CONFLICTING STORIES: THE PRESIDENCY AND THE MEDIA IN FRAMING CRISES
VOLUME 1

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2011

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This manuscript has been read and accepted by the
Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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My dissertation explores the ability of presidents to successfully frame crises for the mass media in three historical periods, prior to, during, and after the development of the modern presidency and mid-20th century changes in the media. Faced with both national security and scandal crises, presidents have utilized their evolving tools and understanding of media coverage to continue to exercise great power in framing crises. The president has consistently framed national security crises successfully by tapping the resources of the modern office to adapt to the daunting new media environment. In a scandal-inspired crisis, the media initially provided a forum that allowed for some presidential framing, then became far more hostile, and finally returns to a more open setting that ensured a president some influence in establishing that a scandal would be seen through his frames. Presidents over time have used framing to sustain their authority in crises, demonstrating that a more adversarial press has not eliminated presidential framing prospects.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Andrew J. Polsky, the best adviser and mentor a graduate student could have, whose careful scrutiny of every word of this work made it a much better project. I would also like to thank Professors Stanley Renshon, Charles Tien, Ken Erickson, and Susan Woodward for all of their indispensable advice and help with my writing and researching throughout the process. Thanks are due as well to all of my undergraduate students at Hunter College who helped me puzzle through the questions and issues in this undertaking.

Finally thank you to my parents, my brothers, my family, all of my dear friends, and to Ian for all their amazing support and love over my graduate school years.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Favorable (or unfavorable) impressions of the president and his actions may be produced by simply describing the same events in very different ways. Is the U.S. military liberating or occupying Iraq? Was the Monica Lewinsky affair a personal mistake made by Bill Clinton or the case of a president committing perjury and abusing his power? Presidents have good reason to frame their actions in terms most likely to elicit support from the American people and other elites and to aim to have their version of events presented to the public by the mass media. For the president to exercise power most effectively, the public and other political actors must view his actions as legitimate and appropriate. Effectiveness in turn depends heavily on whether the frame he and his administration deploy is adopted by the media.

Presidential framing strategies have been shaped by historical institutional developments within two key institutions in American politics, the presidency and the mass media. Many scholars have identified the emergence of a modern presidency in the 20th century, marked by, among other things, leadership or shaping of public opinion and greater institutional and technological resources to reach the American people with the president's views on issues and events (Greenstein 1978; Lowi 1985; Tulis 1987; Neustadt 1990; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000). Additionally, the media have undergone dramatic change since the 1970's in two ways that will be relevant for this study. First, the American media began to place greater emphasis on the character and psychology of politicians in news coverage, and accordingly engaged in far more scrutiny of both their private lives and the personal and political motivations behind their public acts (Nacos 1990; Sabato 1991; Patterson 1993; Jamieson and Waldman 2003). This change has

occurred alongside trends in American politics such as a focus on leadership in the wake of failures of policy to solve social problems, the shift from party-centered to candidate-centered campaigns, and the perceived importance of presidential mental health in the nuclear age, which have all made the character issue more central to citizens (Renshon 1998). Second, the mass media began to modernize and globalize, developments evident in the advent of cable television and the Internet, revolutionizing the ways in which citizens could acquire information and politicians could disseminate it. Many news outlets have been pressured by corporate owners to place a higher priority on increased profits rather than on objective informative reporting to apprise the public of leaders' decisions and actions (Boyer 1988; Mayer 2007).

These dual institutional changes warrant a closer look at how the president attempts to frame actions and events for the public and how the media enhance or constrain those efforts over time. Using a comparative historical perspective, this dissertation will examine presidential framing in crises because they constitute moments in American politics when the president will be particularly invested in promoting his interpretation of events, and the media will be focusing heavily on presidential leadership.

Additionally, I offer a dynamic understanding of the modern presidency by illustrating how the presidency has continually adapted over time to changes within the media in order to successfully have an impact on press coverage. My work will also engage issues of media autonomy and the press' position as the so-called fourth estate to show how media independence is more real – though far from absolute -- in the case of a presidential scandal than in the case of a national security crisis. I argue that in order to

better understand the development of presidential power over time we must explore presidential effectiveness at legitimating the use of that power through the interaction of the strategies and resources available for framing and the role played by the media in promoting or challenging the president's framing at different historical moments.

I find that the president initially found a somewhat welcoming media environment for his frames in a time of scandal, saw that forum become far more hostile and difficult to navigate in the mid-20th century, and more recently has been able to amass the resources of the modern office to successfully frame a scandal. In making the case for war, presidents have consistently been able to frame national security crises and compel the media to adopt those frames, but that this task has unexpectedly become easier and met with greater success for presidents over time, even as they face a more aggressive, adversarial press.

A More Powerful Presidency, and Increasingly Independent Media

This dissertation will engage a number of different bodies of literature, including those exploring presidential power, the news media's impact on politicians and political events, and crises and crisis rhetoric. When these different fields of scholarship are placed in conversation with one another, a more complete picture of framing and the actions that accompany it in a crisis emerges. Such an approach may allow for greater insight regarding how presidential power is closely tied to framing strategies, the terms and success of which are influenced by how the media have developed over the same period as the presidency.

Presidential Power and Leadership. Many modern presidency scholars have pointed to the importance of the president's efforts to use speeches and public appearances to draw support for his administration and policies, yet the full extent and likelihood of success of such efforts are unclear. Jeffrey Tulis (1987) has formulated the concept of the rhetorical presidency, which holds that in contrast to most 19th century presidents, modern presidents must engage in rhetorical leadership in order to be successful. Institutional changes within the presidency itself also encouraged presidents to engage in public appeals as the 20th century unfolded. Fred Greenstein (1979) outlines the ways in which FDR's presidency represented a transformation of the office, providing the chief executive with more resources to shape mass opinion while increasing the public's expectations that the president should take charge of the nation's affairs and solve its problems. Samuel Kernell (1993) identifies the growth in recent decades of "going public," the president's approach of building public support for his policies through appearances and speeches, often designed to indirectly pressure Congress to support his agenda. Jacobs and Shapiro (2000) contend that presidents routinely engage in "crafted talk" in order to obtain more positive media coverage for their views and actions and secure public backing. Bruce Miroff (2003) takes these notions of presidential efforts to gain approval a step further by arguing that modern presidents also create presidential "spectacles" designed to imbue the president's image with particularly favorable characteristics in order to satisfy high public expectations and gain popularity, including elements of what we might term visual framing.

However, scholars disagree over how effectively presidents have been able to successfully engage in such practices. George C. Edwards (2003; 2009) has recently

argued that the president is unable to move public opinion through his public statements. Jacobs and Shapiro (2000) illustrate the ways in which persuasion and rhetorical efforts by the opposition may hinder a president's ability to affect media coverage, as well as how an administration's overconfidence in the effectiveness of the bully pulpit may prove disastrous. Additionally, persuasion is by nature a rather restrained power, which speaks to the necessity of support from others in order for the president to exercise authority. The media are key political actors who could potentially aid or inhibit the president's framing efforts, providing support for or a challenge to presidential power.

Media Change Over Time. The media changed dramatically from the 1970's to the 1990's in several significant ways. The first change was in the content of political news. In their coverage of the president and presidential candidates, the media began to take up the role of "amateur psychologist," heavily scrutinizing politicians' character and psychology (Jamieson and Waldman 2003). Additionally, the press began to focus increasingly on the underlying motivations behind the actions of presidents and candidates, making strategy and the game-like aspects of politics the primary focus of their coverage (Patterson 1993; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000).

The second change was a technological one. The past few decades have seen a revolution in communications and media technology. The advent of 24-hour cable television news networks such as CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News has produced a constant stream of news and information for the American public, but has also altered news sensibilities and priorities by giving such stations a vast amount of airtime to fill. The Internet has created a forum for an immense amount of information about politics and politicians that is not subject to the gatekeepers of the traditional media, who would

normally make editorial decisions about what should be presented to the public and how. As a relatively unregulated information provider, the web can also spread stories and information quickly and widely, potentially making it more difficult for presidents to shape the news (Callaghan and Schnell 2005; Mayer 2007).

Even as the media have changed over time, they have always played an important role in crises. Amid a crisis, the public turns to the news media for information and interpretation, evidenced by the extremely high ratings for television and radio news broadcasts under such circumstances (Nacos 2002). In these extraordinary situations, certain norms of press coverage exist – a crisis tends to be personalized, dramatized, and covered in a fragmented manner that seldom gives Americans a full picture of how the crisis emerged (Gans 1979; Christopher 1985; Farber 2005).

As Jacobs and Shapiro (2000) note, one of the limitations of much of the media scholarship is that it is too press-centered, neglecting the important ways in which the actions of politicians and realities of political context impact coverage. Scholars have frequently outlined the ways in which media coverage has influenced American politics, but less often focused on how American politics shapes media coverage. Through a focus on president-media relations during crises, I will examine how the foremost political actor in the American political system influences media coverage of his actions.

Framing and Presidential Rhetoric. Framing involves the selection of central organizing themes to highlight and emphasize certain elements of a story and minimize others, a process that gives coherence and meaning to an event or action (Altheide 1976; Entman 2004; Lakoff 2004; Bennett 2005; Callaghan and Schnell 2005). It is often conceived of as a power exercised by the news media as they seek to condense and

present complex information. However, political actors also engage in framing efforts to place events within particular narratives that foster greater support for their political goals in a given situation. Many (though not all) presidents in the modern era have found ways to increase the likelihood that the press will respond positively to their frames, utilizing strategies such as controlling the flow of information to the press, restricting the access of reporters to the White House, or attempting to discredit the media as an institution (Tebbel and Watts 1985; Mayer 2007). As a result, the president is often able to frame a story for the public more successfully than can those who want to offer an opposing frame (Farnsworth and Lichter 2006).

Substantive Focus: Two Kinds of Crises. Crisis moments test presidential power. Where propelled by external events, a crisis promotes the extension of presidential power and threatens to reduce the media to the status of a presidential instrument. By contrast, if the crisis takes the form of a scandal, the media may erode presidential authority and with that the capacity to act effectively. I define political crisis as an event or set of connected events that the president or other influential political actors determine to have significant bearing on the safety, stability, or standing of the nation, as well as on presidential power and legitimacy. In contrast to normal political circumstances, presidents will need to act more quickly and under greater scrutiny, and frequently with more dire consequences resulting from their actions. The typically high-profile nature of such crises and air of uncertainty make it crucial that the president impose meaning on the unfolding events. Furthermore, researching crises allows for the exploration of instances in which presidential power is of greatest consequence, whether because it is at its height in unilaterally determining the course of government action or because its very

legitimacy is threatened, potentially leading to the political downfall of the administration and a possible decline in public faith in national governing institutions.

The first kind of crisis this dissertation will focus on occurs when the president seeks to persuade the public that military action is necessary. This may entail the use of rhetoric to elevate to the level of a crisis a "base event" that would not on its own be disturbing to the American people (Bostdorff 1994). The goal in creating such a "constructed crisis" is to build broad consensus in support of the actions the president wants to take. A modern president facing what he deems a crisis situation will typically deploy "crisis rhetoric" in order to convince the public and the press that an emergency exists and requires a military response. However, this line of communication is not one-way. The public and the media may also play a critical role in identifying a crisis or legitimizing a particular course of action. In sum, presidents have the ability to "create a crisis, react to a crisis created by others, or portray themselves as reacting to a crisis they have created in the first place" (Kiewe 1994, xvii).

Much of the literature identifies presidential primacy and advantages in constructing a crisis and pushing for military intervention. Jon Western (2005) argues the president must convince the public that the threat to national security is substantially larger than the expected costs of war, and use the media to this end. Presidential attempts to frame an event as a crisis demanding military intervention can create media coverage that "rallies round the flag" and causes journalists to express support for the president rather than criticizing him or his policies (Nacos 1990; Oneal and Bryan 1995). When the president is able to procure consensus at the elite level, which Polsky (2006) finds he can do by committing troops to a situation in which hostilities appear imminent, Zaller (1992)

asserts that the information received by the public through the media will be one-sided, reflecting the president's position. Presidents, however, often believe that even in a foreign policy-related crisis, the media continually seek and make public information that compromises not only the president's goals, but, as presidents are frequently quick to claim, national security itself (Tebbel and Watts 1985).

Presidential advantages in framing a military crisis identified in the literature are, therefore, difficult to reconcile with both the views of presidents themselves and media scholars' assertions that the media have become hyper-adversarial and far more critical in their political coverage over time. Also, as the media and the presidency have changed institutionally over the past few decades, questions emerge as to whether the president's ability to frame foreign policy crises and the substance of media coverage of these events have been altered as well, whether the particular nature of these events still creates a free hand for presidential framing that trumps altered institutional factors, and whether different presidential strategies must be used over time to achieve the same results.

The second kind of crisis I will focus on is political scandal, which places the president on the defensive, his authority and/or integrity under attack. When a president is embroiled in a major scandal, Blaney and Benoit (2001) argue, his goals in framing will be to restore a favorable image, to reduce the perceived severity of his alleged transgression, and, sometimes, to admit a mistake in order to earn the public's forgiveness. Presidents will attempt to rehabilitate their reputations in a media environment that likely emphasizes an alternative and far more negative perspective on the events. However, the president will also tend to have the advantage of a great deal of media and public attention to his statements and actions and may be able to capitalize on

the potential for a public backlash to develop against an overzealous media attack on his presidency.

Much of the scholarship on the common patterns of media coverage of scandal implies that such coverage may offer the president little room to rehabilitate his image and save his political career. Larry Sabato (1991) has compared the behavior of reporters going after a wounded politician in the wake of a scandal to that exhibited by sharks in a feeding frenzy – they latch on to the story and pursue it endlessly and seemingly uncontrollably. In the years following the Watergate scandal, the press has continually been on the lookout for the next major scandal, delving into the details of a president's private and personal activities to expose any evidence of corruption or misconduct.

This level of media scrutiny has taught recent presidents that they must play both offense and defense under such circumstances, crafting a clear message to the American public and simultaneously attacking their detractors, which some have been able to do quite effectively (Farnsworth and Lichter 2006). Mary Stuckey (1997) has demonstrated that there is potential for a president to frame his way out of a scandal, depending on how well that framing fits with what the American public believes it knows about him, knowledge that is likely to be the result of previous media frames of both himself and his actions. However, according to Robert Busby (2001), even as presidential defenses against scandals have become more sophisticated and efficient, developments within the modern media continually undermine the president's ability to control coverage. The literature leaves open whether the increased coverage of a presidential scandal creates an unmanageable political crisis for the president or whether the institutional resources of the modern presidency have made it possible to contain the damage.

Presidential Crisis Framing and the Media: Age Old Dilemmas, New Strategies

The authority of a president in relation to the media is tested most severely amid a crisis. We may consider first a situation in which a president seeks to respond to some national security challenge. The constitutional arrangement and historical precedent suggest that a president under such circumstances enjoys great authority to act. In the past, presidents successfully framed a national security challenge as a crisis; however, there were definite limits to the chief executive's ability to define the situation and lay out the appropriate responses. Many of these limitations stemmed from the nature of news coverage in the late 1800's. In the mid-20th century, some modern media norms, especially the commitment to present the official view without editorializing, strengthened the president's hand. New commitments to objectivity and "balance," however, meant a substantial amount of news content that challenged the president's narratives.

I maintain that the presumption of extraordinary presidential authority during a national security challenge remains intact. Despite the changes in the modern media and the proliferation of new forms of media, the news media continue to give the president great latitude in framing the crisis. Although presidents have had to adapt to certain changes in the media environment, they have accomplished this by tapping the resources of the modern presidency. Presidential authority in a national security crisis is perhaps even more secure today then it was before the media revolution.

Media capacity to frame a crisis has been far greater when it takes the form of a scandal, yet presidents have learned how to respond effectively. Here we might describe

the historical path of media-president relations amid scandals as an arc. Initially, pre-modern presidents could contain some of the damage done by scandals because they could rely upon a favorable party press to defend them. However, norms of 19th century media coverage meant many newspapers did not merely echo presidential narratives, even when controlled by the president's fellow partisans. Further, these outlets did not shy away from covering personal and psychological content often damaging to the president, contrary to what the literature would have us expect. However, the modern presidency found even fewer areas the press regarded as "private" and not subject to media scrutiny, while the advent of independent media meant presidents could not depend on partisan defenders at all. A mid-20th century period of intense media change made it difficult for even a modern president to employ new strategies and adapt to emerging news norms. More recently, as presidents have become wise to the ways of the modern media and more sophisticated in how they should be approached, scandals have proven to be much less damaging than we might expect. Some presidents have been able to recognize and exploit their opportunities to effectively frame scandals, typically by doing so on the media's terms and taking into account conventions of press coverage. Thus presidents have learned over time they can continue to influence the framing of the scandal-crisis to contain the damage it inflicts on their capacity to govern effectively. On balance, the modern presidency has given presidents tools to cope effectively with the media such that the White House can dominate framing in a national security challenge and can neutralize many attacks when faced with a scandal.

There are other possible explanations for the outcomes I have identified. First, one might argue that a president-vs.-media dichotomy oversimplifies the political terrain.

Other actors, such as Congress and the partisan opposition, may play an important role. In the case of a national security crisis, the absence of congressional opposition could have greater explanatory significance than does media acquiescence; the media might simply not have alternative sources from which to draw different frameworks. My national security cases show that the media included other frameworks in news coverage, yet presidential framing approaches have dominated overall, particularly in recent years.

In the event of a scandal, the effectiveness of partisan opposition and the degree of solidarity in the president's own party might account for the varying outcomes. Where the opposing party can impose its framework on the scandal and the president's co-partisans fragment, the scandal will undermine presidential legitimacy; only if the opposition blunders (by overplaying its hand or condemning the president for trivial failings) will a president survive. In short, the president's actions could matter much less in a scandal than do those of the partisan opposition. My research shows that it is difficult to completely discount the importance of party support for presidents trying to weather major scandals. However, I find that successful or poor presidential framing of the scandal can be directly connected to the likelihood his party will vocally back or quickly abandon the president. The importance of the White House's frames is also linked, then, to interpreting the scandal in such a way that allows party members to publicly stand behind the president, without being denounced in the press and by the public.

In looking at presidential authority in moments of crisis, then, I argue that the president's efforts to frame the crisis and the extent to which those frames are adopted by the media are critical determinants of the success of presidential attempts to sustain

legitimacy for his or her actions. I assert that in national security crises the president has consistently over time compelled the media to accept his frames, with the ability to shape news coverage actually being enhanced over the course of American political history. In the case of scandal, I contend that the president initially faced mixed results in framing, saw that influence recede greatly with the advent of the modern media, and then has been able to reassert himself in the framing process by marshalling the assets of his own modernized office.

Research Design

The use of three historical time periods allows me to demonstrate that presidential efforts to shape media coverage are not only a recent development in the American presidency, as commonly believed, but have always been a part of presidents' endeavors to gain authority in crises. I will seek to show that conventional wisdom in the media literature regarding the escalation of media negativity, adversarial journalism, and challenges to authority over time does not hold up when considering national security crises, or, more surprisingly, scandals, when the media are thought to be most hostile to presidential interests and influence. This makes the study of presidential framing and media coverage of great importance in understanding presidential power over time, and speaks to whether the media act as a viable check on presidential authority, which hangs in the balance in the crisis moment.

