pressure to stay out of harm's way affected journalistic routines of reporting and has led to the increase in so-called *hotel journalism* and *rooftop* reporting, where reporters are forced to avoid *boots-on-the-ground* reporting in favor of working the phones in order to get a story (Ricchiardi, 2006, 2007). Similarly, because few journalists speak Arabic, and because it is too dangerous for reporters to go out and interview civilians, reporters have had to rely heavily on translators and stringers to gather information (Spinner, 2006). Indeed, the Project for Excellence in Journalism report found that about 80 percent of journalists said that at least half of their street reporting (that done out of the Green Zone) is done by their Iraqi staff.

While the rise of the insurgency limited who the press could talk to, the changing nature of the embed system also put pressure on the journalists to self-censor. Public affairs officials, who were absent during the ground war, would grumble at reporters when they wrote what was perceived as a negative story. The technology that allowed reporters to send stories more easily back home, also made it possible for commanders and the soldiers they embedded with to read the story online (Laurence, 2007). As long as journalists reported the news accurately and fairly, soldiers rarely complained and sometimes complimented reporters for telling it like it is regardless of whether the news was good or bad (Fahmy and Johnson, 2007b; Spinner, 2006). However, some embeds claimed that the ability of commanders to read stories soon after they were filed led to some retributions against them. Embeds would not always be able to accompany troops on patrol and sometimes they were ordered to leave camp (Fahmy and Johnson, 2007b).

But despite increased government efforts to manage the news, reporters still seemed to support the embed system for many of the reasons they supported it during the ground war. While some journalists reported outright censorship, most reporters reported few, if any, problems with military control or news management efforts ('Into the Abyss',

2006). Reporters claimed that the embed system still provided the same advantages in 2006 as it did during the ground war. Reporters got first-hand reports in real time from military units, and got greater access to the battle than in previous wars. Reporters continued to be granted access to briefs that provided them with a greater understanding of the military and its operations than they would have received if they were not embedded ('Into the Abyss', 2006).

Indeed, a recent survey of embeds found the overwhelming support for the embed system that existed during the ground war had not declined over time. More than 80 percent *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that overall embedded journalists successfully reported the war (Fahmy and Johnson, 2007b).

Based on studies of journalists' support for the embed system and perceptions of government news management and censorship in Iraq, this study addresses the following questions:

RQ1: How much freedom do journalists believe they should be allowed in covering the Iraqi conflict?

RQ2: How did these perceptions of press freedom change over time?

RQ3: How much freedom did embedded journalists perceive they enjoyed in reporting the Iraq War in 2005/6?

RQ4: How did these perceptions of amount of news management change over time?

Factors influencing freedom of press views

No study could be found that has directly explored predictors of journalists' support for press freedom. However, several studies have explored surrogate measures of press freedom, such as journalistic values and support for controversial press practices (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986, 1996; Weaver et al., 2006). Few measures consistently explain freedom of the press among journalists, whether press freedom is measured in terms of the role of journalists or the willingness to take controversial stances.

Weaver et al. (2006) found that intrinsic factors had a more important influence than external ones on support for controversial news practices and on news values. Professional values and norms had the most important influence on support for controversial reporting practices. Similarly, Weaver et al. (2006) found that organizational and individual factors had a greater influence on news values than external factors, although influences depended on what news value was examined.

Johnson and Fahmy (2009) specifically looked at the effects of individual factors and one external factor (sources used) on attitudes toward government news management and support for press freedom. They found that those who relied more on foreign and government sources were more likely to believe the government managed the news. Use of sources did not predict support for press freedom. The authors speculated that the different perspectives of foreign sources might have more clearly demonstrated to reporters the efforts of the military to spin the news from a military perspective.

Based on previous studies examining factors influencing journalists' support for press freedom and perception of news management, this study also advances the following questions:

RQ5: In reporting the Iraq War, to what extent will (1) individual-level factors (individual values, attitude toward war and professional values and norms), (2) journalism routine factors (the relationship developed with the embed unit, the fact that embeds needed to rely on the military for transportation and the relationship they developed with local stringers), (3) external factors (concern that those in the unit could read their reports, the issue that they could read other journalists' reports and concerns about personal safety) and (4) cultural factors (level of familiarity with the Iraqi culture and level of proficiency with the Arabic language) predict attitudes toward press freedom after controlling for demographics (age, gender, education and years of professional experience) and political ideology variables.

RQ6: In reporting the Iraq War, to what extent will (1) individual-level factors, (2) journalism routine factors, (3) external factors and (4) cultural factors predict perceptions of government news management after controlling for demographics, political ideology and support for press freedom variables.

