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Exploring the Transatlantic Media Divide over Iraq:
How and Why U.S and German Media Differed in
Reporting on U.N. Weapons Inspections in Iraq: 2002-2003

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Introduction*

The post-Cold War era has seen many and serious disagreements among the Western allies, particularly between the United States and Western European countries. These countries had, for more than a half-century, formed a tight alliance. But the bond has weakened, and the change has accelerated as a result of events in Iraq in the past two years. Why is this so, to what extent is it so, and what are the likely immediate and long-term consequences of this transatlantic divide?

Writing in the *International Herald Tribune* in 2003 Paul Krugman argued that media reporting prior to the war was responsible for the different ways in which Europeans and Americans see the world and “are suddenly at such odds”. He reasoned, “we have different views partly because we see different news.” This explanation seemed plausible to the transatlantic travelers, scholars and concerned internationalists who found themselves in a sharply divergent climate of opinion whenever they crossed the Atlantic during the fall and winter of 2002/03. Krugman saw two possible explanations for “the great transatlantic media divide”: either a “pervasive anti-American bias” of the European media or the American media having “taken it as their assignment to sell the war, not to present a mix of information that might call the justification for war into question.”

To investigate these possibilities, I have chosen the six-month period prior to the attack on Iraq, and the issue of U.N. weapons inspections, to explore the thesis of the media-divide, and thus to determine what factors might have shaped opinion on both sides of the Atlantic. This analysis provides a window on that pre-war period when most Americans expressed the wish “not to go it alone in Iraq”, i.e. to find a coalition of countries that would support the American plans for intervention. The desire to gain legitimacy for the intervention made the involvement of the U.N. Security Council a critical factor in the

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pre-war period. Ironically, this factor appealed to those who did and to those who did not support war against Iraq. The requirement for Security Council approval was seen by some as enabling, by others as limiting, the use of force. At that time, United Nations weapons inspections in Iraq came to be seen by many Europeans as a means to prevent war through the “containment” of the regime of Saddam Hussein. Thus “giving the inspections more time” became the rallying cry of the European anti-war movement, and dissenting opinions in support of war became minority views in the countries whose governments opposed the war in Iraq.

There are several underlying questions guiding the exploration of these issues, but the central question is this: Were the differing public perceptions of the danger posed by Iraq a consequence of:

- divergent media reports, or
- positions taken by those countries’ respective governments, or
- different political cultures?

The answers to these questions may lead to a better understanding of the transatlantic opinion gap. Although they cannot predict whether these disagreements will diminish as policy changes occur or whether the differing strands of public opinion are the result of a deeper paradigm shift of long duration within the Western alliance, this analysis is important because of the political implications of such a split for Western countries at a time when challenges from other regions, religions and cultures are increasing.

I have chosen Germany as the contrasting case with United States for two main reasons:

1. Germany is, despite the language difference, a European country with particularly close historic and cultural ties to the U.S.
2. The German government and public opinion from the outset were opposed to U.S. military intervention in Iraq. In France, there was also governmental and public opposition, but arguably for other historical reasons. The U.K. and Spanish governments supported the U.S. in Iraq, but public opinion was opposed.

Thus the policy-media climate in Germany offers an obvious and direct contrast to that of the U.S. where both the government and a majority of the people supported a war against Iraq. Among the issues dividing opinion in Germany and the United States are the legitimacy of the use of force in international relations and the role of intergovernmental organizations.

Do the media lead or follow?

During international crises, media in most countries usually operate within the sphere of a prevailing national consensus. Journalists as well as citizens are less likely to criticize their governmental leadership during times of perceived threats to national security. They tend to “believe” their leaders and, as a consequence, governments are better able to control the political environment than during more peaceful times. The aftermath of 9/11 was perceived in the U.S. as a period of acute crisis. At such times, when a country feels itself directly and continuously threatened, the political leadership can more easily enlist the media in building support for its policies. The media, especially those in the nation’s capital, accept governmental cues with less skepticism than in more “normal” times.

Academic research has developed models that help us better understand this pattern. W. Lance Bennett argues that the mainstream media “index” their reporting to the range of viewpoints expressed by governmental elites. If there is debate inside the government or between various governmental bodies, critical perspectives also appear in the press. If a policy appears to have bipartisan support, critical opinions will appear less frequently or disappear entirely from the political agenda.

Jonathan Mermin, a critic of the media, characterizes the effects of the indexing phenomenon in following manner: “The indexing rule is in clear violation of the watchdog ideal, as it is hard for the press to perform the watchdog function if *politicians are granted the power to set the terms and boundaries of debate in the news*. The analogy would be to a watchdog that consulted members of the intruding party as to whether it

was appropriate to bark – not a very useful animal.” Mermin concludes: “When there is consensus in Washington, journalists focus not on the wisdom or justification of U.S. policy, but on the ability of the president to execute it.”¹

Other analysts have argued that a popular president is usually in a position to exert considerable influence over news coverage in times of crisis. The “executive manufacturing consent”-model was thus particularly effective during previous U.S. foreign policy crises, for example in Libya (1986) and Panama (1989), when Presidents Reagan and Bush were able to frame the cause of intervention as a fight against madmen and criminals.

It has been persuasively argued by media critics such as Mermin, MacArthur, Auletta and Alterman that journalists are often too dependent on official sources and locate themselves too close to the governmental centers of power. This is particularly true during times of crises. On the basis of a study of 35 U.S. foreign policy crises since 1945, John Zaller and Dennis Chiu were prompted to call the media “government’s little helper”.²

Robert Entman’s book, *Projections of Power*, expands the concept of “framing” of news by the political leadership. Combining it with a model of “cascading” networks, where the “Administration” stands at the apex and the public at the bottom of the cascade, he asserts that the predominant “frame” travels from the executive to the other elites to the media, and then to the public.³ In the case of the U.S., the Bush administration appeared very adept at “framing” the news and controlling the message in the build-up to the Iraq war. In Germany at this time Gerhard Schroeder was also able to frame his anti-war policy and dominate the news agenda with it.

Policy certainty

Piers Robinson has identified policy certainty as well as policy unity within an administration as the most significant factors affecting the level and extent of media criticism in an international crisis. Other scholars, based on analyses of crises in the former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Rwanda have demonstrated that a policy vacuum and elite dissent over policy give the media greater influence than when there is clearly articulated policy followed by all major players.⁴

It will be argued here that policy certainty about war in Iraq existed in the United States by mid-October 2002 after Congress passed a resolution authorizing the use of military force against Iraq. The debate in Congress was not nearly as fundamental as the debate in the winter of 1990-91 over the use of force in the Gulf War, although there was significant debate in the House of Representatives around October 10. There were two amendments submitted by Democrats which failed. The final vote on the resolution was 296 – 133. The opponents of the resolution, nearly one-third, were denounced as “hand-wringers” and “nitpickers”, but, according to the *New York Times*, “the Democrats voted in surprising numbers not to authorize military action in Iraq”.⁵ Similarly, in the Senate on the next day, nearly a quarter of the Senators voted to reject the motion. Nevertheless, the Bush government’s Iraq policy remained basically unchallenged for the remaining months leading up to the war.

In Germany, policy certainty existed by August 2002. Following Gerhard Schroeder’s election promises regarding German non-participation in a military intervention in Iraq, policy certainty intensified and was maintained throughout the pre-war period. In view of the clear majority of the German public opposing a war against Iraq,⁶ Schroeder’s position was relatively risk-free in domestic terms. Media commentators criticizing Schroeder’s policy therefore would have had limited opportunities to convey opposing positions.