To support my central claims, I examine two different forms of crises -- a president making the case for military intervention and a major presidential scandal -- through a comparative historical approach. The president typically constructs the first

kind of crisis and the president's political opponents or the media independently usually bring about the second kind. Variation thus exists in these cases in the source of the onset of the crisis, whether presidential authority is typically assumed or undermined, and, in terms of the conventional wisdom, whether the media or the president will be more dominant in framing. To sustain my argument, my findings must demonstrate that presidential framing is of central importance in directing the content of media coverage in a crisis scenario. The research should confirm that presidents have been able to use framing in national security crises to shape media coverage toward being supportive of the remedies they propose. It should also verify that the pre-modern presidency was able to at least somewhat put the press into service toward minimizing the fallout of scandals, but as the media changed, they displayed flashes of fierce independence from presidential frames. The frames employed by presidents early in this transition period may also have lacked savvy and insight into how best to gain significant placement in coverage. More recent modern presidents, however, should be shown as better at "taming the beast" through superior strategies and resources to navigate and influence scandal coverage through framing.

I look at three cases in each of the crisis scenarios, one taking place before the institutional changes in the presidency and the media, one during the transitional period of the 1960's and 1970's, and one taking place after the changes. To explore presidential efforts to frame national security crises, I examine William McKinley and the Spanish-American War, Lyndon Johnson and the Vietnam War, and George W. Bush and the Iraq War. For cases of presidential scandal, I use the examples of Ulysses S. Grant and the Whisky Ring scandal, Richard Nixon and Watergate, and Bill Clinton and the Lewinsky

scandal. These cases provide me with a long historical view of presidential framing and media coverage in crises, and take into account how institutional changes have affected the interaction between the presidency and press. The cases of McKinley and Grant are early examples of presidents without the institutional resources of the modern presidency who interacted with a more partisan press. Johnson and Nixon represent transitional cases, in which modern presidents faced media with significantly altered norms of coverage and values. The Clinton and Bush examples illustrate how more recent modern presidents, who have the advantage of considering similar efforts by their predecessors, have utilized the resources of the office to better shape coverage to their liking, even as technological change has simultaneously made the media more unwieldy.

My cases also deal with contentions in the media literature that presidential scandal coverage has invariably and progressively become more critical over time. Scholars have argued news stories have become progressively negative, and that feeding frenzy journalism emerges for types of infractions that likely would have been ignored in an earlier era. Even in foreign policy crises, a hyper-adversarial press might be assumed likely to call the president's interpretation of events into question. My most recent scandal and national security cases illustrate the ways in which the president can reframe scandals and define foreign policy problems even in the daunting new media environment, and identify framing advantages and resources modern presidents have employed toward these purposes.

To understand the role of presidential framing in shaping news coverage in crises, I first analyze the content of presidential speeches and public statements to determine the substance and forms of the president's framing efforts. I then turn to media coverage of

these same events and coverage of the president himself, engaging in content analysis of important and representative news media outlets of each period. My goals in doing so are to ascertain the extent to which the president's version of events is presented in the coverage and whether alternative frames are present, and if so what their sources are and how they interpret events. In the earliest cases, I look at prominent contemporary American newspapers in the country at the time. For my transition cases, I analyze major newspapers with substantial national story coverage as well as nightly news broadcasts on the major television networks, where those broadcasts are available. In the most recent examples, I examine the content of newspapers and nightly news broadcasts, but in addition some of the coverage offered on twenty-four hour news networks and influential political websites in order to help capture the altered media environment over time. As many of these crises unfolded over a significant period of time, I used the secondary literature to determine crucial and high-profile moments in the development of the crisis. In each case, I also analyze news coverage in a second time period to demonstrate how presidential frames fared over time and as other political actors weighed in on the crisis.

Plan of the Dissertation

In the scandal cases, my research illustrates a pattern of mixed results in the 19th century, presidential failure with the advent of new media, and the return of effective presidential framing. In chapter 2 I look at the case of Grant and the Whiskey Ring scandal, and show that the partisan press, even those outlets friendly to the president's party, represented a news environment inconsistent in support for presidential frames. Additionally, the news content bears some striking resemblances to modern coverage,

including a focus on presidential character and psychology, emphasis on underlying White House motivations and tactics, and portrayals of political issues in a personalized manner. These news norms had both advantages and drawbacks for Grant's efforts to weather the Whiskey Ring scandal. Overall, despite a vocal opposition, I find Grant was able to mitigate at least some of the political damage in the coverage, and where he was more ineffectual I connect this to the limitations of the pre-modern presidential office.

In chapter 3, I explore the case of President Nixon, and establish that as Watergate took place so early in an era of media change, the president had difficulty fully utilizing the tools of the modern presidency to frame the scandal, resulting in less success in the administration's attempts to shape news coverage. Nixon's responses to the Watergate scandal illustrate a number of presidential framing failures, including frames that contradicted each other or that contradicted actions he took. The president's frames were also at times out of step with the media landscape, for instance, offering complex narratives requiring significant elucidation that unsurprisingly fared poorly in the televised nightly news format. This transitional period was a moment of media dominance prior to presidential efforts to amass and direct the resources of the modern office to neutralize the political response to presidential transgressions.

The Clinton case, discussed in chapter 4, features a president who built on the formative lessons offered by previous scandals and who possesses more sophisticated techniques for dealing with the media. In discussing the Lewinsky scandal I show that although the partisan opposition was strong and unified in pushing a damaging framing of the scandal and Clinton's own party was fragmented, he was still able to affect press coverage by tailoring his framing strategies to new media norms. Though many have

stressed Clinton's casting of the affair as a personal mistake as allowing him to remain in office, I find that the president's assertion he was persecuted by partisan enemies to be even more successful in shaping news coverage of the scandal. The modern media environment created distinctive challenges for the president's framing project, and my analysis of cable news coverage reveals some of these difficulties, but also ways that Clinton's framing strategies were effective even in this unwieldy medium.

My military intervention cases show that the media consistently remained acquiescent over different historical periods and adopted the president's framing of crises. My research demonstrates that although there were alternative frames and political opposition in each case, these perspectives were largely diminished or de-legitimized in favor of privileging the president's position. Additionally, the most recent presidents represent the fullest realization of adapting their framing strategies to media change using the resources and cumulative learning of the office in order to achieve the same results as their predecessors, and in fact, the earliest cases show presidents facing substantial difficulties in seeking to shape news content.

In chapter 5, I present the case of McKinley and his efforts to pursue the Spanish-American War on his own terms and timetable. Despite the national security context and partisan press environment, President McKinley faced a great deal of difficulty getting his frames into the news. This I attribute to both the inadequacies of some of McKinley's narratives as well as the nature of the news content in the late 1800's, in which no single framing of events appeared to dominate in the press. The constraints of the pre-modern presidency are apparent as they were in the Grant case, notably in that other political

figures could rival McKinley for influencing press depictions of events, even in the foreign policy realm.

Lyndon Johnson and the Vietnam War is the subject of chapter 6, and I show that the primacy of the modern presidency in shaping news coverage of national security crises is very much evident in this case. Several of Johnson's key narratives about the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964 enjoyed great prominence in the press and were often adopted as objective characterizations of the events. At times the news content demonstrated elements of independence by presenting content refuting the president's claims, but the sources of such opposition generally were not portrayed as having the credibility or support to challenge Johnson's authority.

In Chapter 7, I analyze President Bush's efforts to make the case for war with Iraq in 2002 – 2003. Despite the highly adversarial, unwieldy modern media environment he faced, Bush was able to marshal the resources of the modern presidency to build support for military intervention, in some ways even more easily and successfully than his predecessors. Several of Bush's key frames enjoyed great prominence in the press, and opponents appeared to have difficulty mounting a coherent counter-frame to the president's narratives in the complex new media landscape. However, my analysis of blog content from this period demonstrates that presidents will face challenges in obtaining space for their frames in this modern online incarnation of the partisan press.

Finally in Chapter 8, I conclude this study by assessing the importance of presidential framing in major crises in American politics and the presidency's ability to shape media coverage over time. I discuss some of the implications of the findings of my

cases for studies of the presidency and the media, and raise some possible future subjects of inquiry.

Chapter 2: President Grant and the Whiskey Ring Scandal

In 1876, President Ulysses S. Grant's private secretary in the White House, General Orville Babcock, was indicted and given a criminal trial for involvement in the St. Louis "whiskey ring" that had been exposed in 1875 by Grant's Secretary of the Treasury Benjamin Bristow, the first real effort to stop the longstanding illegal activities.[1] Whiskey rings were uncovered in cities throughout the country, and involved the underreporting of the production of whiskey so that fewer taxes were paid to the federal government, which lost millions in revenue as a result. The excess money was illicitly divided amongst the whiskey producers and corrupt government officials charged with collecting the taxes in an intricate system of bribery. The most incriminating pieces of evidence against Babcock were mysteriously worded dispatches sent to some of the main organizers of the ring and construed as Babcock's warnings to his co-conspirators as to when federal agents were going to strike. Grant had personal and political connections to a few already convicted of running the whiskey rings, but Babcock was regarded as much closer to him, one of the most powerful and influential people in the White House.[2]

Operating in a pre-modern presidency context, Grant was somewhat constrained in trying to rehabilitate his image and that of his administration. Grant, testifying to Babcock's innocence, sought to help vindicate his private secretary, but also to set the record straight as to his own lack of involvement in the scandal. As a vehicle for framing a scandal, a president's deposition differs sharply from a major speech: the president in the former case cannot entirely control the format and limits of the questions posed to

[1] William B. Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant: Politician* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1935), 378.
[2] Timothy Rives, "Grant, Babcock, and the Whiskey Ring," *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives and Records Administration* 32 (3) (Fall 2000).

him, and is subject to a typically hostile cross-examination.[3] Despite these limitations, in the course of his statements, Grant's efforts to highlight certain elements of the case and deemphasize others become clear. We might even note certain advantages of the deposition as a means of framing – a major public address on the issue may have been regarded as an unseemly demagogic appeal to the public in the late nineteenth century, and a willingness to be confronted by questions of the opposition provides the appearance of transparency and openness on the part of the president.[4] Further, the rarity of presidential depositions in criminal cases could draw great public and press attention to Grant's preferred take on the situation.

In this chapter, I look at President Grant's framing of the scandal in his deposition and how these frames fared in subsequent newspaper coverage of the Whiskey Ring events. I find that though Grant framed the scandal so as to absolve himself and Babcock of any wrongdoing, the nature of the 19th century newspaper limited his ability to shape the coverage effectively. Much of the editorial content in Republican papers did privilege the president's position and that of the Democratic papers challenged Grant's frames. However, much of the news content consisted of detailed recounting of events, such as trial proceedings, which resulted in a fair amount of favorable and unfavorable content for the president in all of the print outlets, regardless of their partisan affiliation. Contrary to what we might expect then, the partisan press was not (at least in the case of the Whiskey Ring scandal in 1876) all that partisan. Further, the newspapers analyzed here

[3] The prosecution in Babcock's case, in fact, sought to argue that the president's deposition was just as useful to their side as Grant had meant it to be for the defense. One of the prosecuting attorneys proclaimed in court that "[t]he telegrams and the president's deposition tend in only one direction and that is to show that this defendant has violated the law of the land" (*The New York Tribune*, "Arguing the Babcock Case. Col. Broadhead Outspoken," February 21, 1876).

[4] Grant's original intention was actually to testify in person, which would have drawn even greater public attention to his statement and appearance, but his Cabinet convinced him not to do so (Geoffrey Perret, *Ulysses S. Grant: Soldier and President* New York: Random House, 1997, 441).

offered a surprising amount of commentary on the character and psychology of the politicians involved in the scandal, counter to assumptions such content is a firmly modern development. Finally, where Grant's narratives did not gain a hold in the coverage, I trace such problems to presidential failures of framing, due in part to the limitations of the pre-modern office and the norms of the 19th century media coverage.

Grant's Framing of the Whiskey Ring Scandal

The first frame employed by Grant in his deposition was highlighting Babcock's good character, enhanced by Grant's assertions that he had known him quite intimately for an extended period of time. Rather than choosing to distance himself from his secretary as a political liability, Grant instead emphasized what an "efficient and faithful" member of the administration Babcock had been. At one point the president declared that he "always had great confidence in his integrity and efficiency, and as yet my confidence in him is unshaken; I have never learned anything that would shake that confidence; of course I know of this trial that is progressing."[5] The president sought to restore public faith not only in Babcock but also in the integrity of his administration.

Grant's close firsthand knowledge of Babcock also served to bolster the second frame employed in his testimony, that Babcock was innocent of the charges against him involving complicity in the Whiskey Ring. The president frequently reiterated that to his knowledge and recollection, Babcock never interfered with the investigation of the ring, never asked for Grant to take particular action in the case except to make sure "men of high character" were doing the investigating, and had no involvement in the ring's illegal

[5] All excerpts and quotes from Ulysses S. Grant's deposition can be found in the printed version of the deposition in *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, Volume 27: January 1 – October 31, 1876*, edited by John Y. Simon, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 27 – 45.

activities. At some points in the deposition Grant said that he could not remember being shown particular dispatches or being spoken to about certain officials now convicted of being involved in the ring. However, his overall portrait of the events was that if Babcock had been trying to use his influence with the president to cover up his involvement, Grant would certainly remember these efforts, and he did not. The president portrayed this high level official in his administration as falsely accused. Throughout Grant's time of working very closely with Babcock, there was never any indication of misconduct on his part.

A third (but less emphasized) frame throughout Grant's statements was the depiction of Babcock as not only innocent, but also as treated unfairly over the course of the Whiskey Ring investigation. When asked whether Babcock ever interfered with the investigation, Grant responded: "To my knowledge he has not; General Babcock has complained very bitterly of his treatment; after the speech of Mr. Henderson in the Avery trial was delivered ----." The statement by Henderson, a Whiskey Ring prosecutor, was the accusation that Grant and Babcock had wrongly interfered with the Treasury Department's efforts to root out the whiskey frauds.[6] This was widely criticized by Grant supporters as evidence that the investigation was little more than a partisan attack on the president.[7] Grant's defenders felt he not only faced persecution from Democrats, but from within his own administration, and accused Secretary Bristow of trying to position himself for a run for the Republican presidential nomination in 1876 at Grant's expense.[8]

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[6] Hesseltine, 386.

[7] Rives, 5. According to the diary of Hamilton Fish, Grant's Secretary of State, the president in a meeting with some Cabinet members at the start of the Babcock trial "manifested a great deal of excitement and complained…that the prosecution was aimed at himself, and that they were putting him on trial…" (Simon, 45).

[8] Allan Nevins, *Hamilton Fish: The Inner History of the Grant Administration, Volume Two* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1967), 793.

Furthermore, when Grant was questioned as to why he made a request for a military Court of Inquiry for Babcock before he was indicted by the Grand Jury and given a civilian criminal trial,[9] he answered, "It was made because he applied for it, and I thought he was clearly entitled to vindicate himself if he was innocent. He had been denied that opportunity before the Grand Jury." The president raised the possibility of misconduct in the criminal investigation, violating norms of fairness, and turned the tables on administration critics. Interestingly, this turns out to be a scandal management strategy President Clinton would also employ against his opponents over a century later.[10]

Finally, Grant emphasized that he had no involvement in the scandal, and that throughout the investigation his intentions were always to expose the guilty and root out corruption. Grant's framing of the scandal as one in which he had no knowledge or complicity was particularly important given the first frame outlined here regarding his closeness to Babcock. With Babcock the subject of a major criminal trial, Grant might have wanted to maintain his secretary was innocent but simultaneously needed to illustrate his own distance from the corruption. Throughout his deposition, he did this in two ways: first, several times he asserted that he did not recall events or documents that might link him to some of the suspicious activities, saying for instance that his "memory

[9] The military trial ultimately never came to fruition, as the district attorneys in the case refused to send evidence on Babcock's complicity to the military court, and so it was disbanded on December 15, 1875 (*The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, Volume 26: 1875*, edited by John Y. Simon, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003, xiv).

[10] This was not the first time that Grant alluded to feeling the victim of political persecution. In his Second Inaugural Address in 1872 he wrote, "I did not ask for place or position, and was entirely without influence or the acquaintance of people with influence, but was resolved to perform my part in a struggle threatening the very existence of the nation. I performed a conscientious duty, without asking for promotion or command, and without a revengeful feeling toward any section or individual. Notwithstanding this, throughout the war, and from my candidacy for my present office in 1868 to the close of the last presidential campaign, I have been the subject of abuse and slander scarcely ever equaled in political history, which today I feel that I can afford to disregard in view of your verdict, which I gladly accept as my vindication" (Josiah Bunting, *Ulysses S. Grant: The American Presidents*, edited by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004, 129-30).

doesn't go back to that time" regarding being shown incriminating telegrams between Babcock and officials indicted as part of the ring. Second, he went to great lengths to identify his desire to find and punish those guilty of participation in the ring, and to contradict the notion that he had not been cooperative or proactive in the investigation. One action taken by Grant that appeared to undermine this narrative was his revoking an order to transfer revenue supervisors between cities to disrupt the ring and root out the guilty parties, but he explained in the deposition that he became convinced (but not by Babcock) this would actually prevent the corrupt from being caught, giving them too much notice and time to cover up their misdeeds.

Media Coverage of the Grant Deposition

The newspapers that will be analyzed here are *The New York Times*, *The New York Tribune*, *The New York Herald*, *The New York Sun*, and *The Chicago Daily Tribune*. These papers were selected according to three criteria to best permit conclusions about general news coverage of Grant and the Whiskey Ring scandal: circulation rates,[11]

[11] According to George P. Rowell and Company's *American Newspaper Directory of 1875* (New York: George P. Rowell and Co.), New York had the most daily newspapers of any state, with 100. The four newspapers within New York State with the highest circulation rates are those analyzed here, including the *Herald* – 65,000 daily, the *Tribune* – 43,833 daily, the *Sun* – 119,792 daily and the *Times* – 42,000 daily. As scholars of nineteenth century media have pointed out, newspapers were frequently read aloud to groups or passed along from person to person, so there is reason to believe that the coverage of these papers reached many more Americans than just the numbers listed above. Also, though newspapers might be tempted to inflate their circulation numbers to generate higher advertising rates, the prominence of the papers selected is generally acknowledged, and many of the paper's identities were tied to high profile political figures who acted as their editors, like Horace Greeley at the *Tribune* (though not as the time of the articles analyzed) and Charles A. Dana and the *Sun*. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* or simply the *Chicago Tribune* refused to release their circulation numbers in 1875, but was one of the most prominent Midwestern newspapers. Additionally, many of the papers would occasionally carry articles from newspapers of other cities and regions, which were not excluded from the analysis here, and frequently used dispatches from wire news services like the Associated Press in their pages, making the coverage more indicative of what news content in general was like over this period.

different partisan leanings,[12] and different regions of the country.[13] All five of the newspapers analyzed here featured a great deal of extremely detailed coverage of the Babcock trial during the time period selected, February 9th, 1876 through February 25th, 1876.[14] During these weeks the trial was the single most dominant story in the news cycle.

The nature of the coverage in nineteenth century newspaper articles makes a quantitative account of how many times President Grant's frames appear in the coverage not particularly useful. A major portion of the content of the articles in most of the papers simply provided the day's court proceedings from dispatches of the Associated Press, which recounted at length even minor legal maneuvers and points made by lawyers on both sides. Several articles contained large sections that were directly quoted from the attorneys' arguments before the court or their interrogation of witnesses. Therefore, a descriptive account of the quality and nature of the coverage will be provided here, specifically focused on the ways in which President Grant and the content of his

[12] Horace Greeley, founding editor of *The New York Tribune*, had supported Grant for president in 1868, but wrote to a friend in March 1872, "I have had as much Grant as I can endure." That year he gave up his position as editor to become the presidential candidate of the Liberal Republican party, with a platform including pushing for civil service reform, and the Democrats ultimately made him their candidate as well. Harry W. Baehr Jr., *The New York Tribune Since the Civil War*, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1936), 105-109. After the *Tribune* left the party, *The New York Times* advertised itself as "the only Republican morning paper in New York," and saw its influence and support accordingly increase (Elmer Davis, *History of the New York Times 1851-1921*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1969, 117). *The New York Sun* was openly attacking Grant from the beginning of his first term, and leaning Democratic in most of its coverage (Candace Stone, *Dana and The Sun*, New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1938, 66). Prior to and during the Civil War, *The New York Herald* also supported the Democratic Party (Davis, 9). As for *The Chicago Tribune*, its leader and editor, Joseph Medill was an organizer of the Republican Party in Chicago, and had been its mayor from 1871 to 1873 (David Paul Nord, *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001, 116-117).