Method

The data come from two survey data sets conducted with embedded journalists during the Iraq War. The first was conducted from 20 January 2004 to 10 March 2004 and a follow-up survey was conducted from 13 October 2005 to 17 February 2006.

Out of the population of 600 journalists embedded to cover the invasion stage of the war, a list of about 400 journalists was compiled to conduct the first survey in early 2004. The list of 400 reporters included all the names of embedded journalists made available to us. This list was compiled unofficially from the Pentagon and through personal contacts with news correspondents and journalism educators in the Middle East, Europe and the Far East.¹

Correspondents who only covered the Iraq War as unilateral journalists were removed from the list. Moreover, journalists who got the approval to embed but who never covered the conflict, as well as news professionals who only managed the embedded program in their news organizations, were also eliminated from the list. In fall 2005, to conduct the second survey, about 20 percent of the embedded reporters' email addresses we had access to in the earlier survey were no longer valid, leaving a list of about 300 valid email contacts.

To gather the data, personalized emails were sent directing respondents to participate in web-based questionnaires. Participation was voluntary and all of the responses remained anonymous. Overall, it is estimated in the first survey, in 2004, that 302 emails were delivered successfully to embedded reporters. To increase the response rate, four follow-up emails were sent to non-respondents. A total of 159 respondents out of the 302 valid contacts completed the survey, with a response rate of 53 percent. Because over time about one-fourth of the email contacts were no longer valid, for the follow-up survey, 229 emails were delivered successfully. To increase the response rate of the second survey, reminders by both email messages and telephone calls were made to non-respondents. By February 2006, 118 respondents out of the 227 valid contacts had completed the survey,² a response rate of 52 percent. While we acknowledge that some of the respondents in this research might have completed both questionnaires, because of

the anonymity we promised to all participants in this project we assume that some of respondents might have only participated in one of the two surveys (i.e. either filled out the first or the second questionnaire). Consequently, the two studies do not constitute a true panel of respondents.

Using online surveys, we had access to a limited number of email addresses. Nevertheless, the electronic survey method offered potential efficiencies that include reducing costs, timeliness as well as overcoming international boundaries (Dillman, 2000). Overall, cost effectiveness and timeliness, accompanied with the fact that many of the journalists were still embedded in Iraq, made the web-based data collection a practical survey method for this study.

The two web-based questionnaires explored the following measures.

Attitudes toward press freedom and access

One of the main dependent variables for this study was embedded journalists' perceptions of press freedom. In the two web-based questionnaires, respondents were asked to rate the following three statements:

1. Embedded journalists should be able to report anything they choose without prior military review.
2. The media should enjoy maximum access to military plans during conflict.
3. Embedded journalists should be free to visit any place they choose without army approval.

Five-point response categories ranged from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. For the regression analysis, the three variables were summed to form an attitude toward press freedom index. The Cronbach's alpha for the index was .64.

News management during the Iraq War

The second main dependent variable for this study was embedded journalists' perceptions of government news management during the Iraq War. Five five-point Likert scale measures gauged news management perceptions in the two questionnaires:

1. To what extent did the media impose self-censorship in the coverage of the Iraq War?
2. How much did the public information specialists influence the news media during the Iraq War?
3. How severe was the military control of embedded journalists during the Iraq War?
4. How severe was the government control of information during the recent Iraq War as compared to the Afghan War?
5. How much did the public enjoy their right to know during the Iraq War?

Possible responses ranged from *not at all* to *very much*. The last question was recoded to range from *very much* to *not at all* and the five variables were summed to form a news

management during the Iraq War index for the regression analysis. The Cronbach's alpha for the index was .72.

The embedded journalists were further asked the following question: In your view, how much more access was there for non-embedded/unilateral journalists as compared to embeds? Again response categories ranged from *not at all* to *very much*. Moreover, they were asked two additional questions: Should the media have been less controlled during the war? They were then asked *why* via an open-ended question to elaborate on their perceptions of freedom in reporting the Iraqi conflict to provide a more detailed examination of the media management issue under study.