It has been argued that during times of executive predominance over a certain issue, such as occurred in this pre-war period in both countries, critical reporting would fall outside the dominant frames. Thus the impact on governmental policy of such reporting would be

minimal. Following the congressional decision to authorize war in October, there was consensus within US foreign policy elite in Washington, as shown in the editorial pages of the *Washington Post* and, to a lesser extent of the *New York Times*, to go to war. If there was such a high degree of support for war against Iraq, one might ask why the Bush administration went to the Security Council at all in the fall of 2002. The cynic's answer would be that it was just a maneuver to gain time and to complete military preparations. In Entman's terms, it could have been a "strategically chosen ritual". The United Nations became a symbolic tool for gaining international support for a predetermined U.S. intervention in Iraq and for biding time. Indeed, suspicions about the U.S. government's motives in going to the Security Council were rife among critics of the Bush policy both inside and outside the United States.

The post-September 11 World

In recent (2004) discussions of the differences between the United States and Europe at Harvard University Michael Ignatieff considered Europe still to be in a pre-9/11 mode. Robert Kagan even described Europeans as "living in paradise". Both these comments are a response to European attitudes to the terrorist threat. Even terrorist attacks on European soil appear not to have challenged Europeans' sense of security, as the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon did in the U.S. While there may be a growing concern among Europeans that terrorists will hit close to home,⁷ it has not reached the heights found in the U.S.

The horror of 9/11 was viewed on television around the world, but it did not elsewhere result in the major shift in perspective that occurred in the United States. While people around the world rallied to America's side in response to 9/11, the European media did not fundamentally change their reporting line. On the other hand, American media during the months following 9/11, including in the war in Afghanistan, accepted that the Bush Administration controlled the news agenda: "Patriotism was the administration's ally,

building a protective wall around its policy. Americans were outraged by the terrorist assaults, and they overwhelmingly supported the president's response."⁸

Of course, the simplistic "other news – other views" hypothesis does not satisfactorily explain the widening gap in transatlantic perspectives. Other factors must also be taken into account, including the different political cultures in the United States and Germany.

A Cultural Divide?

The German public remains in a post-1945 mode, which is characterized by an aversion to war. The peaceful reunification of Germany in 1989 appears to have confirmed the prevalent belief that conflicts could and should be resolved peacefully.⁹ A related belief is that, even if war cannot be prevented, Germany, given its history, should not play a major role. Germany should only act militarily in concert with its allies, and then only if peaceful means of conflict resolution have been exhausted.

This outlook was somewhat weakened as a result of the violent dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, when the European Union's conflict prevention capacity failed, and the limits of consensual peacekeeping were revealed. As a consequence, Germany began to participate actively in military peace enforcement but nearly always under a U.N. mandate. The war in Kosovo was a watershed in that NATO intervention and the air attacks on Serbia were not authorized by the U.N. Security Council. Then, as in Iraq, the U.S. led a coalition founded upon the belief that the Security Council would be unable to act effectively. For Germany, this was departure from its traditional position that armed force should be used only as a last resort, and then only as authorized by the U.N. Observers at that time warned that the precedent would later come to haunt policy makers.

U.S. foreign and security policies and structures today reflect a curious ambivalence towards Europe, if not the entire non-American world. This is partly a result of

America's perception of its historic uniqueness, what Henry Kissinger has called the assumption "that America is possessed of an exceptional nature expressed in unrivalled virtue and unrivalled power."¹⁰ This outlook is compounded by an American belief that they have been thrust into a quasi-imperial role they did not seek, and this ambivalence has contributed to a rise of neo-conservative isolationism. Recent experiences have reinforced American skepticism about international organizations and treaties. The attacks of September 11 furthermore shattered the feeling of invulnerability of the American heartland.

Research Design

This paper will now explore the differences in reporting and published opinion in the United States and Germany by comparing selected critical events or decision points, and describing how they were portrayed during the six months prior to the war in Iraq. One print and one television medium from each country are analyzed, using the Lexis/Nexis-database,¹¹ and supplemented with information from secondary sources. The two print media are leading newspapers within their respective countries: *The New York Times* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. The evening news programs analyzed are the *NBC Nightly News* and *Die Tagesschau* which had the largest number of viewers in the two countries at the time.

Nine critical events or developments were selected for their significance and relationship to the issue of U.N. weapons inspections in Iraq. The inspections were, as outlined above, an important factor on whose success or failure the issue of military action in Iraq would be decided:

- a. September 16 2002: Iraq accepts return of weapons inspectors without conditions;
- b. October 1-3 02: Vienna talks on return of inspectors and U.S. Congressional debate on authorizing use of force in Iraq;
- c. November 8 02: U.N. Security Council unanimously adopts resolution 1441;

- d. November 18 02: The UNMOVIC inspectors return to Iraq;
- e. December 7 02: Iraq submits 12,000 page dossier to inspectors;
- f. January 03: Blix and El-Baradei update Security Council;
- g. February 5 03: Security Council debate, addresses by Powell, Straw and Fischer;
- h. February 14 03: Blix and El-Baradei report to Security Council; and
- i. March 03: Security Council consultations and withdrawal of inspectors.

Comparative Media Analysis

September 2002: The Stage is Set

John MacArthur, the publisher of *Harper's* and a prolific critic of the Bush-administration, charged that the “White House propaganda drive began in earnest” on September 7, 2002 with a Bush-Blair press conference at Camp David. MacArthur objected to Bush’s reference to an IAEA-report that allegedly claimed Iraq “was six months away” from building a nuclear weapon. Although IAEA spokespeople denied that a new report to this effect had been issued, American media buttressed Bush’s case.¹² For example, on September 8 the *New York Times* published an extensive analysis of Iraqi capabilities, “U.S. Says Hussein Intensifies Quest for A-Bomb Parts” which cited anonymous “administration officials” and Iraqi defectors, but not the IAEA.¹³

During the early part of September, German media reports were dominated by issues raised in the last phase of the German parliamentary election campaign. As Gerhard Schroeder in August had made it clear that Germany would not participate in military action against Iraq, the wisdom of this commitment was widely discussed by German media and commentators. On September 7, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported on the Bush-Blair meeting at Camp David and on their apparent readiness to go to war, noting they were also trying to force Iraq to accept U.N. inspectors. The main evening

television news program, *Die Tagesschau*, quoted Bush's statement about "sufficient evidence" against Iraq.

On September 12, President Bush addressed the U.N. General Assembly at its annual session. Bush's speech, in the words of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, "galvanized the international community." It was hailed by some diplomats as a U.S. return to multilateralism and there appeared "palpable relief that the United States would try to strengthen the United Nations instead of sidelining it."¹⁴

Element of Surprise: Iraq agrees to Return of Weapons Inspectors

On September 16, Iraq's Foreign Minister announced, in a letter to Kofi Annan, that it would accept the return of the inspectors without conditions. Julia Preston described this event vividly in the *New York Times*:

Secretary-General Kofi Annan smiled broadly when he stepped to the microphones on Monday afternoon to report the breakthrough: Iraq would allow United Nations weapons inspectors to return "without conditions." But this news made United States officials furious. A few blocks away in his suite at the Waldorf Astoria hotel, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell interrupted a meeting with the foreign minister of Egypt to read the Iraqi offer, which was drafted with Mr. Annan's advice and brokered with his blessing to avert war. In an instant, Iraq's move put the brakes on the diplomatic charge that President Bush had started with a powerful speech just four days earlier, calling on the United Nations to hold President Saddam Hussein accountable for defying its resolutions.

On the *NBC* evening news that day only U.S. officials and former American weapons inspectors were interviewed. One of Blix' predecessors, Richard Butler, was interviewed on *NBC* on September 17 who said that Iraqi claims of having no WMD's were "not true" and wondered whether they would be able to conceal them. The reporter noted that "the UN itself may be an obstacle" and David Kay was shown claiming that only the threat of military action would allow inspectors to return. Secretary Rumsfeld was quoted as having enlisted "a number of other countries" for the attack on Iraq.