[13] *The Chicago Tribune* allows us not only to see a non-New York, east coast paper perspective in the coverage, but a Whiskey Ring was discovered to be operating in the city of Chicago over the 1875-1876 period as well, giving Whiskey Ring scandal stories more local importance.

[14] These dates were selected to analyze articles from because they span the length of General Babcock's trial, with the president giving his deposition in the middle.

deposition appear in and are described by the reporters and editors of the newspapers, and with some reference to how the defense and prosecution used Grant's words.

The New York Newspapers

The Deposition Coverage Generally

When President Grant's deposition was officially entered into the court's records, its text appeared in its entirety in all four New York newspapers analyzed here, and any commentary on the deposition's content was placed in separate articles nowhere near as lengthy as the president's own words. However, the openly hostile *New York Sun* provides its own subheadings to the full text of the deposition that criticized the president's statements, such as "A Bad Memory" and "Points Grant Doesn't Remember."[15] Overall, however, it seems Grant through this public statement of support for Babcock was able to get the full content of his views out to the newspaper reading public, often without being directly undermined (at least initially) by the newspaper in which they appeared.

An exception to this is the February 16th edition of the *New York Sun*, where an editorial entitled "Grant's Deposition" directly questioned many of Grant's main assertions, and even postulated that Grant likely had something to hide that precluded him from actually appearing on the stand, since he had been only too happy to leave Washington for reasons of personal leisure. Even the *Sun*, however, proclaimed the president to have answered questions with "straight-forwardness," and contended that the

[15] *The New York Sun*, "U.S. Grant's Deposition. The Document That Was Filed in the Babcock Case," February 18, 1876.

cross examination seemed more directed against Grant than Babcock.[16] This could cast the trial as a politically motivated effort to bring down Grant, as the president and his surrogates appeared to believe, but perhaps the *Sun* simply sought to emphasize that Grant was as legitimate a target of investigation as his private secretary.

The *Herald* on several occasions openly criticized the president's inability to remember certain specifics of his interactions with Babcock that might shed more light on the case. As previously mentioned, in his deposition Grant at some junctures professed not to precisely recollect some information, and this aided him in defending himself against accusations of involvement in the scandal, as well as avoiding stating things that might later be proven untrue. On two consecutive days, February 15th and 16th of 1867, the *Herald's* coverage of the president's deposition included the contention that it was a "remarkable failure" on Grant's part to recollect Babcock's explanation of the meaning of his suspicious dispatches, particularly given that the president was somehow able to recall that these explanations were to his satisfaction. In contrast, the *Times* offered greater credibility to Grant's deposition overall by including in the headline of a February 14th article on its content that much of the testimony was "fortified by papers and telegrams." The president's inability to remember certain things was never questioned or criticized in the *Times* articles analyzed here.

Babcock's Good Character

The *Herald* at no point offered an independent corroboration of Grant's assertions of Babcock's good character, and only touched upon this frame in recounting the testimony of the president and other character witnesses for the defense. In fact, even after Babcock was acquitted, an editorial claimed that though the jury knew best, "We

[16] *The New York Sun*, "The President's Deposition," February 13, 1876.

question if he [Babcock] should return to the White House…the man who is pliable enough to allow thieves and conspirators to draw him into this most unfortunate position is not the man to enjoy the confidence of the President."[17]

The *Tribune* similarly did not offer any commentary or verification of Babcock's good character, and went further in charging that such testimonials were largely worthless in a criminal trial. The paper contended that when charged with a crime, it is never assumed that one has always been a degenerate character. Still, all the focus on Babcock's character, his army service, and his work in the White House was like showing "in the trial of Aaron Burr for treason that the defendant was a good lawyer."[18] This content counteracted a major thrust of Grant's testimony, that Babcock's commendable and faithful service as his private secretary went a long way toward explaining his innocence.

Furthermore, the *Tribune* went on to contend that if the defense's contention that Babcock was an honest man fooled by criminals was taken as the truth, then this was "a man too easily imposed upon to be trusted with any serious responsibility, or to be assigned to any official position requiring ordinary intelligence for the discharge of duties."[19] Even if Grant was successful in portraying Babcock as a man of integrity, this only led to the criticism that the president chose a naïve, easily manipulated individual as one of his closest advisers.

Babcock as Innocent

With regard to Grant's framing Babcock as innocent of the charges against him, all of the newspapers provided a fair amount of information that both supported and

[17] *The New York Herald*, "The Acquittal of General Babcock," February 25, 1876.
[18] *The New York Tribune*, "Notes of the Trial," February 19, 1876.
[19] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "Too Much Baby Act," February 22, 1876.

contradicted this version of events. This was largely due to the nature of the coverage – in providing the actual text of the courtroom arguments and lengthy quotes from attorneys, readers were exposed to evidence and explanations from both the prosecution and the defense. On days in the courtroom when the defense was most dominant in making its case, immediate media coverage reflected defense themes; the opposite held true when the prosecution held sway in the courtroom.

The *Times* coverage was more amenable to the claim of Babcock's innocence than that found in the other papers. The *Herald* frequently criticized Babcock's defense team for its flawed arguments and lauded the prosecution for the inherent logic of its claims. In the period looked at here, there were three editorials in the *Herald* expressing the view that the evidence in the case pointed to Babcock's likely guilt. Meanwhile, the *Times* vacillated back and forth between statements professing Babcock's guilt and innocence. For instance, in a February 9th article, the paper asserted that some of the evidence would be nearly impossible to explain away, but in a February 15th editorial proclaimed that the dispatches provided by the prosecution were problematic and questionable evidence. When the prosecution closed its case, the *Times* also portrayed a public surprised that Babcock's accusers did not have as much direct evidence as they had expected.[20] The *Times*, with a pro-Republican Party bent, was thus was more likely to provide a version of events in line with Grant's.

By contrast, the *Tribune* emphasized guilt, recounting all of the evidence that the prosecution had against Babcock and the defense's resorting to technicalities to exclude testimony and evidence, which the paper deemed "the most damning thing in the whole

[20] *The New York Times*, "The Trial of Gen. Babcock; Close of the Prosecution," February 16, 1876.

case."[21] Additionally, toward the end of the trial the paper postulated that even if Babcock were able to obtain an acquittal, "it would have little weight unless it were in line with the common sense of the country." In the court of public opinion, Americans had far more damaging evidence that had been excluded from the trial due to various technicalities.[22]

The *Sun* was most hostile to Grant's framing by conveying directly that the evidence all pointed to Babcock's guilt. Pointing to various actors deemed "unscrupulous" by the paper and secured by the president and the defense to aid Babcock's case, the *Sun* contended, "If innocence has to adopt such expedients, it has evidently fallen on evil times." When the defense presented a key witness who claimed he had removed letters with money in them from a mailbox to be sent from conspirators to Babcock, testimony intended to exonerate Babcock from charges of bribery, the *Sun* covered the story as a witness highly coached and clearly engaging in perjury. His words were labeled in the paper, "Testimony That No One Believes."[23] The *Tribune* depicted this witness similarly, citing that he dodged all the questions, yet kept asserting he was telling the truth, which had the effect of giving the impression he was lying.[24]

In describing the defense's contention that Hoge, another witness who worked for the government, was really the one warning the Whiskey Ring criminals about the investigations, a *Sun* headline rang out, "Hoge To Be Made the Real Informer,"[25] implying the evidence was constructed rather than based in reality. Appearing in the

[21] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "A Strong Case," February 17, 1876.
[22] *The New York Tribune*," Editorial, "The Babcock Case," February 21, 1876.
[23] *The New York Sun*, "Gen. Babcock's Defence [sic]. The Improbable Story of a St. Louis Letter-Carrier," February 18, 1876.
[24] *The New York Tribune*, "An Astonishing Witness," February 18, 1876.
[25] *The New York Sun*, "Gen. Babcock's Defense," February 17, 1876.

same day's paper, however, was a lengthy recounting of the arguments made by one of Babcock's lawyers, and commentary undermining those arguments appeared only on the editorial page and not within the article itself.[26] Even in a partisan paper clearly hostile to the administration, then, we can identify articles that leaned toward giving the opposition a fair hearing, though those views might be torn apart in editorial commentary. Though some of the ways Grant's version of events were undermined in the papers might be more attributable to faults of the defense lawyers rather than unconvincing framing on the president's part, coverage portraying Babcock as guilty would undeniably harm Grant, who had so publicly pronounced him innocent.

Babcock Subject to Unfair Treatment

Not one of the New York papers legitimized the president's implication that Babcock had received unfair treatment preceding and during his trial. With regard to Grant's contention that he had ordered a military trial for Babcock largely because he had been denied the chance to prove his innocence in court, one *Herald* article argued that this "contrasts curiously with his [Babcock's] previous extreme anxiety not to go to St. Louis to testify, even when his counsel assured him that he would incur no detriment, no danger, personal, political or otherwise."[27] The *Tribune* also asserted that Babcock had no desire to testify, but instead wanted to stay far away from the previous Whiskey Ring cases, and that developments looked so bad for Babcock he telegraphed Grant for "reinforcements."[28] This frame may have been unsuccessful at taking hold given that when the president of the United States has given a deposition in one's favor, it strains

[26] *The New York Sun*, "Ex-Attorney General Williams's Address," February 17, 1876.
[27] *The New York Herald*, "Washington. The Feeling Regarding the Trial of General Babcock," February 16, 1876 and *The New York Tribune*, "Whiskey Frauds. Gen. Babcock's Trial Begun," February 9, 1876.
[28] *The New York Tribune*, "Babcock's Friends Demoralized – Remarkable Stories About the President," February 11, 1876, originally published in *The Baltimore Gazette*.

credibility to claim one is being treated unfairly. As previously pointed out, though, this was not a frame heavily emphasized by Grant, a factor that could help explain why it gained little traction in the coverage.

It should be noted, however, that this frame did appear to be a tactic used by the defense to try and exonerate Babcock, with his lawyer claiming the secretary was suffering as the unfair victim of public judgment and comparing him to Jesus, a moment in the trial that was related in both the *Herald* and the *Times*. The *Tribune* reported a similar argument on the part of the defense, claiming that Babcock was prejudged guilty by "irresponsible papers" that counted among the enemies of the president,[29] evidence that the allegation of media bias was a means of combating scandal charges even back in 1876.

Alternatively, the *Sun* actively constructed the interpretation that not only did Babcock not receive unfair treatment, he has actually been the beneficiary of a systematic effort by the president to get him *preferential* treatment. The notion that Babcock was subject to an unfair trial was directly contradicted by both the *Sun* and the *Tribune* as they scrutinized the jury and declared that none were rebels against the Union, at least seven were affiliated with the Republican Party, and half were born in the eastern part of the United States.[30] While Grant did not explicitly claim the trial had been infiltrated by rebel influences out to get Babcock, he was perhaps aware that some strongly Republican newspapers *were* making such charges, and therefore was free to allude to general unfairness that might bring to mind such accusations without engendering great controversy. This could then constitute an example of an early, pre-modern president

[29] *The New York Tribune*, "The Trial of Gen. Babcock. Judge Porter's Address," February 23, 1876.
[30] *The New York Sun*, "The Great Whiskey Trial: President Grant's Private Secretary Arraigned," February 9, 1876.

employing a framing strategy that capitalized on the media environment of his time. The *Tribune*, making mention of the unfairness charge, directly undermined Grant's message, claiming "if the fairness and justice of the proceedings are to be questioned at all upon the ground of interference or undue influence, the president himself, as Gen. Babcock's friend, is much more exposed to criticism than anyone else."[31] The paper rebuked those who pursued Babcock's interest rather than justice, and charged that within the government many "have actively demonstrated their feelings by prostituting the functions of their offices for the purpose of rendering aid to the defendant's cause,"[32] including, presumably, Grant.

Further, the *Sun* and the *Tribune* attempted to make the framing tactics of Grant's side transparent by claiming that the contention that the trial was a Democratic conspiracy aimed at the president is merely "intended to manufacture a public sentiment" for Grant to pardon Babcock if convicted.[33] They explicitly noted that the White House knew it needed public opinion to support its actions in the case, and that the administration was using the rhetoric of an unfair trial for that purpose. This cast the president's deposition as an act of political persuasion, and not merely the legal accounting of facts by a responsible official. Attributing such motives to his message might lessen its perceived veracity and authority. Additionally, this illustrates that newspapers of this era did include speculation and discussions of the strategies and underlying motives of White House figures, though such coverage is typically depicted as a modern media development.

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[31] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "Rebel Influence," February 12, 1876.
[32] *The New York Tribune*, "The Array Against Col. Dyer," February 16, 1876.
[33] *The New York Sun*, "The White House Ring Demoralized; What the Telegrams Will Prove," February 10, 1876 and *The New York Tribune*, "Babcock's Friends Demoralized – Remarkable Stories About the President," February 11, 1876, originally published in *The Baltimore Gazette*.

Grant as Zealous Investigator

Finally, as far as Grant's efforts to frame his own involvement as that of a president eager to find the guilty and punish them, several of the papers frequently called these assertions into question. One of the most common ways in which the *Herald*, *Tribune*, and *Sun* did this was in extolling the virtues and pure motives of Secretary Bristow in his efforts to expose and prosecute those involved in the Whiskey Ring. As Bristow was praised, the papers often discussed Grant as his adversary, working at every turn to impede the investigation as it increasingly implicated those close to the president. Five *Herald* and three *Tribune* editorials in the period analyzed here take the position of outright support and praise of Bristow and/or criticism of Grant for finding various ways to hinder the prosecution of his "friends." One such *Herald* editorial even went so far as to accuse Grant of leaking sensitive information on government policy to the press with the goal of frightening away potential witnesses in Whisky Ring trials.[34] Generally, the *Herald* promoted the idea that Grant would be very happy to get rid of Bristow entirely, if removing him from the Cabinet would not result in major political damage for the administration in the eyes of the public.

The *Tribune* expressed a similar sentiment, but believed that Grant's opinion that Bristow was seeking to tarnish him politically had been actively encouraged by some of Grant's old army friends who wanted to see Bristow's rising political career come to an end.[35] From this perspective, the actions of the president with regard to the trial were framed as an effort to put Bristow back in his place, while Grant's supporters would have

[34] *The New York Herald*, "Who Perpetrated the 'Gross Impropriety?' February 24, 1876.
[35] *The New York Tribune*, "More Rumors of the Coolness Between Gen. Grant and Secretary Bristow – The President's Sympathy for Babcock Encouraged by Mr. Bristow's Enemies," February 14, 1876, originally published in the *Baltimore Gazette*.

much preferred to frame the trial as an illegitimate partisan effort to tear down Grant himself. The *Tribune* cast Bristow as the hero reformer, "who has done so much by his splendid fidelity to make this Administration respectable"[36] – not *more* respectable, but respectable at all, as the paper saw it. Even in this era, the press coverage had what Bennett (2005) terms a "personalization bias," emphasizing a personal confrontation between two individuals over some of the more substantive and issue-oriented aspects of the story.

The *Sun*, unsurprisingly, directly contradicted Grant's portrayal of himself as a zealous investigator, arguing that the president's claim in his deposition that he revoked a transfer of supervisors in order to better detect the whiskey frauds was "an insult to public intelligence, besides being wholly destitute of truth."[37] The paper claimed that from the outset Grant only accepted the transfer of supervisors with great reluctance,[38] implying that he was *never* zealous in trying to break up the ring, even before Babcock was accused of being involved. An investigation was only begun because "wrongdoing became so immense that it came to public attention," not because Grant personally sought combat the corruption.[39]

The *Tribune* gave Grant slightly more credit with regard to excising the frauds, arguing that the president was an advocate of the investigation months earlier, when he did not think Babcock or any other close friend would become its object, but then changed his tune.[40] Further along in the trial, the *Tribune* claimed that the shift in the president's attitude toward the prosecutions was attributable to his determination that the

[36] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "A Cabinet Crisis," February 19, 1876.
[37] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "Grant's Deposition," February 16, 1876.
[38] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "The Babcock Revelations," February 14, 1876.
[39] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "A Convicting Coincidence," February 17, 1876.
[40] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "A Cabinet Crisis," February 19, 1876.

entire investigation's goal was to do him political injury.[41] However, ultimately the *Tribune*, like the *Sun*, supported the perception that throughout the Babcock trial, the president had largely been obstructing justice.

For the *Sun*, this meant Grant was as guilty as Babcock was, and his own deposition, particularly all that the president claimed not to recall, proved he knew about the Whiskey Ring all along. The paper even contended, "If a tenth part of what is now admitted in this deposition could have been proved against Andrew Johnson, he would have been found guilty and dishonored."[42] Given this perspective, it is unlikely that anything Grant said in his deposition would have framed the story to the president's liking in the pages of *The New York Sun*.

Overall, the zealous investigator frame employed by Grant was the frame most likely to be directly undermined by the coverage, which at least in part resulted from Grant weakening his rhetorical claims of support for the investigation by taking contradictory actions that clearly inhibited the effort, such as ordering a military trial for Babcock and enacting policies discouraging witnesses from coming forward. Additionally, Grant found himself the proponent of a contradictory and confusing narrative about the role of the executive branch in the investigation. Officially, the prosecution in Babcock's case was the United States government, and was backed by figures in the Treasury Department like Bristow, while at the same time, as the *New York Sun* asserted, the government's "whole official machinery is used to obstruct and defeat a successful prosecution of Babcock."[43] In publicly aligning himself with the defense,

[41] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "The President and the Courts," February 23, 1876.
[42] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "Grant's Part in the Whiskey Frauds," February 22, 1876.
[43] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "Investigate the Whiskey Ring," February 15, 1876.

Grant conveyed the image of an executive branch divided, and a defanged official investigation.

In contrast, an editorial in the *Times* asserted that the rumors of hostility between Bristow and Grant had been exaggerated, probably by those who wished to undermine the investigation.[44] After the prosecution's closing arguments, the *Times* described lawyer James Broadhead's speech in a way that seemed to attribute partisan motivations to the attorney: "As was expected, he indulged in an indirect but severe criticism of the administration of President Grant, of whom he has long been a conspicuous opponent."[45] Grant was far less likely to be framed in the *Times* as an obstacle to the investigation and trial proceedings, and the paper argued that, unfairly, his political opponents "have labored to create the impression that the Administration itself was on trial,"[46] seeking to capitalize on the proceedings by using them as a vehicle to attack the president.

Grant's Character

Grant's character was at times called into question by the more hostile papers. Both news articles and editorials promoted the view that Grant had been frequently pressured to hinder the investigation by friends of questionable character by whom he had been taken in. One such *Herald* editorial termed Grant "a plain, blunt soldier, who is so inexperienced in the detection of rogues that the revenue service is filled with them."[47] A *Sun* editorial contended that Grant was very easily susceptible to negative influence from unsavory characters around him. That the president was really the one on trial was "a notion put in his mind" and he "believes, or pretends to believe, these absurdities,"

[44] *The New York Times*, Editorial, "The President and Secretary Bristow," February 9, 1876.
[45] *The New York Times*, "The Trial of Gen. Babcock; The Arguments in the Case," February 20, 1876.
[46] *The New York Times*, Editorial 1, No Title, February 20, 1876.
[47] *The New York Herald*, "The President and the Attorney General," February 16, 1876.

leading to the conclusion that the president was either very gullible or had something to hide.[48] The *Tribune* claimed Grant was susceptible to terrible and manipulative advice from various "Iagos" that surrounded him.[49] The editors of the paper declared, "Keeping bad company is the besetting sin of Gen. Grant's administration."[50]

Even *The New York Times*, though to a lesser extent, raised similar questions about the nature of Grant's personality, maintaining, "While stubborn fidelity to one's friends, through good and bad report, may be a fault which leans toward virtue's side, there is a point beyond which it may become a grave blunder in one occupying the position of President of the United States."[51] However, the *Times* never neared the sustained assault on Grant's character found in the other three newspapers, and certainly the critique that the president was too loyal was far more benign than the criticisms that appeared elsewhere.