Influential individual, routine, external and cultural factors

Regarding the perceived factors that may have influenced perceptions of press freedom, classifications for whether variables constituted individual-level, journalistic routine, external or cultural factors were based on earlier research (see Fahmy and Johnson, 2005) as well as conversations with communication scholar Steve Reese (pers. comm., 31 March 2006) and former *Washington Post* Baghdad Bureau chief Jackie Spinner (pers. comm., Carbondale, IL, 15 May 2005). Respondents were asked to assess – on a five-point scale that ranged from *not at all* to *very much* – the following factors that were later combined into indices for the regression runs:

1. How influential were your personal values in your reports?
2. How influential were your personal attitudes toward the war in your reports?
3. How influential were your professional roles or norms in your reports?
4. How influential was the relationship you developed with the unit you embedded with in your reports?
5. How influential was the relationship you developed with local stringers in your reports (if applicable)?
6. The embeds didn't go anywhere without the military, how influential was this issue in your reports?
7. If you had access to the Internet providing you with instantaneous coverage and access, how influential was the issue that information about the unit you covered could be read by the troops you interviewed?
8. If you had access to the Internet providing you with instantaneous coverage and access, how influential was the issue that you could read other journalists' stories?
9. How influential were concerns of personal safety in your reports?
10. How influential was your degree of knowledge of the Arabic language in your reports?
11. How influential was your degree of familiarity with the Iraqi culture in your reports?

Demographics and political variables

A set of background questions were used for descriptive and comparison purposes. We specifically examined associations between press freedom and age, gender, education,

years of professional experience and political ideology. Additional background questions used for descriptive purposes included nationality, international experience and proficiency in foreign languages, as well as experience with non-embedded reporting (if applicable) and coverage of previous conflicts. Further, in the follow-up survey, respondents were asked about the time-frame and lengths of their embedding experience, and also asked to assess their Internet access during and after the invasion phase of the war.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed in three stages. First, frequencies were run on demographics and political variables, support for press freedom and access in war reporting. Second, a series of paired sample *t*-tests examined whether perceptions of press freedom and amount of news management changed over time. Third, hierarchical regression analyses tested whether individual-level factors, journalism routine factors, external factors and cultural factors predicted attitudes toward press freedom after controlling for demographics and political ideology variables. Fourth, a series of hierarchical regression analyses tested whether these factors predicted opinions about the amount of government control in reporting the Iraq War after controlling for demographics, political ideology and support for press freedom variables. For both regressions, demographics were entered as the first block and political ideology was entered as the second block. Support for press freedom was entered as the third block in the regression examining perceptions of news management in Iraq. For both regressions, the influential factors were entered last. The individual-level factors, journalism routine factors, external factors and cultural factors were entered separately, creating four separate equations for both of the dependent variables. For simplicity of discussion, the hierarchical analyses were only conducted on the second survey data.

Results

Embeds: Demographics and characteristics

While we acknowledge that we did not have access to the entire list of embedded journalists, and therefore these results may not be representative of all embeds who covered the Iraq War, the findings showed that the two samples of embedded reporters surveyed were quite similar. Paired sample *t*-tests suggested no significant differences in respondents' background and characteristics between the two surveys, although the respondents were not necessarily identical. Results showed, for example, that respondents in the first survey ranged in age from 25 to 60 years old, with a mean of 41. In the second survey, the age ranged from 29 to 73 years old with a mean of 45. Males greatly outnumbered females. Male respondents represented fourth-fifths of all embeds in both studies (85.5 percent and 80 percent respectively). The vast majority of embeds reported they were white and more than 90 percent indicated at least a university degree. Three-quarters (73 percent) of the respondents in both surveys were from the United States.

In terms of their experience in covering the war in Iraq, almost half of the respondents in the two surveys indicated they also reported the Iraq War as non-embedded journalists

Table 1. Responses to Statements Regarding Embedded Journalists' Attitudes toward Press Freedom and Access in War Reporting in 2005/6 (N = 118)

	Mean	SD	Percent reporting strongly agree & agree	Percent reporting strongly disagree & disagree
The media should enjoy maximum access to military plans during conflict.	2.24	1.06	66.7%	15.4%
Embedded journalists should be able to report anything they choose without prior military review.	2.30	1.21	64.7%	25.0%
Embedded journalists should be free to visit any place they choose without army approval.	2.50	1.28	57.4%	29.5%

Note: 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = neutral; 4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree.

and were embedded in Iraq more than once. Further, in the follow-up survey, the majority of respondents were embedded from one month to three months (79.7 percent) and 20 percent reported they were embedded for a period that ranged between three months and a year. In terms of the embedding experience, about half (47.5 percent) indicated they were embedded during the invasion phase and 40 percent explained they were embedded during and after the fall of Baghdad.

The vast majority of embeds tended to have extensive professional experience, with three-fourths reporting they had worked as journalists for more than two decades. They represented a fairly international background. The majority of respondents in both surveys had lived outside their native country for at least a year, with one-third stating they had lived abroad for a period that ranged from six to more than 20 years. While seven in 10 indicated in the first survey they were proficient in at least one foreign language, our second survey showed that only 8.6 percent of the respondents were *somewhat proficient*, *very proficient* and *proficient* in the Arabic language. In terms of familiarity with the Iraqi culture, about half of the respondents indicated they were *somewhat familiar* with it.