The *New York Times* suggested in its reporting of Sept. 17 that the move of the Iraqis was merely “tactical “ and cited skeptical remarks by U.S. officials and former weapons inspectors, who expressed doubts about the success of inspections in view of past experiences. On September 18 Judith Miller of the *Times* asserted that “verifying Iraq’s assertions that it has abandoned weapons of mass destruction...may not be feasible.” She interviewed several former inspectors and other scientists who painted a dim picture of UNMOVIC’s capabilities and called it “in many ways weaker” than its predecessor UNSCOM. The article stated that Hans Blix “had eliminated many of the more aggressive inspectors” and that the new inspectors would not be in a position to share intelligence with member states. (Hans Blix, in his book *Disarming Iraq*, is quite scathing in his views of former inspectors and their proclivity for speaking to the press.¹⁵)

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine* framed these new developments in the context of German electoral politics. On September 18, a front-page editorial attacked Schroeder for being “naïve” and “unilateralist.” Another editorial expressed great skepticism about Iraq’s intentions and referred to its record of lies and deceptive maneuvers. Robert von Lucius portrayed Chief Inspector Hans Blix in an editorial on September 19 as highly experienced, but also as naïve and compliant. Lucius noted that Blix had been tricked by the Iraqis before, when he was head of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

On German television the response to the Iraqi announcement was more positive: each side of the German political spectrum considered its political course on Iraq as “confirmed” by these developments. Chancellor Schroeder was seen offering German inspectors to the U.N., and Foreign Minister Fischer as describing these developments as a chance to prevent war. A day later, on September 18, the evening news was more pessimistic, as the U.S. was described as sticking to its “tough course,” and President Bush’s efforts to gain congressional support for disarming Iraq were analysed . Schroeder, by contrast, was shown as warning “not to put up additional demands” following Iraq’s offer.

Washington, Vienna and New York: Deliberations and Resolutions

During the last week of September 2002, the White House introduced the draft resolution in Congress which would give it a free hand for military action in Iraq. This move met with strong reservations from Democratic senators. These congressional deliberations coincided with negotiations on draft resolutions in the U.N. Security Council in New York which would make the mandate of U.N. Inspectors in Iraq far more intrusive than in the past.

Meanwhile in Vienna, negotiations began on September 30 between Hans Blix and Mohamed ElBaradei of the IAEA on the one side and an Iraqi delegation headed by Amir Al Sadi on the other. Practical arrangements for the resumption of U.N. inspections were discussed. The Vienna talks ended late on October 1 with a press conference during which Blix and ElBaradei confirmed that they would now have “unrestricted, uninhibited, unconditional access to all sites in Iraq” with the exception of the Presidential sites which were covered by separate agreement with the Security Council.¹⁶

The *New York Times* on October 2 highlighted Hans Blix’s statement “that “there is a willingness to accept inspections that has not existed before,” but also suggested that Iraq’s compliance was designed to forestall a new Security Council resolution. The *Times* also raised the issue of the presidential palaces by expanding on American and British charges that Iraq was using the eight compounds to hide elements of its chemical, nuclear and biological weapons programs.

NBC Nightly News reported on the Vienna talks,¹⁷ but before doing so aired a two-year old Pentagon-video showing Iraqi forces firing at planes in the no-fly zone, followed by Rumsfeld’s claim that Iraq must be lying when it says it will cooperate with inspectors. Both days the reporting ended on a speculative note citing unidentified U.S. intelligence sources regarding Saddam’s ability to hide his weapons: “...if UN inspectors do get back...Saddam could drag out the process well into next summer, well past the administration’s current deadline for war.”

In the *FAZ*, the Vienna talks did not even make front page-news on October 1, but on the next day, in a front-page article, the paper reported that inspectors would have unhindered access in Iraq, quoting Iraqi negotiator Amir Al Sadi extensively on the concessions made by Iraq. The issue of access to the presidential palaces was given less prominence than in the *Times*. German television reported the Vienna talks in positive tones on both days, although the story about the negotiations came after four segments of domestic news. The problem of the presidential palaces was noted, but did not receive either the critical comment or prominence accorded by the American media.

During most of October attention shifted to the Security Council and its extensive deliberations behind closed doors about a new resolution, with a US draft circulating but not gaining consensus. The rift between France and the United States began to show clearly, and Russia also objected to the toughly-worded US draft resolution.¹⁸ The continuing discussions caused a delay in the dispatch of the weapons inspectors. During most of October and early November, UNMOVIC began its training sessions for new inspectors in three groups: the “biological” group, the “chemical” group and the “missile” group. During this time, the selection of UNMOVIC inspectors became an issue for the U.S. media, but did not get much attention in Germany. The *NYT* of October 21 explained Hans Blix’s reasoning :

But Mr. Blix’s office defends the group as superior to previous teams because it includes members from a wider range of countries, notably Eastern Europeans and Russians with expertise in nuclear and biological and chemical weapons. Moreover, an aide to Mr. Blix said, these experts would have the advantage of being international civil servants rather than nationals from their own countries, and therefore more likely to be accepted by the Iraqis.

November 2002: Security Council Unanimity and a Tough Resolution

On November 8, the Security Council adopted resolution 1441 by unanimous vote. It declared that although Iraq was in breach of earlier resolutions it was being given one last opportunity. Iraq was asked to provide immediate, unconditional and active cooperation

to the inspectors. The resolution also made clear that any further “material breach” could lead to armed action. Although there were different interpretations among members of the Security Council as to what would constitute a material breach and what steps should be taken if it occurred, these differences faded into the background for the moment. This was a time of unity and a sense of achievement in the Security Council. In the words of an editorial in the *NYT*, “The council’s unified stand maximizes the possibility, admittedly slim, that Iraq can be disarmed without war.”

The *New York Times* carried several articles about future prospects. Steven Weisman commented on November 9 that Saddam Hussein would now have to make a “confession” about “the weapons projects whose existence he had denied and which administration officials have said he has been hiding in secret bunkers, underground caves and mobile laboratories.” He would have to declare himself “in effect a liar and a fabricator.”¹⁹ David Sanger, in the same issue of the *Times* asserted: “White House officials said today they were fairly confident that Mr. Hussein would attempt to undermine the inspections sooner or later.” On November 10 a *NYT* front-page article expressed a positive view of the inspectors, asserting that they “plan to force an early test of Saddam Hussein’s intentions by demanding a comprehensive list of weapons sites and checking whether it matches a list of more than 100 priority sites compiled by Western experts.” (In his book Hans Blix sarcastically commented on this statement: “Really?”) Thomas Friedman, in an op-ed of the same day, discussed the disagreement between doves and hawks in the U.S. administration by saying that hardliners “fear the inspectors won’t find anything and then Iraq will be off the hook. Cool it. Saddam is as likely to fully comply with the U.N. as Mike Tyson is to embrace anger management.”

NBC Nightly News described the resolution as tough and said the U.S. would be watching for slip-ups: “U.S. officials are skeptical that inspections can work. So today’s resolution gives the U.S. the option of presenting its own evidence of Iraqi violations to the U.N.” Hans Blix, for his part, quietly “drew the conclusion that the U.S. did not itself know where things were.”²⁰

German television on November 8 had the resolution as its lead story, calling it “the last chance for disarmament.” U.N. Secretary-General Annan was shown saying that this was a good first step and that Iraq would now have to cooperate with Blix. Also aired was President Bush’s positive response to the Council’s action, followed by his warning that the U.S. would not be deceived and was prepared to act alone militarily. The broadcast went on to portray German and French official reactions and cited an official Iraqi statement that the U.S. would use the resolution as a pretext for attacking Iraq. On November 9, the *FAZ* on 9 November mainly reported the gist of the resolution and commented that Baghdad would still have to agree to the resumption of the inspections.