Overall, though, there was perhaps a benefit to the character questions raised by the more hostile New York newspapers for Grant's efforts to minimize the political damage of the Whiskey Ring scandal. In placing so much emphasis on Grant's ill-advised sources of counsel, Grant's personal honesty was less tarnished. Despite the public perception that Grant surrounded himself with schemers and criminals, this was a step short of believing Grant himself to be a criminal. The tenacity of Grant's perceived integrity was noted by the *Tribune*: "It is strong proof of the general trust in his honesty that he has kept such a good name in spite of the notorious rascalities of his associates."[52]

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[48] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "Grant's Deposition," February 16, 1876.
[49] *The New York Tribune*, "Will The President Interfere? Serious Charges He Will From a Republican Journal," February 11, 1876, originally published in *The Chicago Tribune*.
[50] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "The Acquittal of Gen. Babcock," February 25, 1876.
[51] *The New York Times*, Editorial 1 – No Title, February 20, 1876.
[52] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "Who Is On Trial?," February 24, 1876.

The *Tribune*, usually a harsh judge of the president, still maintained that though Grant wanted the conspiracy rooted out, "the law has laid hands now upon persons whom he honestly believes to be innocent, and he has become convinced that the prosecutions are to be directed to his own political injury" and thus "a feeling of bitter and not unnatural irritation has taken entire possession of him…."[53] Grant was still portrayed as easily influenced by dubious characters, but his motives in protecting Babcock were portrayed as more honorable.

However, susceptibility to bad influences was not the only character flaw these papers ascribed to the president. *The Sun*, publishing an editorial printed originally in *The Nation*, tied one criticism to Grant's national reputation, built largely on his military-hero status. It argued that "with the halo of war about him, not only have a terrible number of faults been forgiven him, but they have come to lose the appearance of faults, and to take on that of virtues."[54] Grant's acclaimed military reputation was portrayed as having a dark side, of being used as a guise to hide corruption from the public. *The Sun* also depicted a president with an anger problem, flying into "a rage" when evidence against Babcock was not sent to the military court he ordered, and the paper warned that for Secretary Bristow, it was only a matter of time before "the volcano of Presidential wrath" would begin erupting again.[55] The *Tribune* also highlighted Grant's temper, claiming that as the president came to believe the investigation of the Whiskey Ring was aimed at himself, "the hotter grew his anger." The paper attributed this to a fundamental

[53] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "Judge Pierrepont's Letter," February 19, 1876.
[54] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "The Great Mischief of Grant's Administration," February 11, 1876, originally published in *The Nation*.
[55] *The New York Sun*, "Trouble in the Cabinet," February 8, 1876.

character flaw in Grant, that he "has never been able to separate his personal feelings from his public duties."[56]

The *Sun* also called Grant's loyalty into question, claiming that before the investigation implicated Babcock, the president was untroubled by the convictions of other associates, because "[h]e was willing to sacrifice a few friends for the glory of being called a reformer." This was something that Grant's foes might readily believe; he was accused by his critics during the Civil War of allowing his own men to be butchered when he felt it would further his own success.[57] It also located Grant in a consistent central narrative over time in the public arena, of a man showing more concern for his reputation than the best interests of others. Grant's faults were magnified in the *Sun* by casting them as unique compared to his predecessors: "He is the first president of the United States who ever openly associated with notorious plunderers; who made personal companions and confidants of notorious characters…and who has deliberately prostituted his great trust for the advantage of political scoundrels who ought to be cracking stone in the penitentiary."[58]

Painting a less bleak picture, the *Tribune* attributed Grant's behavior in the Whiskey Ring investigation to the fact that he was so fiercely loyal to those close to him. Listing some of the actions Grant had taken to impede the prosecution, the paper concluded, "[I]f the peculiarities of the president's temper were not well understood, they would compromise him personally in a very serious manner. But he has shown before now that when his friends are in peril he perceives no impropriety in interfering with any

[56] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "The President and the Courts," February 23, 1876.
[57] James E. Pollard, *The Presidents and the Press* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), 435.
[58] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "Pension Frauds," February 19, 1876.

department of the government whatever."[59] Overall, in attesting to Babcock's character in the midst of a criminal trial largely assailing it, Grant appeared to open himself up to a debate about whether these actions illustrated his own flawed character, and speculation as to what precisely those flaws might be. Further, these 19th century newspapers did not shy away from scrutinizing Grant's personality and hypothesizing about his motives.

Corruption in White House

The more hostile papers substantially undermined Grant's framing of the Babcock situation by linking what was becoming public during the trial to wider corruption inside the White House itself. *The New York Sun,* for instance, derisively called the president "Boss Grant" and referred to "The White House Ring" prominently in headlines.[60] Other officials in the administration were tied by the paper to obstructing justice, such as Attorney General Pierrepont, taken to task for directing prosecutors in the Whiskey Ring cases not to offer lesser punishments for those willing to testify against the ring, reportedly at the president's request. Harsh criticism of Pierrepont on this basis was the subject of four editorials in *The New York Sun* and two editorials in *The New York Tribune*. Babcock was in part exonerated, according to the *Sun*, because anyone planning to testify against him was "made to realize that the Secretary of the Treasury was not the government, and if they went on the stand they did so with a rope about their necks, by which the president, through the attorney general, could swing them off."[61] Grant was thus accused of using his executive branch resources to obstruct justice and thwart

[59] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "The President and the Courts," February 23, 1876.
[60] *The New York Sun*, "The White House Ring Demoralized; What the Telegrams Will Prove," February 10, 1876 and *The New York Sun*, "Babcock and Boss Grant. The Defence [sic] Trying to Exclude the Dreaded Telegrams," February 13, 1876.
[61] *The New York Sun*, "Aiding the Whiskey Ring. Executive Interference With the Course of Justice," February 25, 1876.

Bristow's investigation. The *Tribune*, meanwhile, at first gave Pierrepont the benefit of the doubt, contending that he must have made a mistake in giving this order, as it would eviscerate the prosecution's evidence.[62] Coverage in the paper at one juncture even assumed Pierrepont *and* Grant were deceived by an entrenched conspiracy to thwart justice to explain why the order was given.[63]

Corruption was portrayed throughout the Democratic-leaning *Sun*'s articles as permeating not only the White House, but the entire Republican Party. The paper sensationally declared, "In this trial the life of the Republican Party may be said to be suspended by a hair."[64] Even if Grant were made to leave office, according to the *Sun*, and replaced with another Republican, the problems would continue, "because the system itself is poisoned with the virus of Grantism."[65] Not surprisingly, the paper advocated the first step to be taken as voting the Republican Party entirely out of office. However, in making the case for rejecting Republicans, the *Sun* did not extol the virtues of the opposition party. Instead, it played the role of populist advocate, standing with the American people against corruption and evil, positioning itself as the defender of right against Republican wrong.

The *Tribune* made a similar argument, contending that if Babcock's innocence was established via explanations that the accused believed key Ring members to be acting in the president and the party's best interests and mistakenly trusted them for this reason, the clear problem was that the Grant administration was more concerned with its

[62] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, Untitled, February 8, 1876.
[63] *The New York Tribune*, "Will The President Interfere? Serious Charges He Will From a Republican Journal," February 11, 1876, originally published in *The Chicago Tribune*.
[64] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "Investigate the Whisky Ring," February 15, 1876.
[65] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "Pension Frauds," February 19, 1876.

own well-being than the public's.[66] The *Tribune* also sought to place itself above partisanship: "For those who put the honor of the country first, there is hope Babcock can fully establish his innocence."[67] In reporting Babcock's acquittal (after being highly critical of the defense), the paper claimed congratulations were in order, as "it would have been an intolerable mortification to every patriotic American if the president's private secretary were found guilty of conspiracy to defraud the revenue."[68]

By also championing Secretary Bristow, the *Tribune* revealed its desire for the Republican Party to move in a more reform-minded direction. The paper warned Grant against removing Bristow because the public was "anxiously looking for a man who has the pluck and the honesty to defend their interests, and, though they are not able to make Cabinet officers, they are able to make Presidents."[69] At some points, the *Tribune* took the facts of the Babcock case and sought to tie them to larger issues of civil service reform and anti-corruption measures, running counter to the personalization bias tendency noted elsewhere in the coverage. Commenting on Babcock's acquittal, the paper contended that hopefully Grant would be moved toward reform as a means of preventing the country from suffering greater shame related to his appointments and associates in the future.[70]

Finally, the *Sun* took Grant's involvement in the case and framed it as an abuse of presidential power, further amplifying its criticism of the president.[71] Although the later

[66] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "A Remarkable Defense," February 8, 1876.
[67] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "Rebel Influence," February 12, 1876.
[68] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "The Acquittal of Gen. Babcock," February 25, 1876.
[69] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "A Cabinet Crisis," February 19, 1876.
[70] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "The Acquittal of Gen. Babcock," February 25, 1876.
[71] This was also a charge very briefly alluded to by the prosecution in the Babcock trial. Colonel Broadhead in arguments before the court claimed that Grant's explanation of the revocation of the transfer order "amount to no reasons at all" and that the president stepped down from his own high office to meddle

cases of presidents belabored by scandal would also involve abuse-of-power accusations, this case demonstrates what the distinctive nineteenth century use of that concept might entail. The *Sun* claimed that Grant's suspension of the transfer order was "a direct, positive and arbitrary interference by the President with the functions of the Treasury Department." The president had no connection with the details of collecting revenue; rather, "[h]is whole power is to see the law faithfully executed."[72] Implying that Grant's military background had made him more susceptible to such power grabs, the *Sun*'s editors claimed that rather than discussing revoking the order with Bristow, Grant "sat down as he would in camp to direct the change of a regiment."[73] From the *Sun*'s perspective, the president had no legitimate authority over the work of his Cabinet departments, and he overstepped his bounds should he try to exercise power within them.

The *Tribune* also touched upon the abuse-of-power storyline. With all the ways Grant used his office to interfere with the prosecution, the paper asserted, "He is better fitted to rule an Asiatic kingdom than a free American republic."[74] The claims that the reasons given for revoking the transfer were insufficient and that the president wrongly interfered with Bristow's duties were points also echoed by the prosecution during its closing arguments, reinforcing these criticisms.[75] Part of the difficulty for Grant in trying to mitigate scandal damage, then, was that *any* involvement in the situation, even within the Treasury Department, would be perceived (at least by some) as an inappropriate

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with the duties of one of his Cabinet officers (*The New York Tribune*, "Arguing the Babcock Case. Col. Broadhead Outspoken," February 21, 1876).

[72] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "The Babcock Revelations," February 14, 1876.

[73] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "Grant's Part in the Whiskey Frauds," February 22, 1876.

[74] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "The President and the Courts," February 23, 1876.

[75] *The New York Sun*, "The Associated Press Report," February 20, 1876.

aggrandizement of executive power, given the quite constrained view of presidential authority championed here by Grant's opponents.

A Midwestern Perspective: *The Chicago Tribune*

Babcock's Good Character

Of all the newspapers analyzed, the *Chicago Tribune* overall was the most receptive to Grant's frames and offered the most clearly positive coverage for the administration. One indicator of this was that the *Tribune* was the only paper to independently make some reference to Babcock's good character, bolstering the frame offered by Grant. The paper claimed that testimony at the trial had given the country a "glimpse at the real dignity of Babcock as a public functionary" and lamented that there were unfortunately so many "little things" emerging in the case against him it would be hard for "the good and honorable Babcock" to explain them all away.[76] Although infrequent, this corroboration of the president's assertions in the *Tribune* sets the coverage apart.

Babcock as Innocent

Interestingly for a Republican newspaper, the *Tribune*'s coverage at the start of the trial was more one-sided in casting Babcock as guilty of the charges against him. The articles reflected the prosecution's domination of the trial's beginning. As the evidence against the defendant piled up, the *Tribune* found itself forced to acknowledge the case of the government was much stronger than had been assumed.[77] On several occasions the

[76] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, "Whiskey. Proceedings Yesterday in the Trial of Babcock at St. Louis," Special Dispatch to the Chicago Tribune, February 12, 1876.
[77] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, "Comments. The Vigor of the Prosecution," Special Dispatch to the Chicago Tribune, February 9, 1876.

paper pointed to the defense's propensity to object to every piece of evidence submitted by the prosecution and reliance upon technicalities, which its writers claimed created the impression that "Babcock has, in fact, no defense."[78] This gloomy portrayal of Babcock, however, did not extend to the president. In three separate articles, the paper urged Grant to distance himself from and temper his support for Babcock, assuming the secretary would be convicted.[79]

As the trial progressed, however, and the defense became its primary focus, the *Tribune*'s coverage abruptly shifted toward support of the frame of Babcock as innocent. This was also the point in the trial when the substance of Grant's deposition became public and excerpts were printed in the papers. Though the *Tribune* admitted that there was enough evidence "to warrant the indictment found against" Babcock, there still was "not enough to warrant his conviction."[80] The trial's events were now filtered through the frame of Babcock's likely innocence. Whereas the paper previously described the defense's argument that Hoge was actually guilty of informing the ring as a "scheme to offer this choice creature vicariously,"[81] the paper now claimed that letters written by Hoge showed he was indeed the real informer.[82] While acknowledging that the witness Magill, who claimed he took a letter containing money out of the mail before it could be sent to Babcock, "created a very bad impression" with his suspicious demeanor on the

[78] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, "Comments. The Vigor of the Prosecution," Special Dispatch to the Chicago Tribune, February 9, 1876.
[79] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, "Midnight News," Special Dispatch to the Chicago Tribune, February 9, 1876; Editorial, No Title, February 10, 1876; "Outside. The President's Deposition," Special Dispatch to the Chicago Tribune, February 10, 1876.
[80] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Editorial, "Trial of Gen. Babcock," February 18, 1876.
[81] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, "Hoge. Development of the Scheme to Offer This Choice Creature Vicariously," Special Dispatch to the Chicago Tribune," February 16, 1876.
[82] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Editorial, "Trial of Gen. Babcock," February 18, 1876.

stand[83], the paper deemphasized this angle of the story to a far greater degree than the other papers. Later, the *Tribune* even offered an alternative explanation for Magill's nervousness, casting him as a truthful witness. When another paper claimed Magill was part of a plot by the defense to bribe letter carriers to testify on Babcock's behalf, the *Tribune* embarked on some investigative journalism to demonstrate this was untrue.[84] This kind of support for the Babcock-as-innocent frame, though belated, was not found in the other newspapers analyzed. Given that the paper was such a stalwart supporter of the party, perhaps if Grant had indicated to the paper early on that he would stand by Babcock, believing him innocent, the *Tribune*'s early coverage of the trial would not have been as damaging. Press relations were likely not well developed enough in the Grant administration for the president to have pursued that course.

Unfair Treatment of Babcock

The *Tribune* occasionally printed rumors of Babcock receiving special treatment, such as his potential for securing a presidential pardon or a spy on his behalf operating within the district attorney's office, but these stories were often dismissed as untrue in the coverage and received far less attention than in the other newspapers. Although not the exact frame championed by Grant, the paper did emphasize that Babcock was subject to unfair treatment by sometimes casting the trial as a partisan witch-hunt on the part of the prosecution. The paper hypothesized that one of the prosecutors was an "inveterate Democrat" who in cross examining Grant would seek to "get in on the president a

[83] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, "Whisky. Babcock's Lawyers Undertake to Head Off the Granger Jury," Special Dispatch to the Chicago Tribune, February 19, 1876.
[84] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, "Magill. Some of That Individual's Peculiarities," Special Dispatch to the Chicago Tribune, February 20, 1876 and "Sickly Sensations. Bribery," Special Dispatch to the Chicago Tribune, February 20, 1876.

number of artfully contrived questions" that might entrap him.[85] Grant's framing of his secretary as unfairly treated during these criminal proceedings did not provide a full explanation of why Babcock was being treated in such a manner, and the *Tribune* thus filled in the gaps, portraying the trial as a Democratic effort to embarrass the Republican administration.

Grant as Zealous Investigator

Like the *New York Tribune*, the *Chicago Tribune* detailed the president's attitude toward the Whiskey Ring prosecutions as at first zealous support, and then gradually more willingness to obstruct the investigation, particularly as Babcock became a target. However, even at the height of the Babcock trial, the *Chicago Tribune* emphasized Grant's desire to root out the whiskey frauds, claiming the president was "the authority for the statement that there is to be no faltering…no matter whose ox is gored"[86] and that he had issued a "special charge" to be vigilant in bringing to justice those who claimed they had influence to protect themselves.[87] Thus Grant was more likely to be framed as he had portrayed himself -- a zealous investigator -- in the *Tribune* compared to the other papers.

Even in this friendly outlet, however, Grant was subject to a schizophrenic storyline that also drew attention to the ways he impeded the investigation. When portrayed as obstructing justice, though, the president's behavior was always explained as resulting from his susceptibility to the influence of bad advice and unscrupulous characters. Over the course of the trial, four different articles referred explicitly to

[85] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, "Midnight News," Special Dispatch to the Chicago Tribune, February 8, 1876.
[86] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Editorial, No Title, February 11, 1876.
[87] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, "Washington. The President's Order," Special Dispatch to the Chicago Tribune, February 17, 1876.

sinister individuals that had "poisoned Grant's mind" against the prosecutions and Secretary Bristow.[88] Grant's undermining of the investigation, then, was not attributed to his own corruption or complicity with the ring, but rather the character flaw of being easily influenced by the wrong people. The newspaper's editorials frequently took on the tone of trying to warn President Grant against taking particular actions, while also asserting they had the president's best interests in mind. Early on in the trial they urged Grant to temper his support for Babcock, and later in the proceedings they outlined the damaging consequences should he choose to dismiss Bristow.

Toward the end of the trial, the coverage of Grant and Bristow provided an indication of just how far this Republican paper's support extended to the president. In all articles prior to February 20th, 1876 referring to the relationship between the two, the *Tribune* either downplayed or outright dismissed any notion of a conflict between the president and his Treasury secretary. After the 20th however, the paper shifted its stance to acknowledge that a rift did exist, and clearly positioned itself on the side of Bristow against Grant. Bristow's portrayal was similar to that found in several of the New York papers – he was described as having "an ability, an energy, a courage and an integrity which have no precedent in any other department of the government under Gen. Grant."[89] In considering removing Bristow, Grant was "playing with fire. To do it will be to risk the forfeiture of much of the fair reputation he has earned, and perhaps darken the remainder of his public career…and to court the censure of history."[90] Whereas Grant

[88] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Editorial, "A New Whisky Conspiracy," February 8, 1876; Editorial, "Tutton's Treachery," February 11, 1876; "Whisky. Statement of the Relations Existing Between Grant and Bristow," Special Dispatch to the Chicago Tribune, February 23, 1876; Editorial, "The President and Mr. Bristow," February 24, 1876.
[89] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Editorial, "The President and Mr. Bristow," February 24, 1876.
[90] *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Editorial, "Grant and Bristow – Lincoln and Chase: A Comparison," February 20, 1876.

received fairly favorable coverage from the *Tribune* when set against his critics or a prosecution associated with the Democrats, when he placed himself in conflict with a rising and popular figure in his own party like Bristow, the paper was more likely to treat the president as a liability for Republicans. Surprisingly, even in a reliably Republican paper like *The Chicago Tribune*, Grant was not always guaranteed favorable coverage toward his rehabilitation project, and though he held the office of the presidency, he might not be perceived or portrayed as the best leader of the party by co-partisan outlets.