Regarding Internet access, in the follow-up survey, respondents reported that they became significantly more likely to have access to the Internet after the end of the ground war ($t = 3.26, p < .01$). The vast majority of the respondents (84.4 percent) reported they had Internet access during the occupation phase, vs 66.7 percent who reported they had access during the invasion phase of the conflict. The majority of the respondents further expressed they had *very strong* or *strong* views about the war. In terms of their political ideology, the majority (52.7 percent) of the respondents in the second survey reported they were *middle of the road* and *independent*. More than one-third (38.5 percent) explained they were *very liberal*, *liberal* and *leaning liberal*. Only 9 percent indicated they were *leaning conservative* or *conservative*.

Overall, both the demographic makeup and work experience of the respondents in both surveys closely resembled results of an earlier embed study (Ganey, 2004), except on industry experience where researcher Kryszons found that only one-third of embeds

Table 2. Comparing Means of Responses Regarding Embedded Journalists' Attitudes toward Press Freedom and Access over Time ($N = 159$ and 118 respectively)

	Mean (2005/6)	Mean (2004)	t-Score
The media should enjoy maximum access to military plans during conflict.	2.24	2.22	-.12
Embedded journalists should be able to report anything they choose without prior military review.	2.30	2.30	.00
Embedded journalists should be free to visit any place they choose without army approval.	2.50	2.36	-.81

Note: 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = neutral; 4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree.

had worked as journalists for more than two decades. This suggests that the samples of respondents who participated in our surveys are largely representative of the general population of embedded journalists who reported the Iraq War.

Attitudes toward press freedom and access in war reporting

The first research question explored the degree to which journalists perceived they should be completely free to cover the war in 2005/6. Results showed respondents believe, by and large, that the media need to be free from government and military control, although journalists were hardly absolutists. Means of responses ranged between 2 and 3, corresponding to *agree* and data showed little variance.

As shown in Table 1, the standard deviation scores for the items examined were low, suggesting homogeneous attitudes toward opinions of press freedom and access. Approximately 60 percent of the respondents *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that the media should enjoy maximum access to military plans during conflict ($M = 2.24$), that embedded journalists should be able to report anything they choose without prior military review ($M = 2.30$) and that embedded journalists should be free to visit any place they choose without army approval ($M = 2.50$).

Table 2 details how perceptions of press freedom changed over time. In comparing means of the two survey data sets, results of paired sample *t*-tests showed opinions did not significantly differ on whether the embeds believed the media should enjoy maximum access to military plans during conflict, whether they should be able to report anything they choose without prior military review and whether they should be able to visit any place they choose without approval. Scores ranged from 2.22 to 2.50, indicating that embeds tended to agree they should have the freedom to cover the war without government restriction.

Perceptions of freedom in reporting the Iraq War

Research question 3 examined embedded journalists' perceptions of the amount of government control they experienced reporting the Iraq War during the occupation phase

Table 3. Responses to Questions Regarding Embedded Journalists' Perceptions of Freedom in Reporting the Iraq War in 2005/6 (N = 118)

	Mean	SD	Percent reporting <i>not at all & little</i>	Percent reporting <i>much & very much</i>
To what extent did the media impose self-censorship in the coverage of the Iraq War?	2.43	.94	54.2%	11.4%
How much did the public information specialists influence the news media during the Iraq War?	2.53	1.15	58.8%	22.7%
How severe was the military control of embedded journalists during the Iraq War?	2.63	1.1	57.4%	23.4%
How severe was the government control of information during the recent Iraq War as compared to the Afghan War?	2.77	1.26	56.7%	26.7%
How much did the public enjoy their right to know during the Iraq War?	3.91	1.05	10.8%	70.0%

Note: 1 = not at all; 2 = little; 3 = neutral; 4 = much; 5 = very much.

in 2005/6. While a sizeable proportion of respondents (38 percent) reported that the media enjoyed sufficient freedom, more than half (62 percent) said the media should have been less controlled during the war.

In terms of self-censorship, half of the respondents (54.2 percent) reported the media imposed *no* or *little* self-censorship. Nearly six in 10 (58.8 percent) reported that public information specialists had *no* or *little* influence on the news media. The mean was 2.53, corresponding to *little*. More than half (57.4 percent) indicated *no* or *little* military control of embedded journalists. Further, seven in 10 (70.0 percent) indicated the public largely enjoyed their right to know during the Iraq War (see Table 3 for detailed percentages, mean and standard deviation scores of responses).