The Inspectors Return to Iraq

On November 13, Iraq formally accepted Security Council resolution 1441, thereby clearing the way for a return of the U.N. inspectors to Iraq. The reporting in the *Times* of the same day gave the impression that Iraq was unlikely to cooperate. The next day, the paper repeated Richard Perle’s comments to the *Guardian*, criticizing the choice of Blix as Chief weapons inspector. This contrasted with a quote from Kofi Annan: “We need to be patient and give the inspectors time and space to do their work.”²¹ An editorial on November 14 was somewhat more optimistic regarding the prospects for weapons inspections in Iraq, referring to technological improvements since the 1990s. The editorial noted that “the White House understandably remains skeptical that Mr. Hussein will comply with the demands” but went on to say that the inspections must be given a chance to succeed.

NBC reporting on November 13 was also skeptical, noting that Washington “is ready to pounce on Iraq’s disclosures” but that “other countries will likely want to overlook smaller violations.” On November 14 *NBC*’s reporters noted the different interpretations between the U.S. and the U.N.: “The U.S. says any omission is a violation”, and then showed Mr. ElBaradei: “If there is a minor omission, you know, and this is clearly not intentional, we are not rushing to the Security Council to say, ‘This is a material breach.’”

The program then aired David Kay, the former inspector, saying there “is a clear gap between what the president has articulated – that is, zero tolerance for any of the old cheat-and-retreat games of the Iraqis – and the view the secretary-general has articulated.”

In its reporting on November 14 the *FAZ* stressed Iraq’s unconditional acceptance of resolution 1441, quoted the reactions of Foreign Minister Fischer and the Ambassador of the Arab League, and asserted that the resolution strengthened the inspections regime: “...this time it will not be as easy for Saddam Hussein to deceive or play his games, once the inspectors are in the country. Albeit, he would not be himself if he did not try.” On November 15, a front-page editorial in the *FAZ* again criticized Schroeder’s policies and went on to discuss the consequences of the Security Council resolution, welcoming the new dynamic the arrival of the inspectors would create in Iraq. It was also pointed out, however, that the real challenge was disarming of the regime. German television reported the Iraqi acceptance by citing international reactions from Britain, Moscow, the Arab League and it broadcast its own correspondent’s report live from Baghdad.

On November 18, the first group of inspectors arrived in Baghdad, led by Blix and ElBaradei. From then until the end of the year, the group of inspectors slowly grew to about 200. Inspectors gave no advance warnings of their visits, thus increasing their credibility. Hans Blix, in his many encounters with the press, never ruled out the possibility that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. On the question of intelligence information, ElBaradei stated to the press in Baghdad on November 19 that they “were receiving intelligence information from many countries,” and that “there was a lot of disinformation.”

Hans Blix, who had received critical press coverage in the U.S., was now portrayed more favorably. Following his briefing to the Security Council on November 25, Blix was seen by the *New York Times* as “tough-minded” and an editorial described both Blix and El-Baradei as having “adopted an appropriately tough tone” as well as “an apparent readiness to proceed more aggressively.” Nevertheless, the *Times* said “that inspections

could possibly take longer than the U.S. would like it.” *NBC*, on the other hand, portrayed mainly the difficulties encountered by the inspectors in Iraq and again relayed the doubts voiced by David Kay as to whether “they are up to it”.

German television, by contrast, reported on November 25 that “the inspectors will continue their work without regard for Iraqi hostile behavior.” The *FAZ* on November 26 reported a great number of details about the inspections and also carried an article on opinion in the Arab world, quoting sources which said that either Hussein or Bush would be shown by the inspectors’ findings as “a big liar.” On November 29 the *FAZ* cited unidentified diplomats in New York who criticized the inexperience of some of the inspectors. An American “munitions expert” who was nominated by the State Department came under particular scrutiny because of his alleged engagement in “sodomasochistic activities.” This charge made the rounds in most European media. In the American press, the charge was used to repeat extensive criticism from former inspectors of “the inadequate vetting process for the present team”, claiming that the UN’s insistence that inspectors resign from government positions had severely limited the pool of inspectors.

December: The 12 000-page Dossier

On December 7 2002 Iraq handed over a 12,000 page declaration on banned weapons to the U.N. in Vienna and New York, one day prior to expiration of a Security Council deadline. In the absence of details about the disclosure, the press focused on broader issues of the pros and cons of inspections and of Bush’s policies. In its news reports, the *Times* noted that an analysis of the disclosure would normally take months, but that the U.N. would have to move quicker than that to satisfy the U.S. On December 8 two analytical articles reflect dominant positions, one which quoted an expert from the Nixon Center claiming that Hussein was “playing for delay, and a lot of other international actors are playing for that, too,” and the other that “for now, administration officials

seemed poised to make significant investments in an extended United Nations inspection effort.”

NBC was also relatively balanced in reporting on the claims and counterclaims, but it continued to air skeptical statements. It said on December 7 that “many” former inspectors think that the report’s length was deliberate and meant to buy time and create confusion. Their regular commentator David Kay was shown as saying: “For Saddam, time is golden. The Security Council unity will dissolve, and all the anti-war movement will grow, and the political and economic cost of the US maintaining a genuine military threat against Saddam...will grow higher and higher and, he thinks, eventually we’ll go away.”

Similar to the *New York Times* the *FAZ* cited both sides of the debate on the credibility of the dossier submitted by Iraq, i.e. that Hussein made the report lengthy to buy time, and then noting that State Department officials “want to wait for several rounds of intensified inspections” to run their course. On 10 December it reported on the arrival of an additional group of 25 inspectors in Iraq.

Meanwhile, at U.N. headquarters in New York, UMOVIC staff worked furiously to digest the Iraqi dossier. Hans Blix described in his book *Disarming Iraq* how, after one week’s work a basic text of 3,500 pages had been culled from 12,000 pages which was then available to all members of the Security Council on December 17. There was, however, significant concern expressed by non-permanent members of the Council that Blix had allowed the entire dossier to be whisked off to Washington a week earlier for analysis. This concern was reflected in a flurry of critical news articles in the European media during the following days. Hans Blix briefed an informal Security Council meeting on December 19 which he recounts in his book:

I reported to the Council that our preliminary examination of the declaration had not provided material or evidence that solved any of the unresolved disarmament issues. At the same time I noted that while individual governments had stated that they had convincing evidence contradicting the Iraqi declaration, UNMOVIC was neither in a position to confirm Iraq’s statements, nor in possession of evidence to disprove them.²²

U.S. ambassador to the U.N. John Negroponte strongly disagreed, calling the Iraqi declaration an insult to the Security Council and concluded that Iraq was in material breach of its obligations. Other Council members disagreed and argued that the U.S. had not presented sufficient evidence for its case. This controversy caused significant flurry in international media reports until the end of the year.

On December 19, a *New York Times* editorial held the position that while Iraq failed the test and missed an opportunity, it was nevertheless incumbent upon the Bush administration to present hard evidence of Iraq cheating. At the same time, pressure mounted on Blix and ElBaradei to use more aggressive methods, including the interviewing of Iraqi scientists. This led the *FAZ* to comment in an editorial that the latest U.S. statements put more pressure on the U.N. and its inspectors than on Saddam.

On 20 December, the UNMOVIC spokesman in Baghdad, Hiro Ueki, announced that the weapons inspectors were conducting an average of ten inspections a day and that the pace of inspections would accelerate when they started using helicopters. Over the Christmas holidays, the commencement of in-country interviews of Iraqi scientists was widely reported, following the receipt of a list of names of Iraqi personnel associated with its chemical, biological, nuclear and ballistic missile programs. This list contained more than 500 names of scientists and was submitted by Iraq in response to a request from Hans Blix. At the end of the year, UNMOVIC inspectors numbered 110 and inspections continued at a steady pace. Simultaneously, the US military build-up on the perimeter of Iraq continued as well, with troop deployment reaching about 100,000 at the turn of the year. President Bush announced that Saddam's "day of reckoning is near," but most European commentators remained unconvinced of the need for military intervention. While some argued that the countdown to war had begun, others organized and marched in large-scale peace demonstrations.