Civil War Reconciliation Frame

The *Chicago Tribune* framed the end of the Babcock trial in a unique way. Though the possibility of a "rebel" jury in Missouri, still anti-Union and Confederacy sympathetic, and therefore predisposed to judge Babcock guilty, was mentioned in passing earlier in the paper's coverage, it was typically dismissed as false. When Babcock was acquitted by the court however, the paper dedicated the bulk of its coverage to framing his vindication as clear evidence that the citizens of St. Louis were plainly capable of providing him with a fair trial and that the animosities of the Civil War had been entirely put aside, leaving just one nation of people, reconciled and unified. The trial results were thus cast in a positive light, tying Babcock's fate to the well-being and unity of the country. However, this was not necessarily the best possible framing for the Grant administration specifically, as proving that the White House was not tainted by the Whiskey Ring and that subjected to great scrutiny the president emerged unscathed.

Mixed Results For Grant's Frames

Overall in the trial coverage, Grant was treated as a far more credible witness by the press than many others testifying, and may thus have aided Babcock's acquittal. At the same time, he was not immune to criticism by reporters and editors, most notably for his faulty memory on a few important points, and for actions that appeared out of step with the goals of the investigation. Due to Babcock's close proximity to the president for so many years, it is doubtful that Grant could have sought to contain political damage of the scandal by distancing himself from the accused. However, in providing the deposition Grant inserted himself into the coverage and discussion of the trial to a much larger extent, a strategy fraught with risks. The prosecution in the case closed its arguments by maintaining that even the president would be unable to protect the guilty Babcock, a claim that the newspapers covered extensively, along with the reported "sensation" that this caused in the courtroom.

Coverage of the House of Representatives Select Committee Concerning the Whisky Frauds

Analysis of a second time period will allow us to see how Grant's frames fared over time in the news coverage and whether his version of events would dominate when other major political actors also weighed in. The House of Representatives, with a Democratic majority, convened a select committee to investigate the whiskey frauds that sat for six months, from March to August 1876.[91] After reviewing the published testimony of the committee, I selected the month of July for analysis, because it offered

[91] The testimony and proceedings of the committee were published as 44th Congress, 1st Session, House of Representatives Miscellaneous Document No. 186, and is 555 pages.

some of the most high profile witnesses appearing before the committee, and because several events closely related to Grant and his relationship to the investigation transpired during this time. Two well-known government employees, Homer T. Yaryan and Marshall Jewell, were ousted by Grant, and a third resigned in protest. All three were acknowledged as strong supporters of Bristow and the Whiskey Ring investigation and prosecutions. Bristow, Yaryan, and Bluford Wilson, Bristow's investigative partner and Solicitor of the Treasury, were witnesses before the House committee in July. All provided accounts of the investigation in which Grant's assertions were in some way undermined.

Bristow's testimony was especially notable in that he refused to answer most of the questions posed to him about the president's attitude toward the prosecutions, citing what was essentially an executive privilege argument. On July 12th, 1876, Grant wrote Bristow a letter (soon made public) relieving the former secretary, who had resigned in June, of all secrecy, and stated that he wished all current and former Cabinet members to freely testify in the matter, if requested by Congress. Bristow responded on the following day with a letter to the president, saying he believed that executive secrecy was in the public interest and could not be waived by either himself or Grant.

Two of the frames important in the president's deposition and the press coverage during the Babcock trial remained relevant in the coverage of the House investigating committee several months later, namely the assertion of Babcock's innocence and the narrative of Grant as a zealous investigator. The president's maintenance of Babcock's good character and the frame of Babcock as unfairly treated were no longer applicable to the events unfolding here, months after the end of the trial. Still, many aspects of the

earlier trial coverage reflecting upon Grant were also to be found in the July 1876 newspaper articles, such as Grant's character and flaws, questions of abuse of power, and his relation to his party, the press, his administration, and the public.

Babcock as guilty

Grant's effort to cast Babcock as innocent was completely absent from the coverage at this point in the scandal, replaced by a dominant frame of Babcock as guilty. For instance, though the *Herald*'s coverage over July tended to have a pro-Grant bent, the paper was not as kind to General Babcock. After the testimony of Wilson became public, the *Herald* emphasized the ways his account verified Babcock's guilt, and claimed it was a disgrace Babcock still held public office.[92] The *Sun* did not even need the confirmation of Wilson's testimony to make this same argument,[93] though once Wilson's words were made public, the paper emphasized the pattern of illegal behavior Babcock engaged in to be acquitted.[94]

Wilson's testimony met with varying responses from the press, depending upon whether a paper preferred to see Grant as implicated or duped. The *Tribune* used Wilson's testimony as a launching point for illustrating Babcock's guilt, and provided lengthy excerpts of the questions posed to Wilson by the committee and his responses for readers.[95] Particular care was taken in the *Tribune* to emphasize a specific portion of Wilson's testimony, which indicated that immediately after the trial President Grant

[92] *The New York Herald*, Editorial, "Bluford Wilson's Testimony," July 28, 1876 and "Washington. From Our Special Correspondent. Effect of the Bluford Wilson Testimony," July 30, 1876.
[93] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, Untitled, July 20, 1876.
[94] *The New York Sun*, "Bluford Wilson's Start. Exporsure of the True Inwardness of the White House," July 29, 1876.
[95] *The New York Tribune*, "Washington Startled. Bluford Wilson's Revelations," July 29, 1876 & "Wilson's Reminiscences. Gen. Grant's Suspicions," July 31, 1876.

learned that Babcock had previously been involved in a major gold speculation scandal[96] and had taken steps to try and avoid any criminal prosecution, yet Grant still took action to shield him.[97] The newspaper called this "the most startling disclosure" by Wilson, and highlighting it certainly did much to undercut the perception that the president earnestly believed Babcock innocent and worked to save him for that reason. The *Times* subtitled the portion of Wilson's testimony in which Babcock's guilt in the gold speculation scandal was found out by Grant "The President Learns that Babcock Betrayed Him," but other than this the paper did not discuss the matter or emphasize Babcock's guilt.[98] The *Herald* asserted in its coverage that though Babcock was clearly guilty, Grant refused to dismiss him from the government out of "blind friendship."[99] The *Sun* claimed that any actions Grant and his friends took to help Babcock had been motivated by the fear that if taken down, Babcock would implicate them.[100]

Grant as zealous investigator

The *Herald* began its coverage of the Yaryan removal at the beginning of July by casting the move by Grant as indicative of his desire to *punish* all those who were zealous investigators and prosecutors of the Whiskey Ring. The paper ascribed hatred on Grant's

[96] Wilson testified that when Grant found out about this, "the President then, for the first time, comprehended, in all its significance, the fact that he had been betrayed by Babcock, and that if he [Babcock] had betrayed him in the Black Friday transactions, he was quite capable of betraying him in connection with the whisky frauds, and of becoming a party thereto; and the President recognized that the prosecution against General Babcock had had its full warrant and justification" (44th Congress, 1st Session, House of Representatives Misc. Document No. 186, 369-370).
[97] *The New York Tribune*, "Washington Startled. Bluford Wilson's Revelations," July 29, 1876.
[98] *The New York Times*, "The Testimony in Detail. Let No Guilty Man Escape," July 29, 1876.
[99] *The New York Herald*, Editorial, "Grant and Yaryan," July 3, 1876. Secretary of State Hamilton Fish also recorded in his diary after Babcock was acquitted that he was unhappy to find Babcock was still working in the president's office, but when Fish questioned Grant about it, the president told him he had seen an article in *The New York Tribune* saying Babcock was to be dismissed, so Grant let him take a letter to the Senate to prove the *Tribune* wrong. So it seems that spite, directed at the press, might have been a motivating factor as well (*The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, Volume 27: January 1 – October 31, 1876*, edited by John Y. Simon, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005, 64).
[100] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "Grant and the Whiskey Ring," July 31, 1876.

part toward these officials, and pointed out the disparity between how well the president had treated some of those accused of being a part of the ring and how poorly those trying to expose the ring had fared.[101] However, over the course of the month, the *Herald* backtracked significantly from this initial portrayal. Wilson's testimony before the House committee, held by some of the other papers as so damaging to Grant, was interpreted by the *Herald* as actually "exonerating" the president, in showing that he honestly wanted to break up the ring. The *Times* also took this approach, contending that Wilson's account proved that Grant wrote his "Let no guilty man escape" order of his own volition and with no reluctance, contrary to what his critics argued.[102] The *Herald* read Wilson's version of events as showing that at first the president was a zealous investigator, but then certain bad influences tried to turn him against Bristow and Wilson, at which point his support diminished, and when these false friends were shown to be wrong, Grant's sympathy with the investigation was apparent again.[103] From this perspective, Grant's backing for the investigation was inconsistent, but at times certainly clear, and never dropped off completely.

As Wilson's testimony could be construed as indicated above, the fact that it was so generously quoted in the pages of *The New York Sun* and *The New York Tribune* meant that a slightly rosier picture of Grant's support for the investigation emerged even in the more hostile papers. At least in Wilson's account Grant was at some points a zealous investigator, while the *Sun* typically assailed the president as obstructing justice, only

[101] *The New York Herald*, "A Treasury Scandal. President Grant Demanding the Instant Resignation of the Head of the Special Agency Bureau," July 1, 1876, and *The New York Herald*, Editorial, "Grant and Yaryan," July 3, 1876.
[102] *The New York Times*, "Washington. The Whisky Prosecutions," July 28, 1876.
[103] *The New York Herald*, "Washington. Testimony of Bluford Wilson Before the Whiskey Trials Committee. The President Completely Exonerated," July 28, 1876.

appearing supportive when he thought it might be to his political advantage.[104] In this same vein, the *Sun* argued that Grant had been engaging in a systematic purging of zealous investigators from the executive branch, beginning with Yaryan. "He is at last seen in his true character. All along he has been wearing a mask and playing a part. At no time was he ever earnest about the prosecution of the Whiskey Ring."[105]

The *Tribune* also tied Grant's actions to a pattern of behavior, claiming, "It is an unpleasant conclusion to come to that the President was really consistent all the way through. Thrusting out Bristow was the legitimate sequel to shielding Babcock."[106] In this account, not only was Grant never a zealous investigator, he hated those who were and worked to purge them from the government. In contrast, the *Times* identified on one occasion the "official decapitation, one after another" of officers who faithfully brought criminals to justice, but the president was not portrayed as indulging a desire to protect criminals.[107] Instead, vague references were made to negative influences on Grant that caused these actions,[108] while simultaneously the dismissed officers were praised for their honesty and integrity,[109] creating a narrative in the paper of wrongdoing without any clear blame attributed to the president.

The *Tribune* also was relentless in championing civil service reform and urging the Republican Party to strongly back it, while simultaneously identifying the president

[104] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "Grant and the Whiskey Ring," July 31, 1876.
[105] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "Grant Furious," July 18, 1876.
[106] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "Mr. Wilson's Testimony," July 29, 1876.
[107] *The New York Times*, Untitled, Editorial, July 6, 1876.
[108] *The New York Times*, Untitled, Editorial, July 6, 1876 and "The Whisky Frauds. Testimony of Bluford Wilson," July 29, 1876.
[109] *The New York Times*, "Washington. Mr. Yaryan's Resignation," Special Dispatch to the New York Times, July 1, 1876; "Commissioner Pratt Resigns," Special Dispatch to the New York Times, July 12, 1876; and "Gov. Jewell's Reception," July 18, 1876.

as "an undisguised opponent"[110] of reform. For the newspaper, the party's ability to credibly be the party of civil service reform was tied to its willingness to rebuke Grant. On five separate occasions in its editorial pages, the *Tribune* called for the Republican Party to clearly and publicly break with Grant and the specter they termed "Grant-ism."[111] This is a move that the *Tribune* in some ways required to reconcile its past and present partisan identity – it deserted the Republican Party to support Horace Greeley as a Liberal Republican presidential candidate in 1872, and an official denouncement of Grant would help justify the paper's return to the fold without the appearance of hypocrisy.

Bristow

When Grant wrote his letter to Bristow absolving him of secrecy, the *Tribune* issued the president a rare compliment, calling the letter "manly and straightforward."[112] Several days later when Bristow responded with his own letter still refusing to testify, the *Tribune* changed its tune a bit, arguing Grant's letter showed his "disposition to consider public questions only in their relations to himself personally," identifying his motivations as predominantly self-serving.[113] This certainly did not aid Grant's effort to appear open about the committee investigation, and in fact the *Tribune* took the opportunity to unfavorably compare him to Bristow, who it argued based his decision to stay silent on setting sound policy and precedent.

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[110] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "Carrying Too Much Weight," July 17, 1876.
[111] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "Grant Re-enforcing Tilden," July 1, 1876; Editorial, "Another Cabinet Change," July 12, 1876; Editorial, "No More 'Ifs,'" July 14, 1876; Editorial, "Carrying Too Much Weight," July 17, 1876; Editorial, "The President and His Friends," July 31, 1876. On March 8, 1876, *The New York Sun* defined "Grant-ism" as "compounded in low greed, obtuse moral sentiment, shoddy display, the use of public offices for private gain, enriching all your relatives at the expense of the government, the ignoring of all the better public opinion, the conception that high office is a reward and not an obligation imposed-in-fine, that the Government is to be administered in the selfish interest of the governors and for their aggrandizement" (Stone, 90).
[112] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "Untitled," July 14, 1876.
[113] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "Untitled," July 19, 1876.

Grant's letter to Bristow was cast even more negatively in the *Sun*. It asserted that the president knew full well that Bristow would still not talk about their conversations. In writing the letter, then, Grant knew his secrets would be safe, yet simultaneously he could gain praise for transparency.[114] Bristow was not exactly made into a hero figure in the *Sun*. Despite the contention that his refusal to testify to all he and the president spoke about reflected genuine convictions, the paper also conjectured that his silence showed "there must have been a skeleton in Grant's Cabinet during the last eight or ten months."[115]

The *Times* did not shy away from casting Bristow as heroic, proclaiming, "Nothing contributed more to the reputation of the Administration than the fearless and faithful prosecution of offenders against the law under the direction of Mr. Bristow."[116] The text of both Grant and Bristow's letters to each other on the executive secrecy issue appeared in their entirety in the *Times*, but the paper said little editorially about them, except to deem the president's message a "challenge" to Bristow, which if taken, would begin a lengthy investigation that it speculated would not reflect badly on Bristow at all.[117] Even in this reliably Republican paper, Grant did not receive effusive praise for his willingness to open up the White House to scrutiny.

Bristow's portrayal in the *New York Herald* differed significantly from that in the other papers – he was vilified, and Grant was often elevated at Bristow's expense. The *Herald* offered an alternative take on why Grant had taken to dismissing so many officials active in combating the whiskey ring, arguing that the president believed they

[114] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, Untitled, July 20, 1876.
[115] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, Untitled, July 14, 1876.
[116] *The New York Times*, Editorial, Untitled, July 6, 1876.
[117] *The New York Times*, "Washington. The President to Mr. Bristow," July 14, 1876.

were part of a conspiracy to disgrace him for the purpose of getting Bristow to the presidency.[118] Grant had every right to expect loyalty from his own administration, while Bristow had betrayed the president by taking advantage of his shortcomings, spying on him, and enthusiastically joining forces with his attackers.[119] The *Herald* did not go as far as to contend this conspiracy against the president could be proven, but as for the propriety of Grant's actions the paper claimed that all that mattered was that the president *believed* there to be such a conspiracy. It is not entirely clear why the *Herald* expressed such hostile views toward Bristow, particularly given its unfriendly coverage of Grant during the Babcock trial, though one possible explanation could be that Bristow's position as a potential Republican candidate at the party's nominating convention and rising star in the party made him a prime target, while Grant's career was coming to an end.

Unlike in several of the other news outlets, Bristow's silence before the committee was not construed by the *Herald* to mean he was harboring secrets that would damage Grant. Instead, reflecting the belief that Grant's record on the Whiskey Ring was untainted, the paper asked rhetorically, "Is it not just possible that one reason why Bristow does not go before the committee of Congress and tell all he knows is that he knows nothing worth telling?"[120] The *Herald* lauded Grant's letter releasing Bristow from executive privilege as a "bold" and "intelligent" move that would place Bristow in "an awkward position."[121]

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[118] *The New York Herald*, "Washington. The Recent Summary Removals in the Treasury Department. Causes of the President's Action," July 14, 1876.
[119] *The New York Herald*, "Washington. The Recent Summary Removals in the Treasury Department. Causes of the President's Action," July 14, 1876.
[120] *The New York Herald*, Editorial, "Bristow, Grant and the Frauds," July 20, 1876.
[121] *The New York Herald*, Editorial, "The President and Personal Government," July 15, 1876.

Grant's Character

Old claims about Grant's propensity for falling under bad influences were revived in the *Herald,* as a partial explanation as to why he removed Yaryan and at various points cooled in his support for the Whiskey Ring investigation.[122] The *Tribune* specifically blamed a select group of Republican senators for feeding lies to Grant and urging him to dismiss honest and faithful officers.[123]

The *Sun* meanwhile added a new dimension to its portrayal of Grant's flaws, depicting the president as angry and bitter, and thus acting out against his opponents, full of resentment at being denied a third term in office.[124] From this perspective, Grant's nature was such that had the public given him a third term, the president's desire "would have been to convert the republic into an empire."[125] This perspective made the paper's frequent calls for impeachment more legitimate, and framed Grant as an enemy not merely of the Democrats, but of democracy itself. It also positioned the *Sun* as it had sought to cast itself during the Babcock trial, as guardian of the public interest rather than rabidly partisan. The *Tribune* also attributed Grant's current behavior to anger and bitterness over the third term, and contended that with no future office before him, the president was choosing to follow his own will rather than heeding the party or his better

[122] *The New York Herald*, "A Treasury Scandal. President Grant Demanding the Instant Resignation of the Head of the Special Agency Bureau," July 1, 1876 and *The New York Herald*, "Washington. Testimony of Bluford Wilson Before the Whiskey Trials Committee. The President Completely Exonerated," July 28, 1876.
[123] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "Grant Re-enforcing Tilden," July 1, 1876; "The Resignation of Jewell," By Telegraph to the Tribune, July 12, 1876; and "En Route to New Haven," July 18, 1876.
[124] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "Grant's Absence," July 6, 1876; Editorial, "Grant's Real Nature," July 15, 1876; Editorial, "Grant, Father and Son – An Example in Point," July 17, 1876.
[125] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "Grant, Father and Son – An Example in Point," July 17, 1876

advisers.[126] The paper blamed some of Grant's mistakes on his prior career, stating Grant "sought to apply to civil government the coarse methods of the soldier and mistook a [public] trust for a prize."[127]

Even the friendlier outlets found Grant lacking as the scandal dragged on. One sharply worded editorial in the *Herald* criticized Grant's taciturn nature, arguing that in removing officers he must go before the public and provide some sort of explanation, both out of democratic necessity and because with silence he opened himself up to the charge that he was seeking revenge on behalf of the Whiskey Ring. "The President could at once rally the country to him by one of those plain, simple letters he knows so well how to write," said the editors. Instead he said nothing to the public or press, because of "General Grant's singular habits of having no relations with the people."[128] Somewhat less harshly, the *Times* also called for Grant to be more vocal, saying he very much needed to give explanations for why he dismissed trustworthy and effective officers like Yaryan and Jewell.[129] Without providing justification, the paper said it deplored how many opportunities were presented for Grant to be accused of trying to shield friends caught in the Whiskey Ring, allegations the *Times* believed were false.[130]

The *Herald* was the newspaper most concerned with looking ahead to what Grant's legacy would be. On three separate occasions the paper paused in praising or criticizing the president to note that long after most other figures had faded from the

[126] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "Another Cabinet Change," July 12, 1876; "Washington. Grant's Strange Course," July 13, 1876; Editorial, "Not In This Way," July 14, 1876; and "Washington. Gen. Grant on Gov. Hayes' Letter," July 15, 1876.
[127] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "Not In This Way," July 14, 1876.
[128] *The New York Herald*, Editorial, "The President and Personal Government," July 15, 1876.
[129] *The New York Times*, "The Removal of Yaryan. One of the Alleged Reasons for His Removal Shown to Have Been Groundless," Special Dispatch to the New York Times, July 3, 1876; Editorial, "Senatorial Dignity," July 9, 1876; and Editorial, Untitled, July 12, 1876.
[130] *The New York Times*, Editorial, "Senatorial Dignity," July 9, 1876

political landscape, Grant's "name will be one of the trophies of our history," and he would be a "memorable and honored figure."[131] In urging its readership to look beyond the current political scandals, the *Herald* provided a far more positive picture of Grant the man and the president. Meanwhile, the far more hostile *Sun* focused attention on the present, and on four separate occasions in the month of July said enough had come to light about Grant's role in the Whiskey Ring scandal to warrant impeachment, a course the paper enthusiastically advocated.[132]

Congressional Committee Members

The individual members of the congressional investigating committee did not dominate newspaper coverage, though at times their actions in the hearings did have an effect on article content. The *Sun* gave ample space to and directly quoted some of the harsher questions asked by Democratic representatives in several articles.[133] Though members of the committee did not dominate the *Sun*'s coverage, the paper lauded their investigation as crucial. "Nothing but the vigilance of the House of Representatives can prevent a great spoilation of the Treasury in the closing months of Grantism."[134] Of course, this also reflected the *Sun*'s reliably Democratic viewpoint, hailing the one part of the national government controlled by the party.