When comparing perceptions of news management during the two surveys, respondents became significantly more likely to agree that non-embedded journalists had more access in reporting the Iraq War ($t = -5.01, p < .001$). In the 2005/6 survey of embeds, almost half (45.2 percent) of the respondents perceived that unilaterals had *much* or *very much* more access in reporting the conflict than embedded journalists, with a mean of 3.30.

By and large, our data analysis indicated that embedded reporters continued to perceive limited government control in reporting the conflict. In comparing means of the two survey data sets, results showed perceptions have not changed for three of the five variables used to assess freedom and access in embedded reporting.

Table 4. Comparing Means of Responses Regarding Embedded Journalists' Attitudes toward Government News Management over Time ($N = 159$ and 118 respectively)

	Mean (2005/6)	Mean (2004)	t-Score
To what extent did the media impose self-censorship in the coverage of the Iraq War?	2.43	2.71	2.22*
How much did the public information specialists influence the news media during the Iraq War?	2.53	2.38	-.46
How severe was the military control of embedded journalists during the Iraq War?	2.63	2.46	-.89
How severe was the government control of information during the recent Iraq War as compared to the Afghan War?	2.77	3.45	3.03**
How much did the public enjoy their right to know during the Iraq War?	3.91	3.87	-.42

Note: 1 = not at all; 2 = little; 3 = neutral; 4 = much; 5 = very much.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 4 details how embedded journalists assess the amount of government news management experienced in Iraq and how their evaluations of press freedom changed over time. Paired sample t -tests suggested opinions on whether public information specialists influenced the news, whether military control of embedded journalists was severe and whether the public largely enjoyed their right to know during the Iraq War did not significantly differ.

Our analysis suggested two cases where attitudes had changed. However, in both cases embeds had perceived less government efforts at control in 2005/6 than in 2004.

Respondents became significantly less likely to agree that the media exercised self-censorship ($t = 2.22$, $p < .05$). In the 2004 survey of embeds, more than one-fourth (25.8 percent) of the respondents reported that the media imposed self-censorship in covering the Iraq War, with a mean of 2.71. On the other hand, over time, that percentage dropped by a half, as 11.4 percent of the respondents in the later survey reported the media imposed *much* self-censorship in covering the conflict, with a mean of 2.43.

In the 2004 survey of embeds, in comparing control in covering the Iraq War to the Afghan War, 43.2 percent of the respondents perceived *no* or *little*, with a mean of 3.45. In the follow-up survey, more than half (56.7 percent) of the respondents perceived less government control in covering the conflict in Iraq as compared to the Afghan War, with a mean of 2.77. Embeds explained that access had become more limited in Iraq since May 2004 because of the growing insurgency and the increasing threats faced by journalists covering the war. As one embed explained: 'Access has been more limited since May 2004 not because of the military's actions, but because of direct insurgent threat against foreign journalists in Iraq.'

Table 5. Hierarchical Regression Analyses of Individual-Level Factors, Journalism Routine Factors, External Factors and Cultural Factors as Predictors of Embedded Journalists' Attitudes toward Press Freedom ($N = 118$)

	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3	Regression 4
<i>Predictor variables</i>				
Age	-.06	-.12	-.07	-.24
Gender	.02	.31	.09	.23
Education	-.27	-.37	-.28	-.15
Experience	-.08	.19	.16	-.1
Political ideology	-.11	.01	.05	.09
Individual-level factors	.34 [#]			
Journalism routine factors		.63*		
External factors			.40*	
Cultural factors				.13
R	.34	.63	.40	.13
R ²	.12	.4	.16	.02
Adjusted R ²	.08	.33	.13	-.02
F-value	3.60 [#]	5.90*	4.45*	.42

[#] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$.

Factors influencing support for press freedom in 2005/6

Research question 5 examined whether (1) individual-level factors, (2) journalism routine factors, (3) external factors and (4) cultural factors would significantly predict attitudes toward press freedom after controlling for demographics and political ideology variables. In three of the four cases the hypothesis was supported. Variables were entered as blocks with the demographic ones entered first, followed by political ideology with the different factors entered third.

In hierarchical regressions 1 through 4, individual-level factors (individual values, attitude toward war and professional values and norms), journalism routine factors (the relationship developed with the embed unit, the fact that embeds needed to rely on the military for transportation and the relationship they developed with local stringers) and external factors (concern that those in the unit could read their reports, the issue that they could read other journalists' reports and concerns about personal safety) predicted attitudes toward press freedom ($\beta = -.34$, $p < .10$; $\beta = .63$, $p < .05$; $\beta = .40$, $p < .05$). On the other hand, demographics and political ideology variables were not linked to opinions of press freedom, nor were cultural-level factors.