During the last days of December another subject of keen interest on both sides of the Atlantic was the role of Germany as it assumed its seat as a non-permanent member of

the Security Council on January 1 2003. Some commentators in Germany viewed statements by Schroeder and Fischer as a sign of reappraisal of the country's declared opposition to war, but Fischer dodged a question by *Der Spiegel* how Germany would vote in the Council and Schroeder made several statements insisting that Germany's position on Iraq had not changed. All German newspapers debated the issue in their editorials, but the *FAZ* was in the minority by arguing for a reassessment for Germany's position, saying that it would exact a high price by undermining the country's international influence.

January 2003 - Reports and Accusations

The month of January was, in the words of Hans Blix, characterized by “lowered expectations and increasing tension.” On January 9 he and Mohamed ElBaradei briefed the Security Council on their assessment of the dossier submitted by Iraq and the progress of inspections. Blix stated in his informal briefing that no “smoking gun” had been found. The story made front-page news.

At this time, the gap between European and American coverage began to widen. While German media highlighted Blix's remarks that no weapons of mass destruction had been found, American media focused more attention on Blix's criticism of Iraq. The *New York Times* headline was “UN Inspectors Criticize Iraq over Arms List,” and the *Wall Street Journal* noted that “Iraq's cooperation with weapons inspectors has been insufficient so far.” But, in the early part of January, most U.S. papers editorial pages still called for continued efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the crisis. Criticism of UNMOVIC and Hans Blix for “not being serious” about inspections (William Safire) continued to appear, criticism that now focused on the lack of surprise inspections and on UNMOVIC for not taking Iraqi scientists out of the country for questioning.²³ On January 16 a *Washington Post* editorial attacked Mr. Blix's “irresolution” and called into question any attempt at a containment of Iraq: “His motive is obvious: He would like to head off U.S.

military action at any cost, even though such action clearly has been justified by Iraq's failure to comply.”

The formal reports by Blix and ElBaradei to the Security Council of January 27 were generally anticipated as a watershed in the evolution of the conflict with Iraq. At this time the divergences in reporting became more pronounced. While in the *New York Times* Julia Preston described Blix's report as “broadly negative” and “grim”, ElBaradei's more positive assessment of the nuclear issues was mentioned in a single paragraph. The rest of the story was placed towards the end of the paper. Nevertheless, a *New York Times* editorial of January 28 argued strongly for giving the inspections more time.

NBC Nightly News was now broadcasting under the screen title “**Road to War**” and on January 27 the subtitle was “UN Inspectors say Saddam is not coming clean. They want more time.” Then Tom Brokaw said “Blix tipped off some troubling issues...most of all, Iraq's resistance to disarming.” noting that the report was “tougher than expected.” It also detailed Iraq's claim that it fully cooperated and that no weapons of mass destruction had been found. The Iraqi disclaimer was, however, followed by another story in which U.S. officials expressed their conviction “that a terrorist camp in Iraq is a deadly weapons factory” for ricin and cyanide, which “is operated by Ansar al-Islam, a terrorist group with known ties to...alQaeda.” On January 28 *NBC* reported that Iraq was preventing inspectors from interviewing scientists in private.

An editorial in the *FAZ* of the same day concluded also that the combination of threats, inspections and sanctions against Iraq was “the lesser evil.” The *FAZ* also carried two articles giving the Iraqi perspective on inspections. German television on January 27 dedicated two thirds of its evening news broadcast to Iraq-related news. In addition to giving extensive coverage to Blix's report, it covered the U.S. reaction, the French position, Kofi Annan's comments, and U.K. Ambassador Sir Jeremy Greenstock agreeing with Germany on giving inspectors time to report again in mid-February. The *Tagesschau* also interviewed Iraq's Sabri, who charged that the U.S. only wanted to secure the region's oil resources. Schroeder was quoted as reiterating his position that a

military attack was not justified, and opposition leader Merkel was portrayed criticizing Schroeder for taking a position before the U.N. report had been published.

A Crucial Security Council Debate: Colin Powell's Address

The Security Council meeting at the ministerial level in early February was anxiously awaited around the world. It was up to Colin Powell and Jack Straw to make the case for military action. In the event it certainly appeared that each made a particularly strong case, thoroughly documenting Iraq's non-compliance.

In hindsight it is clear that the credibility of Colin Powell, which was still very high in European capitals, was deliberately used by the Bush government to persuade allies and friends of the case for war against Iraq. According to Todd Purdum of the *New York Times*, the U.S. strategy for Powell's speech was carefully crafted by the White House in mid-January: "Now, to counter the flood of international resistance to the use of American force, and to rebut Blix and ElBaradei's careful, cautious reports, President Bush had decided to roll out his biggest diplomatic gun: Colin Powell."²⁴

Powell's presentation on February 5 was entitled "Iraq: Failing to Disarm" and his main message was: "Clearly, Saddam Hussein and his regime will stop at nothing until something stops him." In the U.S. press, the speech was widely accepted as having presented "irrefutable" evidence and almost no media questioned his arguments.²⁵ Michael Gordon in a front-page news analysis of the *New York Times* of 6 February wrote: "Critics may try to challenge the strength of the administration's case and they will no doubt argue that inspectors be given more time. But it will be difficult for the skeptics to argue that Washington's case against Iraq is based on groundless suspicions and not intelligence information." Still, the editorial of the *New York Times* on February 7 continued to press for building a broad international position of support and for continuing inspections:

Mr. Hussein is a cagey despot, and he is certain to use the coming week to make a dramatic concession or two. But Hans Blix, the chief inspector for chemical and biological weapons, has demonstrated a stern resistance to eyewash, and the Security Council seems to be tiring of Mr. Hussein's antics. Coercive diplomacy has its limits – it didn't budge Mr. Hussein from Kuwait a decade ago. But it is well worth trying.

NBC Nightly News on February 5 entitled its broadcast “**Text, Lies and Videotape - Secretary of State Powell Tells the UN Saddam Hides Weapons, Deceives Inspectors and Supports Terrorists.**” Although it also gave the Iraqi reaction to Powell's speech (“what you might expect: strong, even mocking of the United States”) and quoted French Foreign Minister Villepin, its main interview was with Richard Butler who emphasized that Powell's emphasis was “devastating” and took for granted that Iraq was “continuing to make new weapons of mass destruction.” On February 6 the *Nightly News* quoted Bush's comment: “the game is over” and his belief that “inspections won't ever work.”

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* ran several editorials supporting Powell's contentions in the days after the speech, taking his evidence as genuine. On 6 February its editorial asked: “Was this material credible?” and it answered in the affirmative. It doubted the utility of continuing inspections and stated that “all signs point in the direction of war.” It also reported on the French-German proposal made in the Security Council for a strengthening of inspections and making them more robust. The *FAZ*, like its competitor *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, criticized Schroeder for his anti-Washington stance, the latter even called Schroeder “Kaiser Gerhard II.” and criticized “Schroeder's wrong instincts” in opposing the U.S. moves. German Television evening news was far more cautious and only reported official positions, saying that Powell's speech strengthened the Security Council, but that his allegations about Iraq would have to be verified by inspectors. †

* It was on British television, in *The International Herald Tribune* and in some smaller European papers that the most pointed criticism of the Powell speech emerged. The *IHT* commented aptly on February 6 that Powell's speech “turned heads but probably didn't change minds;” the Swedish paper *Svenska Dagbladet* said that the presentation failed to prove Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, that it planned to use them or that war was the only way to halt such plans. Denmark's *Politiken* added that the strategy the U.N. had followed since last autumn had been effective. The Austrian newspaper *Salzburger Nachrichten*

In U.S. public opinion polls the President's favorable ratings rose to 61 percent and when those polled by *NBC* on February 6 were asked if they "were convinced by Colin Powell," 66 to 11 answered in the affirmative. Tim Russert exulted in his report: "High marks from the American public for Colin Powell." Still, when Russert looked at the role of the UN, he reported that 51 percent believed that the U.S. should take action against Iraq only with U.N. support, while 37 percent said the U.S. should act unilaterally. By contrast the *New York Times* reported a poll by the German news cable channel *N-TV* of the same day which indicated that 62 percent of its German respondents were "not persuaded by Powell's evidence." Only 19 percent said that Mr. Powell's evidence "exposes Saddam Hussein as a liar," while another 19 percent were unsure.