The *Tribune* related the views purported by one Republican member of Congress from Maine, William Pierce Frye, who stated publicly that Congress was "'bringing

[131] *The New York Herald*, Editorial, "The President and Personal Government," July 15, 1876; Editorial, "Bristow, Grant and the Frauds," July 20, 1876 and Editorial, "The President and the Whiskey Frauds," July 29, 1876.
[132] *The New York Sun*, "One Guilty Man to Escape. Facts That Should Hurl Grant From the White House," July 3, 1876; "Grant Still Pursuing Faithful Officers," July 9, 1876; Editorial, Untitled, July 30, 1876; Editorial, "Grant and the Whiskey Ring," July 31, 1876.
[133] *The New York Sun*, "Bristow's Examination. Reflecting As to Whether Grant Sustained Him in His Whiskey Raid," July 7, 1876 and "Bluford Wilson's Story. Exposure of the True Inwardness of the White House," July 29, 1876.
[134] *The New York Sun*, Editorial, "Restoration of the Whiskey Ring," July 6, 1876.

down the great name of the great republic in the eyes of the whole world.'" Rebuking Frye, the *Tribune* termed the House's work merely "investigations which bring out facts."[135] Clearly some of the president's supporters in the party were willing to openly criticize the investigative committee and imply a lack of patriotism among the more zealous investigators. However, such statements did not appear in the reliably Republican outlets analyzed here, but did appear (and were undermined) in a more hostile paper like the *Tribune*.

The Chicago Tribune's Limited Support

Wilson's testimony was also extensively quoted in *The Chicago Tribune*, again emphasizing Babcock as guilty, and a portion of the testimony was prefaced with the sub-headline "Babcock's Potency to Shelter Himself and Brother Ringsters."[136] Taken with the *Times*' coverage discussed above, it seems that even in reliably Republican newspapers, the common assumption by July was that Babcock was in fact guilty of the charges he had been acquitted of back in February. Editorially, the *Chicago Tribune* concluded that Babcock took advantage of Grant's confidence in him to save himself from conviction.[137]

This fit with the paper's depiction of Grant's character throughout the month's coverage – that his major flaw was his susceptibility to bad influences. When Wilson's testimony became public, rather than emphasizing a multitude of sins of the president as the more hostile papers did, the *Chicago Tribune* explained away many of Grant's shortcomings through this "bad influences" narrative. Though the president had "honesty

[135] *The New York Tribune*, Editorial, "The President and His Friends," Jul 31, 1876.
[136] *The Chicago Tribune*, "Wilson. He Gives More of the Inside History of the Whisky-War," July 29, 1876.
[137] *The Chicago Tribune*, "Bluford Wilson's Narrative," Editorial, July 30, 1876.

of purpose," he was "made the dupe of men who had abused his confidence, and he was persuaded to do things to protect innocent men, as he was led to believe, which materially interfered with the plan of reaching *all* of the men who had been guiltily connected with the Ring."[138]

Similarly to the other newspapers, the coverage's focus on the testimony of witnesses like Yaryan and Wilson conveyed the impression that Grant was not consistently a zealous investigator of the Whiskey Ring, but at the very least that his backing was sometimes evident. The *Chicago Tribune* appeared to support this version of events, on two occasions expressing support for Wilson's credibility in particular[139] and claiming in its editorial pages that "the President was fully in accord with the most persistent prosecution of the Ring to the bitter end up to the time when his mind had been poisoned by agents of the Ring as to the purpose of the Secretary and Solicitor of the Treasury."[140] This was a better storyline for Grant than that of the *Sun*, which asserted he was never a zealous investigator, but still portrayed the president as more influenced by criminals than by honest officials.

The *Chicago Tribune* offered a quite different take on Grant's learning of Babcock's guilt and subsequent action. When the president learned Babcock was involved in the gold speculation scandal, the *Chicago Tribune* stated he moved back in accord with the ring prosecutions and removed Babcock.[141] What the paper does not mention, and what was emphasized by the *New York Tribune*, was that Babcock, though

[138] *The Chicago Tribune*, "Bluford Wilson's Narrative," Editorial, July 30, 1876.
[139] *The Chicago Tribune*, "Wilson. He Gives More of the Inside History of the Whisky-War," July 29, 1876 and "Bluford Wilson. His Testimony Yesterday Before the Whisky Investigating Committee," July 28, 1876.
[140] *The Chicago Tribune*, "Bluford Wilson's Narrative," Editorial, July 30, 1876.
[141] *The Chicago Tribune*, "Wilson. He Gives More of the Inside History of the Whisky-War," July 29, 1876.

no longer the president's private secretary, did still retain a position in the government and that Grant did not entirely fall into accord then with Bristow. As the *Chicago Tribune* told it, as soon as Grant was no longer under the false assumption that Babcock was innocent, he returned to his original position of supporting the investigation.

Secretary Bristow, meanwhile, was championed by the *Chicago Tribune* as a hero on four separate occasions,[142] and the paper deemed the Whiskey Ring prosecutions for which it gave him so much credit to be "the grandest work the Republican party has accomplished since it put down the Rebellion."[143] Though the paper did praise Grant for throwing "down the gauntlet to the whisky investigators" in his letter relieving Bristow of executive privilege, claiming this showed that neither the president "nor any of his Cabinet has ever said or done anything for the whisky-thieves that will make them blush,"[144] much more attention was paid to Bristow's commitment to silence in the first place. Like *The New York Tribune*, the writers effusively praised Bristow's principled stand, conjecturing he would go to jail before abandoning his convictions, and independently detailing important reasons for upholding executive privilege.[145]

In part, the *Chicago Tribune* portrayed Bristow as standing up to the House investigating committee, which it implied was dominated by the Democratic Party and often served the party's interests.[146] To the extent that the paper attributed partisan motivations to the investigative committee, even in the context of praising Bristow, it

[142] *The Chicago Tribune*, "Mr. Bristow. A Hard Nut for the Democracy," Special Dispatch to the Tribune, July 9, 1876; "Violations of Executive Confidence," Editorial, July 10, 1876; Untitled, Editorial, July 14, 1876; and "Some Falsehoods Refuted," Editorial, July 30, 1876.
[143] *The Chicago Tribune*, "Some Falsehoods Refuted," Editorial, July 30, 1876.
[144] *The Chicago Times*, Untitled, Editorial, July 14, 1876.
[145] *The Chicago Tribune*, "Mr. Bristow. A Hard Nut for the Democracy," Special Dispatch to the Tribune, July 9, 1876 and "Violations of Executive Confidence," Editorial, July 10, 1876.
[146] *The Chicago Tribune*, "Mr. Bristow. A Hard Nut for the Democracy," Special Dispatch to the Tribune, July 9, 1876 and "The Whisky Inquiry. Yaryan on the Stand," July 13, 1876.

would appear to aid Grant's scandal rehabilitation in chalking up some of the more hostile questions and testimony of witnesses to ordinary partisan animosity. The *Tribune* also made some reference to Republican members of the committee who would vigorously cross-examine witnesses like Wilson to show Grant was in fact supportive of the prosecutions.[147] These advocates for the president in the House were not visible in the coverage of the other papers analyzed.

The *Chicago Tribune* also pointed to other Republican press outlets that might be said to be expressing the *most* pro-Grant views in their scandal coverage over this same period. The paper noted that some other news outlets had charged that Wilson was a liar and that the Whiskey Ring investigation and prosecutions were an orchestrated conspiracy headed by Bristow and Wilson to disgrace Grant and elevate Bristow to the presidency.[148] On two occasions these contentions by other papers were explicitly dismissed as slander and falsehood, and on one occasion they were merely related without any commentary. Several of the papers analyzed here, even of different partisan affiliations, occasionally made reference to newspapers they termed "Whiskey Ring organs," showing that the above views might be published somewhere, but were out of step with mainstream press content at the time.

Grant's Framing Project: Many Challenges, Few Advantages

Impact of the Nature of the 19th Century Partisan Press

[147] *The Chicago Tribune*, "Wilson's Story. The Ex-Solicitor is to be Annihilated Forthwith," Special Dispatch to the Tribune, July 30, 1876.
[148] *The Chicago Tribune*, "An Old Slander Revived," Editorial, July 28, 1876; "Wilson's Story. The Ex-Solicitor is to be Annihilated Forthwith," Special Dispatch to the Tribune, July 30, 1876; and "Some Falsehoods Refuted," Editorial, July 30, 1876.

Grant's efforts were sometimes hindered by published stories of somewhat questionable origins, the veracity of which would later be refuted. The *Sun* charged during the trial that "the most reliable sources" were attesting to Babcock's involvement in a Whiskey Ring scandal in Springfield, Illinois, and that more shocking details of his complicity were to soon follow.[149] This sort of sensational teasing continued over several days, until the end of an article on a St. Louis trial matter, where one sentence was written clarifying that it had turned out to be a different Babcock implicated in Illinois.[150] The *Sun* also claimed that during the testimony of a witness the newspaper deemed untrustworthy, one of Babcock's lawyers was "heard to whisper…on the cross-exam hopefully, 'He hasn't been caught yet,'" to one of his colleagues. This appeared in no other source, and seems unlikely, but certainly painted the defense and Babcock, and therefore Grant, in a negative light.

The late nineteenth century media environment, with its lax standards for reporting verification, posed special challenges for presidents seeking to rehabilitate their reputation. Rumor and hearsay might receive very prominent attention in sensational newspapers, particularly if the story fell in line with the paper's partisan leanings, while subsequent retractions might get very little space. The problem this posed for a president under attack might be likened to what the presidency today faces through the Internet: in both cases, the decision to publish/disseminate information does not hinge on its accuracy or the existence of corroborating evidence. In contrast to the modern standard of objectivity, to which many (though not all) newspapers adhere, a partisan press outlet in 1876 did not risk its reputation or readership by printing unreliable content.

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[149] *The New York Sun*, "Another Whiskey Ring," February 13, 1876.
[150] *The New York Sun*, "A Point Against Babcock: Judge Dillon Deciding to Admit the Ring's Telegrams," February 15, 1876.

In all of the newspapers analyzed here, the editorial page was separate from the news pages, yet this did not prevent political commentary and interpretation from seeping into the news articles. The exception was the "general press dispatches" from organizations like the Associated Press, mostly featured in the coverage on the Babcock trial, and typically focused on the day's court proceedings. These articles tended to limit their coverage to recounting events and directly quoting prominent figures in the case, adhering to a factual account of the trial, and making their product commercially viable to papers across a wide spectrum of partisan viewpoints, as we see here. Even these articles, however, did not take "balanced" coverage into account, failing to provide opposing viewpoints to those cited in the articles. They were merely a depiction of the arguments or personalities that dominated the events making news on a particular day.

Herein lies another problem for a president in Grant's position, trying to cast a major scandal in a more positive light. Press coverage largely composed of a detailed, strict recounting of events like a criminal trial or congressional committee testimony may not leave a lot of room for framing. Many news articles, even those not produced by an organization like the Associated Press, were written to cover events in chronological order of how things occurred.[151] Often stories featured no overarching consistent narrative, which made it more difficult to have the president's preferred storyline adopted. Additionally, if the Associated Press' fact-oriented accounts of what occurred in a given article focused on Grant's opponents, solely because they had been more active players in events on that particular day, the president might find his own interpretations of events undermined even in a Republican newspaper, if it carried this "objective" news

[151] This "classic storytelling" model to 19th century journalism is discussed in David Mindich's book *Just the Facts: How 'Objectivity' Came to Define American Journalism*, (New York University Press, 1998).

content. The evidence suggests newspaper content was not entirely partisan. Seemingly neutral pieces were included, a practice that complicated presidential efforts to shape the news because such pieces had not yet adopted the notion of "balanced" or "fair" coverage (that is, stories containing both sides) that has since become a feature of objective journalistic practices.

Another unanticipated feature to the coverage was the focus in many of the papers, regardless of partisan affiliation, on Grant's character and personality. As noted in the introduction, some media scholars contend that the role of the press as "amateur psychologists" emerged only in the post-Watergate period. However, in the coverage of the Whiskey Ring scandal, we see articles clearly linking Grant's perceived character and personality flaws to mistakes made in office.

Conclusion

Unsurprisingly, Grant and his account of the Whiskey Ring scandal were undermined in both a pro-Democrat paper, *The New York Sun* and a third party organ, *The New York Tribune*. However, what was unexpected was finding that the coverage in papers that reliably supported the Republican Party, such as *The New York Times* and *The Chicago Tribune*, did not offer Grant consistent positive coverage either. Their criticisms certainly paled in comparison to the *Sun*'s, but the president was not always supported in their pages, nor his frames imparted to their readers. Part of the explanation for this may be that the newspapers that have been analyzed here were high circulation, mainstream press outlets of their time. There were newspapers in existence willing to take much more extreme stands, with an accompanying smaller range of influence, including the

"Whiskey Ring organs" that accused Bristow of conspiring against the president, or Democratic editors who called Grant a drunk.[152] Even in a partisan press era, then, popular newspapers tempered their content to fit within acceptable parameters to be marketed to a mass audience.

Further, Grant also could not rely on the narratives of a paper or its support of his frames to remain consistent, even over just a few months. This inconsistency was exhibited by *The New York Herald*, which during the Babcock trial attacked Grant and championed Bristow as a hero, but a few months later during the House investigation, completely reversed its position to condemn Bristow and offer support for Grant. This transition appeared to be in Grant's favor, but is evidence a newspaper's relation to his party and interests could be unstable.

However, even if Grant did not receive overwhelmingly favorable coverage throughout the scandal and his frames were sometimes directly undermined, he still was a much larger and more significant presence in the coverage than, for instance, the House investigating committee members. Some of the committee members' more hostile questions or heated interactions with witnesses did make it into the papers, illustrating that they were vocal critics during the scandal who occasionally would be spotlighted by the press. The Democratic House was successful in shaping press coverage to the extent that the papers were all covering Babcock as guilty of the charges he had been acquitted of by July of 1876. On this question, Grant had also left a framing vacuum, allowing the opposition to step in – after his deposition he made no more emphatic public claims of

[152] *The New York Times* questioned in an untitled editorial on July 23, 1876 whether some Democratic editors understood the "people in glass houses " adage, and that if they did, they should stop their slanderous accounts of Grant's drinking, or be forced to confront the condition their presidential candidate Tilden was in the night he heard he was nominated.

Babcock's innocence and, in removing him as his private secretary, even undermined that prior position. Overall, though, Democratic members of Congress were not consistently quoted throughout the scandal coverage, nor were they primarily responsible for constructing the overarching narrative of the story. Reading the House testimony as a primary document, it is clear that this was not due to a lack of trying on their part. This points to the importance of the president's framing efforts in rehabilitating his image, and suggests that where they were ineffective, the failure reflected faults in the framing tactics or a lapse in trying to actively shape public opinion.

Democrats appeared fairly consistent in their persecution of the Grant administration but the Republican Party was far more divided. From an early point in the scandal, it became clear that Secretary Bristow and President Grant represented different factions of the Republican Party. This is in part why Grant had difficulty getting positive coverage from some of the Republican newspapers; in opting to support Bristow instead they were not abandoning their party identity. Even without strong partisan support though, Grant was able to survive the scandal.

Grant's remaining in office, however, might not be the only measure of his success in political rehabilitation in the face of the Whiskey Ring story. As evidenced by much of the coverage, his reputation was badly tarnished and his political support eroded. One factor that seems to complicate the matter of how effective Grant was at framing events is the scandal's timing. The heart of the controversy, and particularly the Babcock angle, takes place over the course of the last year of Grant's presidency and just prior to an election in which he made clear he would not be a candidate. Grant was on his way out of office, and many in the party and the partisan papers were looking ahead. On the

one hand, this meant that traditionally Republican papers might be willing to criticize the administration's shortcomings or promote Bristow in the interest of winning in 1876. At the same time, Grant's pending departure made very harsh attacks or calls for his impeachment seem less urgent or necessary.

The Whiskey Ring scandal is also a reflection of its time, and this held both advantages and disadvantages for the president in trying to weather it. In the 1870's, much of the executive branch, Congress, and the political parties were built around the spoils system, and as government positions frequently came with low salaries, corruption and bribery were rampant.[153] On one level, then, the scandal might not be terribly shocking to the American people, and the ordinariness of the conduct would aid Grant in attempting to temper public outrage. Yet powerful reform currents were also stirring in, witness the mounting pressure to establish merit-based civil service personnel systems and the support for liberal Republicans. Thus, on another level, the scandal erupted at a moment when patronage and official malfeasance were becoming more intolerable to many. In this transitional period, one person's legitimate means of securing and sustaining political support was another person's grossly fraudulent misuse of government. Grant sought to mitigate scandal damage at a crossroads in American politics. A perceived unwillingness to crack down on increasingly discredited practices might not be enough to get a president ousted from office, but certainly was sufficient to engender significant criticism and to limit his political influence.

One of the defining features of Grant's response to the scandal is that at its height, the president did not admit wrongdoing or mistakes to the public, in contrast to some of

[153] Perrey, 433.

his scandal-beset successors.[154] Perhaps Grant could have sought to rehabilitate his image by openly conceding that, as some press accounts insisted, he had been the victim of bad influences and had been taken advantage of by nefarious characters. Both friendly and opposition newspapers depicted him as a president surrounded by those trying to influence him in questionable and corrupt directions. His own public acknowledgment of this shortcoming would go further in redeeming his administration than the news coverage alone. For it would indicate Grant was aware of the problem, a key first step toward not allowing it to occur in the future. And, though surely not a positive portrayal of the president, it would demonstrate far less agency by him when it came to official misconduct and the Whiskey Ring scandal than his critics claimed. Certainly Grant's era was a far less confessional culture than that of today, but the unexpected coverage of the personal lives of politicians in these newspapers suggests such baring of his soul might not be completely out of step with the times. Absent an admission by Grant himself of his gullibility, the press' portrayal of that facet of his character is rendered predominantly negative. He emerges instead as a leader subject to blindness and gullibility he is unable to ever overcome, rather than being made to work in the interest of Grant's ability to rebound from the perceived transgressions.