Factors influencing perceptions of government control in reporting war in 2005/6

Our data analysis shows limited support for the claim that in reporting the Iraq War (1) individual-level factors, (2) journalism routine factors, (3) external factors and

Table 6. Hierarchical Regression Analyses of Individual-Level Factors, Journalism Routine Factors, External Factors and Cultural Factors as Predictors of Embedded Journalists' Perceptions of Government News Management in Reporting the Iraq War ($N = 118$)

	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3	Regression 4
<i>Predictor variables</i>				
Age	-.27	-.27	-.14	-.29
Gender	-.29	.45	-.02	.10
Education	-.08	-.08	-.28	.10
Experience	-.27	.06	-.02	-.20
Political ideology	-.28	.02	.03	.03
Press freedom index	-.21	.45	-.04	.07
Individual-level factors		.40*		
Journalism routine factors			.11	
External factors	.26			
Cultural factors				.26
R	.40	.11	.26	.26
R ²	.16	.01	.07	.07
Adjusted R ²	.13	-.10	.03	.03
F-value	4.98*	.12	1.66	1.78

* $p < .05$.

(4) cultural factors would significantly predict perceptions of government news management after controlling for demographics, political ideology and support for press freedom variables (see Table 5). In only one of the four cases were results significant.

As shown in Table 6, in the first hierarchical regression, individual-level factors predicted attitudes toward press freedom ($\beta = .40, p < .05$). Hierarchical regressions 2 through 4 did not support the assertion that journalism routine factors, external factors and cultural-level factors would predict perceptions of news management after controlling for demographics, political ideology and support for press freedom variables. Further, demographic, political ideology and support for press freedom variables were not linked to perceptions of government news management in reporting the Iraq War.

Discussion

While even critics conceded that the press experienced little control during the ground war, some questioned whether access might decrease and government management efforts might increase if the ground war had not progressed as smoothly (Paul and Kim, 2004). With the rise of the insurgency and the decline of public support, reports of incidents of government control increased ('Into the Abyss', 2006). But while several observers have debated the degree of control that embeds experienced, few have surveyed the journalists themselves to determine the degree to which they felt managed. The one study (Johnson and Fahmy, 2009) that had explored attitudes toward news management was conducted before the escalation of violence.

This study compared a survey conducted of embedded journalists in late 2005 and early 2006 to one conducted in early 2004 to examine whether their opinions toward press freedom have changed as well as whether they believe government management efforts have increased as criticism of the war efforts have increased and public support has declined. This study also tested a frame-building model by examining the degree to which (1) individual-level factors, (2) journalism routine factors, (3) external factors and (4) cultural factors significantly predict attitudes toward press freedom and perceptions of news management after controlling for demographics and political ideology variables. This study found that despite reports that censorship and government news management efforts had increased after the escalation of violence in Iraq (Bedway, 2007; Strupp, 2005), the majority of embedded journalists said they experienced few, if any, government efforts to influence coverage and that seven in 10 still thought the public was properly informed of events in Iraq. Indeed, perceptions had shifted little from 2004 to 2005/6 and reporters in the latter time period were significantly less likely to say that government control of information in Iraq was greater than in the Afghan War.

While studies suggest that journalists are more likely than the public to support freedom of the press, past studies of embeds (Johnson and Fahmy, 2009) and journalists in general discovered that support for press freedom is not absolute (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986, 1996; Weaver et al., 2006). Our research echoed these findings. This study found that attitudes toward media access to war information changed little between the invasion and occupation stages of the war. More than 60 percent in both time periods thought the media should have maximum access to military plans and be able to report the war without prior review. A majority also thought the media should be able to visit any place they choose without government approval.

While many embeds said they supported free access in principle, most agreed that the public's right to know needed to be balanced against the military's need to protect national security. One embed noted:

Having covered the military for 15 years, I understand that they have to balance public information against the safety of the troops, and even the embedded journalist. There will ALWAYS have to be restrictions on the access that they give to the media and we will ALWAYS try to get more than we should. It's a natural tension and probably a healthy one in a democracy.

The majority of embeds disagreed that government control of embeds during the Iraq War was severe. The number of journalists who complained about government control changed little from 2004 to 2005/6. Indeed, the percentage of embeds who said that government control in the Iraq War was less than in the Afghan War had actually increased since 2004. As a recent study of embed performance suggests, about 80 percent still believed that the embed program was a success because it provided more access with less control than in previous wars (Fahmy and Johnson, 2007b). Indeed, 70 percent in the 2005/6 survey *agreed or strongly agreed* that the public enjoyed the right to know.

Many explained that while embed ground rules did not allow complete freedom of coverage, this wasn't a censorship issue, instead it was an issue of *logistics and security*.