The divergent response to the Powell speech can therefore be considered a turning point in the development of the public opinion divide. For Americans, the Powell-presentation in the Security Council was essentially convincing and the U.S. press did little to dispel the myth underlying his message despite rapidly unraveling evidence.²⁶ From here on in, regardless of what major newspapers professed, German public opinion was set against the war: the opinion divide was complete, even if the media divide was less apparent.

Moving towards War- the Gap widens

Hans Blix and Mohamed ElBaradei made a last visit to Baghdad from 8 to 10 February during which they met with a number of senior Iraqi officials who, according to Blix, appeared by now "genuinely rattled": "We reminded the Iraqis that we had not asserted that there were still weapons of mass destruction in Iraq but also had not excluded it. Iraq had to stop belittling the unresolved disarmament issues as they had done in January, and start addressing them seriously".²⁷

on February 8 argued "The 'evidence' of Colin Powell is a big flop," in which two of Powell's assertions are attacked: the British intelligence dossier which figured prominently in the Powell presentation was shown to have been copied from an early version of an academic dissertation, and a picture of an Iraqi plane said to have been spraying chemical agents was taken from the archives of the Stockholm Peace Research Institute and dated 1991. Later research would find numerous other cases in which Powell's "evidence" was less than scientifically accurate.

On February 13, President Bush stated unequivocally that the United Nations must help him confront Saddam Hussein or “fade into history as an ineffective, irrelevant, debating society.” The next day, Blix and ElBaradei again reported to the Security Council, fully aware of what the implications of their reports would be. They stated cautiously that procedural cooperation in the disarmament process in Iraq had improved in recent weeks, and that to date they had found no weapons of mass destruction, but that many banned weapons remained unaccounted for. Hans Blix characterized the American response: “There was disappointment in Washington at the outcome of the Council meeting and the statements ElBaradei and I had made. They had not been helpful to the U.S. drive toward a resolution containing an ultimatum and implicitly authorizing force.”

This Council meeting was again held at the level of Foreign Ministers, and the different positions of the US, France and Germany became even more apparent than they had been a week earlier. The German Foreign Minister Fischer stated that the inspectors had been able to score some successes and asked: “Why should we now turn away from this path? Why should we now halt the inspections?” The French concept paper for “beefing up the inspections” was also cautiously supported by Blix, and there were numerous other diplomatic attempts to regain middle ground in the Council during the next few weeks. However, the impression was wide-spread that the time for diplomacy was running out.

This urgency was clearly reflected in press reporting on this event. The *NYT* on February 15 called the inspectors' reports "controversial", followed by a rhetorical question by Patrick Tyler: "So, after another month of inspections, will the 15 Council members know whether they are likely to ever answer the questions: Where is the anthrax? Where are the VX nerve agents? Where are the Scuds?" While political criticism now shifted to the French, Blix and ElBaradei were mildly ridiculed as "mild-mannered civil servants" who "cannot be left to play games of hide-and-seek." The *New York Times*, by arguing that it's "time to call in the cavalry," had now begun to climb onto the bandwagon for military action.

The *NBC* broadcast on 14 February was entitled "Showdown Iraq. UN weapons inspectors offer a mixed message on the case for war. Colin Powell warns they're being tricked." Andrea Mitchell seemed to question Blix's impartiality when she reported: "In a stunning setback to the US, the chief weapons inspector challenged Colin Powell while giving Saddam Hussein almost every benefit of the doubt." On the next day, *NBC* reported that "some military experts believe the use of force in Iraq is now just a matter of time." German television again devoted two-thirds of its broadcast to coverage of Iraq, giving the range of different perspectives. Blix's questioning of Powell's evidence of a week earlier was mentioned, and the fact that both inspectors supported continuing inspections.

The *FAZ*, on the other hand, interpreted the inspectors' reports on February 15 as "having presented a subtle picture of cooperation" by the Iraqis and stated that "compared to the past, the inspections are now working smoothly". A commentary stated that the inspections should continue and that the number of inspectors should be increased, while stressing the difficulties of inspections in a country that large. On February 16, the *FAZ* commentator acknowledged that Iraq cooperated only when militarily threatened, and that without U.S. military presence the inspectors would get thrown out of Iraq.

Massive anti-war demonstrations in the U.S. and in many other parts of the world took place over the following weekend. They prompted the *New York Times* on February 17 to comment that “there may still be two superpowers on the planet: The United States and world public opinion.”

Destruction of missiles and End of Inspections

Despite increasing evidence of deadlock in the Security Council, Hans Blix and his colleagues were working hard to find ways of strengthening the inspections regime, particularly through establishing benchmarks for Iraq’s disarmament which, combined with clear deadlines, was to turn up the pressure. One such benchmark was the demand that the Iraqis start destroying Al Samoud missiles which had been deemed as exceeding the range allowed by the Security Council. Blix commented in retrospect that “I told myself quietly, if war were avoided because the inspection process appeared promising, perhaps the destruction of the missiles would have been the best possible use that could have been made of them.” Although Iraq’s initial reaction to Blix’s request was negative, during the first two weeks of March Iraq destroyed, under supervision by international experts, over seventy of these missiles. This disarmament process did gain a certain amount of media attention, but the interpretations of its significance differed widely.

In early March, there were several critical reports in the *New York Times* about U.S. displeasure with the inspectors, under headlines such as “United Nations: To the White House, Inspector Is Now More a Dead End than a Guidepost” (March 2). The White House was quoted as describing Iraq’s missile destruction as “the mother of all distractions” (March 3), and Colin Powell’s increasingly negative views of the inspectors and the validity of their work on March 6 was cited: “But the secretary made clear his view that the inspections process had been a diversion from the real issue – whether Mr. Hussein was cooperating with the inspectors and revealing all of his weapons programs.” *NBC* showed footage of the missiles being destroyed with the comment that this would

“energize the anti-war coalition.” *NBC* also quoted the Bush administration’s take of this being “part of Iraq’s game of deception.”

The *FAZ* noted the growing gap between the US/UK and European positions and, in its editorial “Too Late?” observed that Saddam Hussein had first denied the existence of the missiles before consenting to their destruction. It also printed wide-ranging opinion pieces from Mario Vargas Llosa (“I don’t believe the US any longer”) and Dan Diner (“continuing the inspections regime is not going to lead anywhere”). German TV showed daily reports about the destruction of missiles, as well as the US reaction (“a deception maneuver.”)

On March 7 Hans Blix presented another report to the Security Council which was reported by the *NYT* under the telling headline “Blix spoke, no one cared – Inspectors’ report is irrelevant in the end.” But the next day Blix’s statement that the destruction of Iraqi missiles “constitutes a substantial measure of disarmament” and that “we are not watching the breaking of toothpicks” was fully reported, as well as ElBaradei’s message, that “he had found no evidence that Iraq had restarted the nuclear weapons programs.” On March 9, the *Times* reported that Iraq was trying to exploit the rift between the western allies, but in its editorial section, it again became decidedly anti-Bush-administration: “Had Mr. Bush managed the showdown with Iraq in a more measured manner, he would now be in a position to rally the U.N. behind that bigger, tougher inspection program, declare victory and take most of the troops home.” *NBC* evening news during those days focused primarily on Iraq posing new demands to the U.N.