[154] Grant did, however, seem to take this approach on his way out of office. In his last message to Congress in December 1876, Grant contended it was his "fortune or misfortune" to become president without any prior political training. Under those circumstances, he felt, "it is but reasonable to suppose that errors of judgment must have occurred…Mistakes have been made, as all can see and I admit, but it seems to me oftener in the selections made of the assistants appointed to aid in carrying out the various duties of administering the Government…It is impossible, where so many trusts are to be allotted, that the right parties should be chosen in every instance. History shows that no Administration from the time of Washington to the present has been free from these mistakes. But I leave comparisons to history, claiming only that I have acted in every instance from a conscientious desire to do what was right, constitutional, within the law, and for the very best interests of the whole people…" (Pollard, 450).

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Chapter 3: President Nixon and the Watergate Scandal

In June of 1972, five men were caught breaking into and attempting to wiretap the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate office complex in Washington, D.C. It was soon discovered that the burglars had links to President Nixon's Committee to Reelect the President. Over time, questions emerged about the extent of the White House's involvement and whether the president was complicit, allegations that the administration initially denied.[155]

By April 1973, however, revelations of administration efforts to derail the Watergate investigation and cover up the scandal led to the resignation of several key White House figures, including domestic advisor John Ehrlichman and Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman, and to the firing of legal counsel John Dean. The Senate Select Committee to Investigate Campaign Practices, known popularly as the Ervin Committee and charged with investigating Watergate and the 1972 presidential election, began holding televised hearings in May, of which nearly 90% of Americans watched some part.[156] During these hearings, Dean testified that the president was directly involved in trying to cover up the break in. Also in May 1973, a special prosecutor, Archibald Cox, was appointed by Attorney General Elliot Richardson to conduct an independent investigation of the affair. When it was revealed before the Ervin committee that the president taped his conversations in the Oval Office, those investigating the affair demanded access to the tapes.

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[155] Many of the connections between the break-in and CRP or CREEP, and the Nixon Administration itself, were first investigated and made public by reporters at *The Washington Post*, especially Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. When the *Post* began publishing such articles over the summer of 1973, very few other mainstream news outlets were pursuing the story with the same intensity.

[156] Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang, *The Battle for Public Opinion: The President, the Press and the Polls During Watergate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 62.

Watergate took place during a period of significant change in the media, both technologically and in terms of norms of coverage. Though Nixon was certainly a modern president, I anticipated that he was not yet able to fully amass the resources of his office and exploit tendencies of press coverage to foster his framing goals. In this chapter, I analyze President Nixon's framing of Watergate and then review the major networks' nightly news broadcasts and prominent print outlets for whether these frames were supported or undermined. I then turn to a second time period and repeat this process, to identify how the president's frames were treated later in the scandal, when his opponents were more vocal.

I find that the administration was fairly unsuccessful at getting the media to echo its frames. Some frames, however, fared better than others. Nixon's call to move on from the scandal often enjoyed a friendly reaction in the press, but his assertions of his innocence were frequently challenged. Looking at the statements and public positions of other prominent politicians of the time, I observe that it is difficult to entirely discount the damage a lack of strong Republican support (and nearly unified Democratic criticism) did to the president's chances of surviving the scandal. Yet Nixon's framing failures were also readily apparent and a significant factor in his downfall: at times he took actions contradictory to the narratives he had constructed, some of his frames were in conflict with each other, and the accusations against him flew in the face of his "law and order" image.

Nixon's Framing of Watergate in His August 15th, 1973 Speech

The speech analyzed here for presidential framing is President Nixon's primetime televised address on August 15th, 1973. Although President Nixon made at least three major speeches on Watergate, the August address took place after key elements of the scandal had been revealed, including the Oval Office taping recordings, but before impeachment or resignation was widely supported by the public and other major politicians. He had, then, a window of opportunity to combat the damage.

The most prominent frame (51 appearances) employed by Nixon was minimizing the improprieties: while he admitted mistakes were made in Watergate, the scandal was not as bad as it might seem.[157] Nixon argued that (1) the transgressions of Watergate were not all that egregious, (2) he *personally* was not really at fault for what occurred, and (3) those guilty for Watergate were also not completely at fault, as their actions were the product of a 1960's culture of lawlessness, promoted first by the political opposition.

Watergate's events were softened in their severity by the president's claims that these were isolated incidents by an "overzealous" few that could not be allowed "to tar the reputation of the millions of dedicated Americans of both parties who fought hard but clean for the candidates of their choice in 1972." Further, Nixon asserted that his administration's use of wiretapping was entirely in keeping with how it was used by previous presidents, as well as only with national security efforts in mind.[158] Therefore, the White House's actions were not unusual, egregious, or out of step with how national

[157] An "appearance" was counted as any sentence or part of a sentence within the speech that conveyed the frame identified.

[158] President Nixon was referring to instances where the White House had generally authorized wiretaps without a search warrant, and not to the attempted bugging of the DNC headquarters. The president pointed out though that such activities had been lumped together under the term "Watergate." Nixon also noted in the speech that after a 1972 Supreme Court decision placing new regulations on such wiretapping, the administration had been in compliance with that ruling.

security policies had been pursued in the past, by both Republican and Democratic administrations.

Nixon's acceptance of responsibility was general and symbolic, because Watergate "occurred during my Administration and in the campaign for my reelection," but he took on little direct blame. His regret was confined to being sorry the events transpired, but not for any specific actions he had taken. In recounting what he did after learning of the break-in, Nixon negated any complicity in a cover-up by saying he placed his trust in reports and information from aides who failed him.

Finally, in this effort to minimize the severity of the scandal, Nixon placed the greatest emphasis on how a 1960's culture of disregarding rules and authority contributed to the belief of the Watergate conspirators that they too were above the law. Nixon blamed liberal actors of the previous decade and the attitude that "their cause placed them beyond the reach of those rules that apply to other persons and that hold a free society together" for causing their opponents to undertake actions like those of Watergate. Nixon accused those in the media and "some of our pulpits" of supporting this 1960's mentality, while casting himself as a continuous opponent to such views. According to the president, that opposition made him a victim of criticism at the time: "Those of us who insisted on the old restraints, who warned of the overriding importance of operating within the law and by the rules, were accused of being reactionaries." In Nixon's account, Watergate was merely a product of a larger problem, not initiated by himself or his party, that could only be solved by the country as a whole showing "renewed respect" for the law, obedience to authority, and avoidance of political extremes and excesses. Having deemed himself a long-standing defender of law and order, Nixon implied that

Americans as a whole, of all political persuasions, needed to come to share his views and values.

The second most heavily emphasized frame (26 appearances) by the president was that he was completely innocent, and had been a zealous investigator throughout the scandal. Nixon stated that he "had no prior knowledge of the break-in; I neither took part in nor knew about any of the subsequent cover-up activities; I neither authorized nor encouraged subordinates to engage in illegal or improper campaign tactics." Though Nixon said he refused to discuss specific charges against him, he promoted his version of events by pointing out that of thirty-five witnesses before Congress, only one (John Dean) implicated him, without corroborating evidence. Since learning of the break-in, Nixon argued, he vigorously supported all inquiries into the affair, constantly pressed his subordinates to obtain and make public the facts, and showed a commitment to openness and transparency by encouraging administration officials to testify and turning over all relevant information. Nixon portrayed himself as tirelessly working to obtain the truth, only hampered by the obstructionist tactics of those below him.

The third most prominent frame (17 appearances) Nixon highlighted was a call for the country to move on and "get on with the urgent business of our Nation," turning Watergate over to the courts. The president argued that from the economy to foreign relations, there were numerous critically important issues facing the country that were being neglected on account of the Watergate "obsession." This theme is apparent from the very outset of the speech, as Nixon called attention to the twenty-two hours a week of Watergate media coverage, and the two million words of testimony heard by the Senate. Nixon portrayed the scandal focus at the expense of more pressing matters as anti-

democratic, claiming that in the previous presidential election "the American people were given the clearest choice of this century. Your votes were a mandate, which I accepted, to complete the initiatives we began in my first term and to fulfill the promises I made for my second term."

A lesser but still evident frame (14 appearances) is Nixon's identification with a noble cause of defending the presidency and the public interest rather than trying to save himself personally. This frame is found in Nixon's discussion of the need for confidentiality between a president and his advisers, so he might get candid advice and make difficult and important decisions toward the greater public good. The president asserted this principle as a key one in government, and the reason he would not turn over the tape recordings of conversations in his office even though they would back his version of events.

Finally, a far less prominent frame (5 appearances) is Nixon casting himself as persecuted by partisan enemies. Nixon described the Watergate investigation as initially legitimate, but one which over time became "increasingly absorbed in an effort to implicate the President personally in the illegal activities that took place." Further along in the speech, the president cited a "backward looking obsession with Watergate" and argued there were "those who would exploit Watergate in order to keep us from doing what we were elected to do." A theme throughout the speech is that there have been several very thorough investigations of the Watergate affair, and so if Nixon has not yet been found to be implicated, congressional members still pursuing the scandal were engaged in a fishing expedition, to find him guilty of something, anything.

Nightly News Television Coverage Post-Speech: August 15th – 22nd, 1973

I examined the nightly news broadcasts of the three major television networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) for whether or not they included the president's aforementioned frames and whether those frames were presented in a way that supported or undermined them. I reviewed a week's worth of coverage totaling 63 stories, to give a sense of both the immediate reaction to the speech and how it was viewed several days later.[159] Slightly less than half, about 48%, of the televised news stories portrayed Nixon and his frames predominantly negatively, with 27% of the coverage's portrayal more positive, and 25% neutral, providing points both supportive and in opposition to Nixon and his statements. To put it another way, 52% of the stories in the week following the speech were either positive or neutral, and 48% negative, and not the deluge of bad news that might be expected.[160]

Despite Nixon's widely noted animosity toward CBS News,[161] ABC News had the largest percentage of negative stories, and NBC the most positive. Contributing to ABC's negativity was a series of editorial pieces by journalist Howard K. Smith, in which he expressed dissatisfaction with the president's statements on Watergate. On August 21st, for instance, Smith mentioned impeachment as a possible means of dealing with the president, but concluded it was probably "too complex" to actually succeed – so

[159] All stories were viewed using the database of the Vanderbilt Television News Archive located in Nashville, TN. Any story involving President Nixon and Watergate, or simply Watergate itself, was included in this analysis.

[160] Another major story during this time period was the bribery charges against Vice President Spiro Agnew that had intensified over the summer of 1973. Agnew resigned his office on October 10, 1973, just before the second time period analyzed here. Though stories dealing solely with Agnew were not included here, the scandal could be viewed as contributing to a general sense of corruption and dishonesty in the administration. At the same time, the story might also serve as a distraction from the Watergate scandal.

[161] Nixon felt that CBS News had always been particularly hostile to him, and in November of 1972 called for a complete embargo of providing any interviews by members of his staff to the network. The same policy was applied to *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* (Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon: Ruin and Recovery; 1973-1990*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991, 17).

he recommended indicting Nixon instead. However, while these ABC segments were clearly labeled commentary, CBS's Dan Rather also contributed a few scathing appraisals of the White House's damage control efforts that were in no way distinguished from the regular news. On one occasion, Rather deemed the speech "a bet on boredom and backlash" and claimed Nixon's self-serving argument was that continuing to ask questions about Watergate was "bad for the country."[162]

Table 3.1

Nixon's Frames on the Nightly News

Frames Appearances[163] Undermined[164]

August Frames	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC
Mistakes but…not that bad	1	5	1	1	2	0
…not really my fault	0	2	2	0	1	0
…not totally their fault	1	1	0	1	0	0
Innocent/Zealous Investigator	11	9	9	16	3	6
Move on/Real Problems/Courts	16	5	9	4	0	0
Noble Defense of Presidency	4	6	5	3	5	3
Persecuted by Partisan Enemies	1	4	4	1	3	1

The president's most successful frame on nightly news broadcasts was the appeal to move on, focus on the real problems of the country, and turn Watergate over to the

[162] *CBS Evening News*, August 16, 1973.
[163] An "appearance" on the nightly televised news was counted when one of Nixon's frames was mentioned in the broadcast, or a statement with the same general meaning as a frame he articulated. A single news segment was counted as having more than one appearance of a frame if that frame was articulated in different contexts, or by different individuals.
[164] The undermining of a frame was counted any time one of Nixon's frames appeared in the coverage, and then was contradicted or criticized, or when sentiments representing the opposite of what Nixon sought to argue were found in the broadcast.

courts. It was the most likely to appear in the broadcasts, and also the least likely to be undermined. Scandal fatigue may have been a factor here. The president was able to capitalize on the fact that even at this point, long before the Watergate saga would end, the story had dragged on for a long time and the public was tiring of it. Although President Clinton also employed a "move on" frame in the Lewinsky scandal, Nixon's usage was more successful on the nightly news. This effectiveness might also reflect the "turn Watergate over to the courts" part of his narrative, giving the media and the public the sense Nixon still wanted justice to be done. The implication is that the guilty will still be punished and the truth found out, but in an impartial branch of government, largely hidden from view, rather than in the political Congress that might be wrongly motivated by interests beside the pursuit of justice.

Adding to the positive way this frame was treated on television, unlike in print, at no point did the nightly news broadcasts discuss that Nixon's lawyers argued as president he could not be prosecuted in the courts. When newspapers cited this legal argument, the motivations behind "turn Watergate over to the courts" were made to seem more sinister. Also, on the August 17th CBS and NBC broadcasts, segments were aired showing Nixon's daughter Julie defending her father on a visit with American factory workers, emphasizing the "move on" frame.[165] The stories not only helped cast Nixon in a sympathetic and positive light, but also included no views countering Julie's pleas for Congress to focus on the nation's real problems.

[165] In the print outlets looked at here, the story of Julie visiting the construction site was only covered by *The Chicago Tribune*, and even there by only a large photo and brief caption that did not encompass her "move on" statements ("Julie grateful for hardhats." UPI Telephoto. *The Chicago Tribune.* August 19, 1973). It seems that the images of Julie interacting with the workers were a visual, "made for TV" story that did not hold the same interest for print media.

The innocent/zealous investigator, as Nixon cast himself in the address, was a very close second most likely frame to appear, but also a hugely problematic one for the president. A fundamental part of his defense, the president's rehabilitation project suffered from all of the hostile questions raised about the frame by television reporters and their sources. On NBC, reporters told viewers that Nixon had failed to clear up many of his claims contradicted by other sources in the scandal, such as precisely what he and John Dean had spoken about in September 1972 and March 1973, some of the most damning portions of Dean's testimony.[166] This emphasis on questions that went unanswered in Nixon's speech would be even more heavily stressed in print coverage.

One contributing factor to the failure of the innocent/zealous investigator frame is that when viewed in the context of the overall narrative constructed by Nixon, it lost much of its credibility. First, the frame was in conflict with another core frame of the Nixon speech, his noble defense of the presidency and executive privilege claims. Were the president truly innocent and interested in fully pursuing an investigation, logic would seem to dictate that opening up the tapes to scrutiny would be a higher priority than protecting the executive's ability to obtain candid advice. The reality of Nixon's refusal to turn over the tapes strained the credibility of the storyline that he had nothing to hide. As presidents craft statements to overcome the damage of political scandals, they cannot expect their words and interpretations to provide cover for clearly contradictory actions.

Secondly, Nixon was a problematic disseminator of this particular frame because his personal honesty had become an issue. It became very difficult for a president labeled untrustworthy to proclaim his innocence and expect the media and public to believe him. As Nixon failed to offer up specific evidence to prove that he was innocent, the frame

[166] *NBC Evening News,* August 16, 1973.

had to rest upon his personal credibility, a trait very much in question. As such, Nixon may not have been his own best defender, evident in the contrast between the very positive coverage of Julie's support for her father and his own more negative treatment in the press.

The third most likely frame to appear in the nightly news was the admission of mistakes with various reasons why the transgressions were not so terrible, which was the frame most employed by Nixon in his August 15th speech. Part of the explanation for the frame's presence is that it contained so many different facets. However, each appeared only a handful of times, with the exception of the "not that bad" variation, which was also often subject to challenge. It seems that there was not a lot of traction on television news for these frames, even when the president raised national security concerns – perhaps because it was not a moment of a heated foreign policy crisis or because the connection was not well made by Nixon. Public undermining of Nixon's frames by even those within his administration was very damaging as well. On August 20th, all three networks carried stories in which Secretary of State William P. Rogers directly contradicted the "not that bad" frame, by asserting national security was not in jeopardy and could not justify actions like Watergate, and that security should not be an excuse for trampling on civil liberties.

Blaming the culture of the 1960's for producing the Watergate scandal did not generate a lot of news, but did not generate a major backlash in televised media either. In one critical ABC commentary piece, Howard K. Smith called for more stringent laws and reforms to prevent future Watergates, which undermined the president's assertion that the

real problem was lack of respect for the law, as opposed to insufficient law.[167] Such critiques were far more indirect than what was espoused in print.

One of the least likely frames to appear was Nixon's noble defense of the presidency and his refutation of the claim that he was selfishly defending himself, and it was frequently undercut on the news. Senator Sam Ervin, head of the Senate Watergate committee, was able to get several dramatic, effective quotes into the news broadcasts contradicting this frame, as when he was shown responding to Nixon's claims of executive privilege by predicting that if the president turned the tapes over "the Constitution wouldn't collapse, the presidency wouldn't be destroyed, the heavens wouldn't fall."[168] Further, the frame was often reiterated in the context of news updates about the courtroom arguments between the White House and special prosecutor before presiding Judge Sirica, and though Nixon's lawyers had their say, "balanced" modern coverage meant Cox's claims calling the frame into question were also included in the stories.

A difficulty Nixon faced with the dissemination of this frame via televised news was that executive privilege is a complex idea for a medium that does not have a significant amount of time for elucidation. In many news stories, particularly after Cox asked the courts to obtain the tapes from the White House, some elements of the executive privilege argument were mentioned, but no full explanation given. Reporters would relay non-specific presidential claims to the audience such as "presidential privacy is unique and indispensable,"[169] confidentiality as needed for "the effective functioning of

[167] *ABC Evening News,* August 22, 1973.
[168] *CBS Evening News,* August 16, 1973.
[169] *ABC Evening News,* August 17, 1973.

the presidency,"[170] and that the president's "special position" lets him alone decide about the tapes.[171] In employing a frame that rested on detailed informational content or perhaps in neglecting to attach it to a concrete and dramatic example to demonstrate its importance, Nixon lost much of his effectiveness. The simplification common to TV news proved costly. Entman (2004) argues that as frames cascade downward from the White House to journalists, they tend to be "increasingly limited to the selected highlights…passed on in ever-cruder form."[172] In this instance, transmission via cruder forms may also limit the effectiveness of the frame, a liability for a politician seeking to influence the public's perception of a situation with a complex framing scheme.

Adding to the lack of success for this frame, defending the institution of the presidency and executive privilege is quite distanced from the everyday experiences of most Americans. Even if we accept that Nixon touted executive privilege for the honorable reasons he outlines, these concerns are not necessarily relevant to reporters and the public, and instead reflect the singular position and viewpoint of the president. Further, to skeptical journalists of the 1970's, it would appear to be a convenient argument manufactured for the circumstances. The importance of executive privilege was not something Nixon had spent a great deal of time extolling in the past. Finally, much as in his innocent/zealous investigator frame, the president's actions seemed to contradict the storyline and diminish the credibility of his frames. As some in the news pointed out, Nixon could easily remove the parts of the tapes that were confidential or national security-related, and turn over the remaining content.