One reporter said, 'Most of the ground rules reporters had to follow were for practical reasons – to keep both them and the unit with which they were embedded safe.' As another embed noted, 'we don't run off in the desert to figure out where our reporters went. ... see a TV crew driving off to get a quote from a local can get troops killed ... some restraint has to be there.' Thus, by and large, embeds reported that while control should have been minimal, troop safety and operational security are always going to be legitimate concerns. As one embed further explained:

We had certain restrictions that we agreed to. Don't give away the plan, don't give away your position, don't interview enemy captives, don't show pictures of dead soldiers. I didn't find these terribly confining, and some of them make sense.

Because embedded journalists considered most of the ground rules necessary to maintain the safety of the troops as well as operational security, they did not consider obeying these rules as self-censorship. Rather, some embeds noted that not reporting such information as troop locations is common sense because it would endanger the lives of the unit and of the journalists themselves. Indeed, only 11.4 percent believed journalists censored themselves during the war. Many embeds said that controls did not result from the embed rules, but from the nature of the embed process and because the rise in sectarian violence made traveling much more dangerous.

Similarly, several journalists stated that the increased danger caused by the insurgency made travel too hazardous without the military. One journalist reported:

First, it's very dangerous out there. Only an idiot would traipse around Iraq without consulting the military. Second, most reporters, including yours truly, haven't served a day in uniform, and aren't trained to follow active units engaged in live combat. There is a thin line between covering a story and endangering both soldiers – those in the immediate vicinity and those who might possibly have to be sent to find you – as well as yourself by somehow deciding that 'you have the right to go where you want to go' unassisted and unescorted and unadvised. You do have that right – but it's a fool's errand.

Embeds agreed that one of the major factors that influenced coverage was that embeds had to rely on the military for transportation. Before the increase in sectarian violence, journalists lamented that they could not always stay as long as they would like to conduct interviews because they would have to leave when the military left (Johnson and Fahmy, 2009). However, some embeds contended that after the insurgency began, transportation was used as a way to control coverage. Some embeds reported that if they wrote negative stories they might be prohibited from traveling with the military as a punishment ('Into the Abyss', 2006). Others suggested that the military only took them to places the government wanted them to see. One commented:

The only problem I ever ran into was transportation. When you rely on the Army to get around, sometimes you can't get to a place because there is nothing headed that way. Also, the Army often takes a group of embed on short trips. These trips are very controlled because they are more of a tour and less about reporting.

Although most embeds did not consider government control a major problem, about a quarter (23.4 percent) did contend it was a serious concern. Some embeds chafed at particular rules such as not printing the names of dead or wounded before families had been notified, or not being allowed to photograph detainees or soldiers who had been killed. Several of those who did say they were subjected to government controls did not blame the embed rules themselves, but the commanders who were implementing them. One embed said control depended on the 'circumstances and the whims of the local commanders. Some seem too uptight, others are very accommodating.'

While some commanders came under criticism, public affairs officers received less flak. About 22 percent argued that public affairs officers might want to shape the news by having reporters write about positive topics such as 'how the Marines provided potable drinking water, had rebuilt bridges, and helped paint schools', they didn't see these attempts to shape the news as efforts to censor reporters. Wartime seems to embody the hierarchy-of-influences model as journalists are expected to support the government's war efforts. Government regulations and policies during wartime also greatly influence what does and doesn't get covered.

This study employed frame-building analysis to explore how both intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence how journalists frame a particular issue. Frame-building researchers have examined how internal factors influence how journalists frame issues: individual characteristics of reporters, journalists' ideological or political orientations, professional values and journalistic routines (Scheufele, 1999, 2000; Zhou and Moy 2007). However, frame-building researchers also examine how external factors can influence how journalists frame the news, including organizational pressures and restraints, government policies and stances, pressures from public opinion and interest groups and cultural influences (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Scheufele, 1999, 2000; Zhou and Moy, 2007).

This study found that journalists perceive that individual-level factors, such as professional values and norms, attitudes toward war and individual values, affected attitudes toward government control, with post-hoc analysis suggesting professional norms and values made the most difference. They also reported cultural factors like not understanding the Iraqi language or culture did not influence either perceived attitudes toward government news management or perceptions of press freedom. These findings are in line with results from Weaver et al. (2006), who said that news values had the greatest influence on support for controversial news practices.