During these last pre-war days, personal attacks against the U.N. inspectors became more frequent, an experience which Hans Blix, in *Disarming Iraq*, describes at length under the heading “Bashing Blix and ElBaradei.” While the diplomats on the Security Council tried to negotiate a resolution that all could agree to, the process proved too difficult, and the split widened between the U.S., the U.K and Spain on the one hand and Russia, France and Germany on the other. This unsuccessful negotiating effort itself undoubtedly helped to deepen the transatlantic divide over Iraq.

On 17 March, Kofi Annan decided to withdraw all international UN staff, including the UNMOVIC inspectors, from Iraq, after he was informed by the U.S. the day before “that it would be prudent not to leave our staff in the region.”²⁸

Summary of Findings

This comparative study of pre-war reporting confirms that in times of crisis media are culture-bound and are less likely to voice opposing views than in times of non-crisis.

During the period under review, the U.S. related to international affairs in a crisis mode, fighting the “war against terror” as a consequence of the attacks of 9/11 2001. Although the alleged links between the perpetrators and Saddam Hussein’s regime were not proven, the U.S. public continued in 2002/3 to make such connections in surprisingly large numbers.²⁹ Media reporting in the United States implicitly catered to this predominant consensus which appeared to take the links for granted and, most important, did little to dispel these myths.

German media, while alert to the dangers of terrorism and war, appeared less in a state of siege. Only towards the end of this period, when war appeared inevitable even to the professional optimists, did German reporting from Baghdad and the putative battle-zones move into the war-reporting mode. The two German media analyzed in this study, the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and the main evening television news program *Die Tagesschau*, while representing the more conservative, cautious trends in German journalism, did not challenge the validity or the general intent of the UN weapons inspections. Although the *FAZ* was occasionally critical of the inspectors and routinely critical of the uncompromising anti-war stand of the Schroeder-government, it did little to discredit or undermine the inspections process.

The *New York Times*, by contrast, was generally more critical of the inspections. Even its headlines reflected the difference. While the *NYT* carried its news under the banner of *Threats and responses*, no such connotative headlines were used by the German papers. Media critic Eric Alterman accused the *Times* of doing “the administration’s bidding on a crucial issue by consistently hyping Iraq’s alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction.” This generalized charge does not take cognizance of the entire spectrum of news reporting by the *NYT*, nor does it take into account its more dovish editorials. In fact, a comparison of the editorials of the *FAZ* with those of the *NYT* reveals a surprising similarity in tone and in content. (Alterman’s criticism is more to the point when looking at the *Washington Post*, which frequently buried reporting critical of the Bush administration’s drive to war amid the back pages of the news section. The *WP*’s pro-war editorials prompted the *Washingtonian* to call it “the most hawkish major daily newspaper.”)

In television reporting, the difference was more striking. Beginning in January 2003, *NBC News* used the title *Road to War*, while for the news program *Tagesschau* it was business as usual. Throughout this period, and right up to the war, German TV attempted to maintain a balance in its reporting by including Iraqi sources and regularly reporting on Iraqi perspectives. Most noticeable in *NBC*’s reporting on the weapons inspections was its use on an almost daily basis of “experts” from among the former U.N. weapons inspectors, almost all of them hawkish. David Kay and Richard Butler appeared regularly to question the competence and ability of their successors in UNMOVIC to deal with Iraqi attempts at deception. As opinion polls have indicated, viewers tended particularly to “believe” David Kay, and his advocacy of military action would therefore have had particularly damaging impact on perceptions of Iraq as menacing the U.S. and cheating the U.N.

While German TV did not portray the Iraq Minister of Information Al-Sahhaf as a reliable source, he was not subject to the derision directed at him by the U.S. media. In general, the consistent use of commentators and perspectives from other countries and international organizations on German television probably helped to maintain a more

balanced spectrum of views. There was also a difference in the sheer volume of reporting. The German media reported less about the Iraq situation than did their American counterparts. As regards the U.N. weapons inspections in the fall and winter of 2002/03, German reporting was clearly more sympathetic to the weapons inspections than was American reporting, reflecting both the government's perspective and popular views. The *FAZ* editorial position, which appeared on occasion more hawkish than that of the *New York Times*, remained a minority position in Germany during this period.

Since the war in Iraq has ended, much has been written about the media by media critics, as well as much critical self-examination by journalists themselves. *Mea culpas* have abounded, particularly after David Kay announced in early 2004 that "we were all wrong" about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. American journalists who examined their conscience and admitted failure in various professional journals and discussion groups cannot turn the clock back and rewrite history.

The charge that the Bush administration manufactured consent and imposed its view of the alleged dangers posed by Iraq with the willing assistance of the U.S. media will not be easily dispelled. U.S. journalists accepted, for the most part, uncritically the slogans of the Bush Administration, such as "Saddam the tyrant and madman" who was to be deposed in the interest of freedom and human rights, linking Saddam Hussein to Al-Qaeda and the 9/11 terrorist attack, and arguing that Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction posed a direct threat to the United States. The absence of credible experts or opposition leaders who could have challenged this framing of the news about Iraq can best be explained by the predominant national consensus that prevailed since 9/11/01.

Journalists appear to have abrogated their critical function in a democratic society. Silvio Waisbord has delivered the most damning indictment of this "patriotic journalism":

Patriotism became a measure of professional legitimacy that trumped quintessential values. The discourse of the "nation in danger" displaced values of democratic journalism such as dissent and fairness. The risk of patriotism eliminating dissent was ignored; instead, the risk of "terrorism" endangering the

nation was prioritized.... Patriotism as chauvinism dangerously bordered on a culture of absolute integration which, as Theodore Adorno somberly observed, facilitates a politics of murder and destruction.³⁰

In the case of Iraq, the German government, given the country's historical baggage and cultural predisposition to oppose war, worked in concert with France, Russia and many smaller countries to continue and to strengthen the U.N. inspections regime. However, the policy of giving inspections more time to disarm and tighten controls on Iraq failed when the U.S., the U.K. and Spain decided that time had run out for inspections. The Schroeder government had until then successfully framed its anti-war policy for its domestic audience. It had publicly opposed in an unprecedented manner the United States and Great Britain. The German opposition party criticized Schroeder's stance, but failed to make its case with the German public, and a large majority of Germans remained opposed to this war. Media criticism of Schroeder's policy as it appeared in the editorials of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, also seem to have had little impact on public opinion.

As the German company *Media Tenor* has reported through its content analysis of German media, they did not critically distance themselves from growing anti-Americanism in the German public, but instead rode that popular wave.³¹ The German media, while critical of Schroeder's foreign policy and the risk of becoming estranged from two close allies, in the final analysis did not contravene the government's anti-war frame. While there were more opposing voices, such as the *FAZ*, available to the German readers than in its neighbor France[‡], the media generally jumped on the popular, anti-war band-wagon.

Outlook

Although there have always been latent political and strategic differences between Germany and the United States, these became more clearly manifest in the late Cold War

[‡] French one-dimensional media reporting on this issue has been described in a study by the journalist Alain Hertoghe (*La Guerre a Outrances*).

period, and even more pronounced as the post-Cold War era unfolded. These differences, especially concerning the use of force and the role of multilateralism, though continuously smoothed over by diplomacy, are nevertheless fundamental. It is unlikely that leadership change in either country would alone suffice to narrow the divide. Better personal relations between the respective leaders could help in softening the tone of the transatlantic discourse.