Similarly, journalists argued that journalistic routine factors, such as the relationship developed with the embed unit, the fact that embeds needed to rely on the military for transportation and the relationship they developed with local stringers, had the greatest overall effect on attitudes toward freedom of press. Individual-level and external factors also had strong influences, but cultural factors did not have a significant impact on the coverage. Post-hoc analyses suggested that one external factor, concern about personal safety, had the greatest influence on attitudes toward press freedom. This may be an artifact of how press freedom was measured. Two of the measures looked at access to the news: the media should enjoy maximum access to military plans during conflict and embedded journalists should be free to visit any place they choose without army approval. The fact that the insurgency made journalists targets made many reporters less

likely to venture out for interviews for fear of being killed or kidnapped. Consequently, some embeds were forced to practice hotel journalism, gathering information from phone calls and email in their hotel room (Ricchiardi, 2006). Issues of personal safety, more than anything else, restricted press freedom.

The fact that this study found that journalists perceived that internal factors had more influence than external ones supports other research on embeds examining their perceptions of how they performed (Fahmy and Johnson, 2005, 2007b) as well as other studies of journalism values and ethics (Berkowitz and Limor, 2003; Voakes, 1997; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996; Weaver et al., 2006). Most of these studies indeed suggest that lower-level factors, such as individual-level and journalism routine factors, make more of a difference than external and cultural ones.

Results from this study and others, then, support a sphere of influence model. Individual, journalistic routine, organizational, extramedia and ideological factors may indeed exert a powerful influence on journalists' attitudes and behaviors. But this relationship will not necessarily be hierarchical. The manner in which these factors influence journalists' attitudes and behaviors may depend both on what attitudes and behaviors are explored and the context in which they are explored. For personal attitudes, journalists may be more likely to believe that more intrinsic factors, such as professional norms and values, exert more influence than extrinsic ones, such as the influence of government regulation.

Limitations

It should be noted that this, and other studies, look at *perceived* spheres of influence. Perceptions may not always match reality. For instance, as this study demonstrates, few journalists believe they have practiced self-censorship. However, they readily admit that they followed the embed rules, which restricted what they could and could not report. Thus, the embed policy may have had a greater influence on journalists' behaviors than they were willing to admit.

Further, this study only examined freedom of press of embedded journalists, not unilaterals, who were not tied to a particular unit. While embeds got an insider view of the war by covering the troops and their battles, unilaterals were better able to put the events of the war in a broader context because they had access to the views of Iraqi citizens. Different factors, then, influenced their coverage (Fahmy and Johnson, 2007a). Those who covered the war from the Pentagon rather than the battle zone complained that they received little information and what information they received had a strong pro-coalition bias. Therefore, unilaterals and Pentagon reporters may have had different views of press freedom in Iraq than the embeds have had and may have been subjected to different spheres of influence than embeds. Future studies should include these other reporters.

While this study examined several individual, journalism routine, external and cultural variables, the list of possible factors was not exhaustive. For instance, Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) and Weaver et al. (2006) suggested that organizational factors, such as relationship with fellow reporters or editors, and external factors, such as sources and audience, might also influence journalists' perception of roles and controversial press

practices. Future studies should also include a more extensive list of factors to more systematically test the sphere of influence concept.

Finally, this study was conducted at a time when violence in Iraq had escalated and support for the war had plummeted. Former President Bush's Iraq Surge, instituted in 2007, has reduced violence in Iraq, although overall public support for the war has not changed significantly (Gallup, 2008). More importantly for this study, claims of military control have, if anything, increased as journalists reported they are prohibited from taking photos of dead soldiers, car bombings, suicide bombings, wounded soldiers without their written consent, memorials for dead soldiers, coffins of dead soldiers, battle-damaged vehicles and Iraqi prisoners (Dispatches, 2008). Therefore, future studies should see if the decrease in violence because of the Iraq Surge has had any impact on perceptions of news management and freedom in reporting this ongoing conflict.

Notes

1. To compile the list of names, a multi-method approach was used. As noted, an unofficial list of names was first obtained through the Pentagon. However, because the list did not include email contacts or journalists' affiliation, efforts failed to find contact information of all journalists listed (note that after numerous communications with Pentagon officials to assist us with this project, Pentagon officials denied that the list existed). Thus, additional names and contact information of embedded journalists were gathered through personal contacts with educators and journalists from the Middle East, Europe and the Far East. Specifically, names and contact information were obtained from Germany, China, Iraq and Egypt.
2. A mixed-mode approach was also used to increase the number of respondents. Current research suggests using multiple methods to contact potential respondents increases the response rate, as some people prefer to be contacted in one mode as opposed to another (Dillman 2000; Dillman, pers. comm., Chicago, 18 November 2005). In the follow-up survey some embeds preferred responding to a phone survey as opposed to a web-based survey and many embeds (i.e. reporters from Reuters and the publication *Inside the Pentagon*) declined to participate after discussing the survey with their editors.

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