Nevertheless, the erosion of trust in the United States as a leader of the international community and as a respected super-power will have a lasting effect on U.S. relations with the rest of the world. The increased power and confidence of a united Germany reflects the strengthened institutions as well as the increasing population of Europe, facts to which the U.S. government has reacted slowly and reluctantly. Attempts by U.S. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and other administration officials to divide Europe into good guys and bad guys, old Europe and new, cannot succeed in a region which has moved towards greater cohesion and is accelerating the development of common political and defense postures and structures.

German sympathies for the United States are at a low ebb: In March 2004, only 38 percent of Germans held favorable views of the United States, down from 61 percent in the summer of 2002. The image of Germany among Americans has also been severely dented: 50 percent of Americans now have a favorable view of Germany, compared to 83 percent in February 2002.³² What world-wide polls in 2004 have shown is that there is growing distrust in most countries of the United States as a result of its conduct in Iraq, and that support for its policies in international organizations such as the United Nations and NATO will not be easily mustered after recent bitterness. American policies and motives are now being challenged by Europeans and people in other parts of the world who are reluctant to accept American leadership on the vital issues of war and peace.

Transatlantic policy discussions are needed to gain a better understanding of the respective roles and positions of the partners across the divide. The media on both sides of the Atlantic will also have to try harder to seek out and to appreciate opposing cultural

and political views; at the same time they must regain their critical distance from their respective governments. In the period between the 9/11 attacks and the war against Iraq the media have largely relinquished their watchdog function, a critical function for democratic societies which must be restored.

ENDNOTES

¹Jonathan Mermin, *Debating War and Peace-Media Coverage of U.S. Intervention in the Post-Vietnam Era*, (Princeton University Press, 1999) p. 23 (Italics added)

² John Zaller and Dennis Chiu, "Government's Little Helper: U.S. Press Coverage of Foreign Policy crises, 1945-1991", *Political Communication*, 13, 1996, 385-405

³ Robert Entman, *Projections of Power – Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (The University of Chicago Press, 2004)

⁴Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention*, (London, Routledge, 2002), Mermin, *Debating War and Peace*, Warren P. Strobel, *Late-Breaking Foreign Policy – The News Media's Influence on Peace Operations* (U.S. Institute of Peace Press, Washington, D.C., 1997), Nik Gowing, "Real-Time Television Coverage of Armed Conflicts and Diplomatic Crises: Does It Pressure or Distort Foreign Policy Decisions?", in: The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, *Terrorism, War, and the Press*, (ed. Nancy Palmer), Harvard University, 2003, pp. 139-222, and Steven Livingston, "Clarifying the CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention", The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Research Paper R-18, June 1997

⁵ David Firestone, "Threats and Responses: The Opposition; Democratic Foes of resolution Are Pleased by Totals", *New York Times*, October 10, 2002

⁶ Public opinion was quite consistent on this matter, as public opinion polls showed that intervention was supported by between 24 percent and 27 percent of those polled in Germany between October 02 and March 03, anti-war figures ranged from 69 percent to 86 percent (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (www.people-press.org))

⁷ see, for example, *Der Spiegel*, March 22 2004 which takes it for granted that there will be another terrorist attack in Germany.

⁸ Stephen Hess and Marvin Kalb (eds.), *The Media and the War on Terrorism* (Brookings Institution Press, Washington, D.C., 2003), p.146

⁹ Frank L. Rusciano and John C. Pollock call it "the wariness with which Germans approach armed intervention in other nations." in: "World Opinion during Times of Crisis", in Doris Graber (ed.), *Media Power in Politics* (Congressional Quarterly Press, Washington, D.C.), p. 403

¹⁰ Kissinger, Henry, *Diplomacy*, Touchstone, New York, 1994, page 809.

¹¹ The respective key-words searched for were: Iraq (Irak), Saddam Hussein, IAEA (IAEO), UNMOVIC, Blix, ElBaradei, weapons inspections/weapons inspectors (Waffeninspektionen/Waffeninspektoren), nuclear, chemical, biological and weapons of mass destruction (Massenvernichtungswaffen).

¹² John R. MacArthur, "The Lies We Bought – The Unchallenged 'Evidence' for War", *Columbia Journalism Review* May/June 2003, online.

¹³ Michael R. Gordon and Judith Miller, "Threats and Responses: The Iraqis; U.S. Says Hussein Intensifies Quest for A-Bomb Parts" *The New York Times*, Sept.8, 2002, p.1

¹⁴ Julia Preston with Todd Purdum, "Threats and Responses: Diplomacy; Bush's Push on Iraq at U.N.: Headway, Then New Barriers", *New York Times*, September 22, 2002

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- ¹⁵ Hans Blix is particularly critical of David Kay in his book as Kay “for more than ten years ...took every opportunity to criticize the agency and myself” and did “not hesitate to attribute to Mohamed ElBaradei and me statements that we never made.” Hans Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, Pantheon, New York 2004, p.26.
- ¹⁶ Unofficial transcript of press Conference by Hans Blix, Amir Al Sadi and Mohamed ElBaradei in Vienna International Centre, October 1, 2002 (records provided by U.N. Information Service, Vienna)
- ¹⁷ Not all of them were accurate, for example:”...inspectors pushed for unfettered access...but Iraq opposes any aerial surveillance or armed guards for inspectors. Surprisingly, UN negotiators say they will not specifically demand access to sensitive sites like Saddam Hussein’s palaces...”(*NBC Nightly News*, September 30,02)
- ¹⁸ Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, pp. 80-85 for the diplomatic background., and Jim Hoagland, “Making the French Connection”, *The Washington Post*, October 18 2002
- ¹⁹ Stephen R. Weisman, “Threats and Responses: Diplomacy: How Powell Lined Up Votes, Starting with his President’s”, *The New York Times*, November 9 2002, p.12
- ²⁰ Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, p.91
- ²¹ Patrick E. Tyler, “Threats and Responses: The U.N.; Annan Presses Bush to Avoid A Rush to War”, *The New York Times*, November 14, p.1
- ²² Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, p.108
- ²³ Hans Blix describes his dilemma about this issue in his book *Disarming Iraq*, pp.115-117, in conjunction with a meeting he held with Condoleezza Rice in New York.
- ²⁴ Todd S. Purdum (and the Staff of *The New York Times*), *A Time of Our Choosing – America’s War in Iraq* (Times Books, New York 2003), p. 69. This point is further elaborated in Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York, 2004)
- ²⁵ Exceptions were opinion pieces and analyses in *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*. Jim Hoagland in the *Washington Post* of February 6 argued that to say now that Bush did not make his case would mean “you must believe that Powell lied...and I don’t believe that.”
- ²⁶ The American author Seymour Hersh recently described the day after the Powell speech as one of the saddest days of American journalism.
- ²⁷ Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, pp. 161 and 165
- ²⁸ Kofi Annan at Press Encounter at the U.N. Secretariat on March 17 2002.
- ²⁹ An important study carried out by the *Program on International Policy Attitudes* (PIPA) of the University of Maryland, “Misperception, The Media and the Iraq War”, dated October 2, 2003 found that large percentages of those Americans who approved unilateral action also believed that Iraq was directly involved in carrying out the September 11 attacks, and/or that Iraq had given substantial support to Al-Qaeda and/or that Al/Qaeda had had contact with Iraqi officials.
- ³⁰ Silvio Waisbord, “Journalism, Risk and Patriotism”, in Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan (eds.), *Journalism after September 11*, (Routledge, London, New York, 2002) p.209
- ³¹ see, for example, Hans Matthias Kepplinger and Helga Weissbacher, “Negativität als Nachrichtenideologie”, in: *Publizistik*, 36/3 (1991), pp. 330-342
- ³² The Pew Global Attitudes Project, “A Year After Iraq War – Mistrust of America in Europe ever higher, Muslim anger persists”, March 16, 2004, www.people-press.org, pp. 6-8