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[170] *CBS Evening News*, August 17, 1973.
[171] *NBC Evening News*, August 17, 1973.
[172] Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 12.

The least likely frame to appear on the nightly news was also the frame least employed by Nixon, portraying himself as persecuted by partisan enemies. One difficulty in gaining support for this frame was that Nixon's opponents and so-called "partisan enemies" were individuals like Senator Ervin and special prosecutor Archibald Cox, figures not already despised or distrusted by the American people.[173] Ervin also took to the airwaves to directly refute this point, contending that every member of the Watergate committee would be happy if the final report showed Nixon was innocent.[174] Additionally, as televised news often covered, many Republicans were critical of Nixon, taking away some of the sting of the "partisan" charge. Generally, however, televised news did not offer a very broad array of prominent Republicans critical of the president, as print did. This reflected the national scope of their broadcasts, compared to the newspapers, which frequently included the views of local politicians and members of Congress.

Navigating the Uncharted Waters of the 1970's Media Landscape

The nightly news coverage during the week of Nixon's speech illustrates the media's sense of their changing role in American politics and newly adversarial relationship with the government. Immediately after Nixon spoke, ABC anchor Howard K. Smith reacted to the speech saying he believed there was "no substitute for interrogation" and that he felt "the need to ask questions rather than repeat what he

[173] As Kutler (1990) argues, Ervin in particular presented a problem for Nixon because he was definitively not viewed as a member of a Northeastern liberal axis or a Ted Kennedy crony (Stanley J. Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990, 345). It might also be noted that though Nixon did not go after Judge John Sirica directly, the judge was also a popular figure, widely praised for his pursuit of the facts in the Watergate case. He was named *Time* magazine's Man of the Year for 1973, exemplifying his positive media portrayal.
[174] *CBS Evening News*, August 16, 1973 & *NBC Evening News*, August 16, 1973.

said."[175] This illustrates one of the major sources of negative coverage for Nixon after the speech: the perception of journalists on all three networks that there still were too many unanswered questions about the scandal. The media seemed to be feeling the weight of its recently assumed "watchdog" responsibility to aggressively question politicians, and of concerns about not getting that opportunity. Smith represents a group of journalists thirsting for more information from the president, presented not on his terms, but on their own.

A fair amount of modern media "hype" and high expectations were also generated in advance of the speech, as ABC emphasized how the president had swept his calendar clear and holed up at Camp David to prepare the statement, and that he would need specifics, rather than a general assertion of innocence, to satisfy the Watergate committee.[176] Not mincing words before Nixon's appearance, NBC labeled it "the most important speech of his presidency."[177] Presidents caught in scandals must also be conscious of managing expectations of what the media believe they will say prior to rhetorical efforts to minimize the damage. Further, given that Nixon's last major statement on Watergate was issued back in May, he also may have made the mistake of heightening expectations by waiting too long to speak publicly.

Although not to the extent of today's constantly evolving, lightning-fast news cycle of twenty-four hours news networks and the Internet, by the 1970's television journalism had evolved to the point that new developments were required to keep the president's frames in daily coverage. As most of the content of the August 15th speech was largely not seen as new information, the speech had a short shelf life on the news.

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[175] *ABC News*, Special Report Coverage of the President's Speech, August 15, 1973.
[176] *ABC Evening News*, August 15, 1973.
[177] *NBC Evening News*, August 15, 1973.

The Nixon administration seemed eventually to understand this, and on the last day of news looked at here, the president held a press conference where he subjected himself to questions from journalists. President Nixon was able to repeat many of the frames from his speech, particularly that he was innocent and a zealous investigator, that the nation must move on, and that the transgressions involved were not that bad. These frames were then expressed in the coverage, with little to undermine them, except for two fairly problematic stories for the president. ABC ran an accompanying story illustrating the ways Nixon's statements contradicted those of other witnesses in the Watergate case, though the segment did not firmly side against the president's version of events.[178] CBS engaged in a bit of investigative reporting, contacting a former assistant attorney general who denied that wiretappings had run rampant under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in the name of national security, as Nixon had asserted.[179] Though some of the analyzed print outlets contended the behavior of previous presidents did not provide an excuse for Watergate, nowhere in the print coverage was it denied preceding administrations had undertaken these actions, and in some articles it was clearly substantiated.

As would become common for scandal-ridden presidents, Nixon attacked the press during this period for obsessing over Watergate and failing to report on more important matters. Nixon's public criticisms of the media were mentioned in five different stories on CBS and NBC, several focusing on his statement during his aforementioned press conference that "ten to fifteen minutes a night on each of the networks" of news about Watergate was a constant barrage placing questions in the

[178] *ABC Evening News*, August 22, 1973.
[179] *CBS Evening News*, August 22, 1973.

public's mind. Nixon charged thirty minutes into the conference, "I have yet to have…one question on the business of the people."[180] Though Nixon may have been one of the first presidents to so openly and emphatically attack the messenger, he may also have employed this tactic too early. In 1973, public cynicism and distrust of the media was not as widespread as it would be later, and so provided minimal returns for the embattled president.[181]

An intense media interest in politicians' psychology, character, personalities, and motivations highlighted in the introduction was also evident.[182] The most likely traits to be mentioned by television reporters as applying to Nixon were nervous, irritated, defiant, and under pressure -- and perhaps "cracking." NBC took this personal focus to its greatest extreme during this time period, broadcasting a segment in which Nixon's spokesperson admitted that the president had been under "extraordinary pressure" over the past few months, but denied Nixon was taking medications.[183] Another NBC reporter noted that Nixon sweat less profusely during his press conference then he usually did when tense.[184]

In contrast to 19th century journalism and the Grant Whiskey Ring coverage, public opinion was an important component to the networks' coverage of the Watergate

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[180] *NBC Evening News*, August 22, 1973.
[181] An August/September 2009 Gallup poll showed that less than half of all Americans today (45%) have a great deal or fair amount of confidence in the media to report the news fully, accurately, and fairly.
[182] A particular incident involving the president and one of his aides was used as a launching point by the networks for such psychologically oriented content.[182] On August 20th, CBS and NBC broadcast stories about Nixon telling his press secretary Ronald Ziegler he did not want any reporters with him and that the situation should be taken care of, simultaneously shoving Ziegler back toward press members. While airing footage of the episode, reporters focused on the president's state of mind, but while CBS characterized the moment as a presidential loss of temper, NBC charitably attributed it to Nixon's nervousness about a thwarted assassination plot revealed earlier in the day. NBC even cast Nixon in a nearly heroic light, emphasizing that the president went on to deliver his speech for the day despite the threats to his life. CBS, in contrast, aired a follow up story on the shove to focus on the fact that no official apology had been issued by Nixon to Ziegler (*CBS Evening News*, August 21, 1973).
[183] *NBC Evening News*, August 21, 1973.
[184] *NBC Evening News*, August 22, 1973.

story. Each of the three networks supplemented their poll coverage with pieces where journalists spoke to average citizens to gauge their reactions to the speech.[185] On all three networks, the Americans interviewed spoke primarily about character traits (seemingly on their own initiative), especially as to whether or not Nixon was believable, honest, and likeable. In the CBS report, several respondents stressed concerns about Nixon's assertions that he didn't know about the affair, expressing doubts this was true or dismay that "if he didn't know a third of what was going on, he shouldn't have been elected."[186] The visual imagery included many of the interviewees shaking their heads in disbelief at the television as Nixon delivered his speech.

Nightly News Television Coverage During the Second Time Period: October 19th – 29th, 1973

I also analyzed October 19th – 29th, 1973, to see how Nixon's frames fared over time and when other political actors weighed in. By this time, the remaining relevant frames were the president casting himself as innocent and a zealous investigator, Nixon acting as a noble defender of the presidential office, and Nixon as persecuted by partisan enemies. These dates span events that would submit Nixon's frames to rigorous tests, including the Saturday Night Massacre, when the president, seeking to fire special prosecutor Archibald Cox, accepted the resignations in protest of Attorney General Elliot Richardson and Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus before Robert Bork, elevated to acting Attorney General, finally agreed to dismiss Cox. Additionally, on

[185] The settings for these pieces included a Chicago commuter train, a Ford Motors plant, a Wisconsin bar, and a wealthy suburb of Los Angeles.
[186] *CBS Evening News*, August 16, 1973.

October 23rd, the impeachment process was set in motion in the House of Representatives, providing Nixon's opponents with a great deal of public exposure.

Over these ten days, Nixon also took the opportunity to reiterate some of his August 15th frames and attempted to garner better coverage. In his statement proposing a transcript of the tapes be provided after being verified by Democratic Senator John Stennis, who would be allowed to listen to the tapes, Nixon again asserted his innocence, his noble defense of the presidency, and his persecution by partisan enemies, and urged Americans to move on to more serious issues.[187] Additionally, Nixon's agreement (later rescinded) on October 23rd to turn the tapes over to the courts, offers an opportunity to see if he was able to shift coverage in a more positive direction. A foreign policy "crisis" also emerged during these October dates, as war had broken out between Israel and several Arab states, including Egypt and Syria. The White House said it received reports that the Soviet Union was going to move troops into the Middle East, and in response the president placed American forces around the world on precautionary alert.

Analysis of Frame Coverage

Of the 77 stories analyzed, a plurality of 45% reflected negatively on Nixon and his frames, but positive and neutral stories combined composed 55% of what was broadcast. The breakdown was thus comparable to the coverage in mid-August. ABC again was the most negative of the three networks, followed by NBC, while CBS was the purveyor of the most positive and neutral stories.

[187] "Text of Nixon's Statement on the Watergate Tapes." *The New York Times* October 20, 1973.

Table 3.2

Frames Appearances Undermined

October Frames	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC
Innocent/Zealous Investigator	3	8	6	1	6	5
Noble Defense of Presidency	2	3	2	0	1	1
Persecuted by Partisan Enemies	5	6	5	3	3	3

The frame most likely to appear in the coverage during this later period was that of Nixon as innocent/zealous investigator, though unfortunately for the president it was also the second most likely to be undermined. NBC speculated that Nixon's motivations in firing Cox stemmed from his desire to quell the investigation, contending that the special prosecutor was looking into many problematic areas for the president, from his taxes to campaign contributions to wiretaps.[188] CBS backed this interpretation as well, with commentator Eric Sevareid contending that Nixon's move to place the investigation back under the White House within the Justice Department would allow him to keep it limited.[189] Tying Cox's dismissal to the scope of his investigation was a theme that would also be expressed in the print coverage.

When the White House reversed its position and agreed to submit the tapes to Judge Sirica on October 23rd, both NBC and ABC journalists cast the president as complying against his will, saying Nixon fired Cox but had realized he could not fire Sirica. Generally, the three networks traced Nixon's agreement to turn over the tapes to the president coming face to face with "the danger of impeachment," as Walter Cronkite

[188] *NBC Evening News*, October 22, 1973.
[189] *CBS Evening News*, October 23, 1973.

of CBS expounded.[190] Typically this interpretation of events was only offset by occasional reference to the official White House line that impeachment had nothing to do with the president's decision.[191]

Acting Attorney General Bork was one of the few figures to appear on the news during this time who was very supportive of framing Nixon as a zealous investigator, publicly asserting that he would carry on Cox's work, as was the president's will and directive.[192] Journalists commenting on the case sometimes backed this perspective as well. One NBC journalist reported that the chances of the Justice Department pursuing the investigation to the same degree Cox did were better than they might appear, because key Justice Department officials wanted to vindicate themselves and some of Cox's assistants were still on the case. A reporter for ABC asserted public skepticism would make it very hard for the department not to move forward with the inquiry.[193]

Nixon's insinuation that he was being persecuted by partisan enemies was the second most likely frame found in the broadcasts, and the third most likely to be disputed. Senator Edward Gurney of Florida was a public backer of this frame, maintaining after the special prosecutor's firing that it had been Democratic partisan politics that got Cox appointed in the first place.[194] Senator Bob Dole of Kansas was quoted by NBC charging that Democrats in Congress saw an opportunity to take down Nixon.[195] There were, then, high-profile Republicans unafraid to back Nixon publicly and point blame toward the opposing party. Occasionally, journalists would independently

[190] *CBS Evening News*, October 23, 1973.
[191] *CBS Evening News*, October 23, 1973.
[192] *ABC Evening News*, October 22, 1973; *CBS Evening News*, October 22, 1973; *NBC Evening News*, October 24, 1973.
[193] *NBC Evening News*, October 23, 1973 and *ABC Evening News*, October 24, 1973.
[194] *CBS Evening News*, October 22, 1973.
[195] *NBC Evening News*, October 24, 1973.

corroborate the partisan cast of Nixon's foes, as when CBS News pointed to the efforts of "liberal Democratic senators" to gain access to more Watergate evidence and push forward with impeachment.[196]

Still, opposition to this frame was a substantial presence in the coverage too, particularly when the networks focused on the call of many congressional Republicans for a new special prosecutor.[197] While the entire party did not abandon Nixon, he had vocal Republican critics. Furthermore, even throughout this short time period, some of the president's most vocal defenders became his attackers. Just a few days after Gurney had assailed the partisan cast to the special prosecutor, newscasts discussed his urging for a new special prosecutor to be appointed immediately.[198] Analyzing the situation, one CBS reporter pointed out that one reason the Saturday Night Massacre was so damaging for Nixon was because most of the public saw men like Cox and Richardson as the "good guys" in the affair, not as partisans.[199]

The president's noble defense of the presidency was one of the more successful frames for the administration in this later time period on television. Though former Attorney General Richardson was not always an advocate of the president's frames, CBS News did cover his assertion that Nixon had refused to give up the tapes because of genuine executive privilege concerns, and not because they would show him to be

[196] *CBS Evening News*, October 22, 1973.
[197] *ABC Evening News*, October 24, 1973; *NBC Evening News*, October 25, 1973.
[198] *NBC Evening News*, October 25, 1973; *CBS Evening News*, October 29, 1973.
[199] *CBS Evening News*, October 24, 1973. This presentation of Richardson as a heroic figure in the television news coverage was also evident in special live news broadcasts not included in this nightly news analysis. When Richardson appeared at a press conference to discuss his resignation on October 23rd, he was greeted by a sustained standing ovation from Justice Department employees in attendance. All three network anchors commented on the unusual and strongly supportive nature of this occurrence, and to the viewer it imparted a portrait of an official who bravely did the right thing, though it cost him his job.

guilty.[200] Even the frequently critical Howard K. Smith of ABC commented that Congress was taking a major risk by attacking the presidency and endangering confidentiality, because the nation requires a strong president and past efforts to weaken the office had been disastrous.[201]

Despite extensive coverage of the battle between the president and other institutions over the Watergate tapes, the nightly newscasts, as in August, rarely explained the concept of executive privilege. In four stories, the administration articulated that the public was "confused" about the Stennis tapes plan proposed by the White House, alternately because of the rapid speed with which events were progressing and/or because the special prosecutor had deliberately obscured things.[202] The White House attempted to explain away public anger toward Nixon identified in the news as a manifestation of misinformation rather than dissatisfaction. This argument was rarely mentioned in print coverage.

October's Focus: Impeachment and Public Anger

Congress loomed much larger in the October broadcasts. Twenty-seven percent of the October time frame news stories focused on members of Congress, compared to only thirteen percent in August. Consistent with those August stories, the majority of these segments portrayed Nixon and his frames negatively. Senator Ted Kennedy was featured in about a third of the Congress-centered pieces, and was always harshly critical of the

[200] *CBS Evening News*, October 23, 1973.
[201] *ABC Evening News*, October 29, 1973.
[202] *ABC Evening News*, October 22, 1973 & October 23, 1973; *NBC Evening News*, October 22, 1973; and *CBS Evening News*, October 23, 1973.

administration.[203] Just after the Saturday Night Massacre, ABC News reported that "talk of impeachment no longer sounds like idle chatter" and quoted two congressional members who came down on opposing sides as to whether or not the legislature had the "guts" to impeach Nixon.[204]

Part of the explanation for why impeachment possibilities became more real in the October broadcasts was the "surge in public anger" following the Saturday Night Massacre to which reporters and members of Congress frequently pointed.[205] ABC and CBS broadcast footage of protesters outside the White House with "Honk for Impeachment" signs, and NBC covered a college protest where Nixon was burned in effigy.[206] An October 26th segment on ABC showed a young male protester with long hair and older male Nixon supporter outside the White House in a shouting match about the Watergate affair, giving the viewer the impression that the scandal was tearing the nation apart.

There were seven stories during the October time frame that discussed the Watergate scandal and the presidential crisis as hurting America. Of these seven, three segments cast this as Nixon's fault, two stories the fault of others (the special prosecutor and Congress), and two in which attribution of blame was to no one in particular or unclear. Perceptions varied as to whether impeachment would help the situation. CBS News discussed how removal of the president was now a much more realistic possibility, yet wondered if the country was ready for "the agony of impeachment."[207] NBC's David

[203] *ABC Evening News*, October 22, 1973.
[204] *ABC Evening News*, October 22, 1973.
[205] *NBC Evening News*, October 22, 1973.
[206] *ABC Evening News*, October 22, 1973; *CBS Evening News*, October 22, 1973; *NBC Evening News*, October 24, 1973.
[207] *CBS Evening News*, October 22, 1973.

Brinkley forecast a future of three more years of an ineffective Nixon, distrusted by the people and breeding cynicism about government -- "the country can endure it, but it's up to Congress to decide if they have to," Brinkley concluded.[208] There was very little explanation on the part of the televised nightly news as to how the impeachment process worked, which might contribute to public apprehensions about sanctioning the move.

Far fewer stories during the October broadcasts took up questions of the president's psychology and character. One of the only times these issues surfaced in the coverage was when AFL-CIO President George Meany blamed Nixon's last minute cancellation of a speech on his "emotional instability." NBC and CBS both covered these remarks, but devoted the same amount of time to the White House's rebuttal, that this was an "incredible, inexcusable, irresponsible" statement.[209]

Print Coverage Post-Speech: August 15th – 22nd, 1973

The three newspapers analyzed here were *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and *The Washington Post*.[210] A plurality (43%) of the *New York Times*' articles negatively portrayed the president and his frames, and only 20% of the coverage could be

[208] *NBC Evening News*, October 25, 1973.
[209] *CBS Evening News*, October 24, 1973 & *NBC Evening News*, October 24, 1973.
[210] The three newspapers selected here represent different geographic areas of the nation, and different perceived partisan leanings. The *Chicago Tribune* supported President Nixon in his two presidential election bids, and was generally seen as a more Republican-friendly outlet. The *Tribune* also often placed less of an emphasis on the Watergate story, not featuring Watergate on its front page until August 27, 1972 and putting the scandal on its lead page only thirteen times, compared to 79 and 33 times for the *Post* and *Times* respectively (Kutler, 226). The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* were seen as more left-leaning, and by the White House as outright hostile to the Nixon Administration, in part because of the role the latter played in breaking the Watergate story. Further, the *Times* and the *Post* are part of the "prestige press" in American journalism, and frequently set the tone for how other outlets will cover national stories. Articles run in these newspapers from wire news services such as the Associated Press and United Press International were included in this analysis as well, and these pieces were run throughout the country in many different print outlets.

categorized as positive for Nixon and his claims.[211] Over the course of this week in August, the *Times* published nine editorials, every single one of them negative. These editorials systematically tore into Nixon's frames, particularly his claims for executive privilege, his call to move on from Watergate, and his assertion that the events were not that bad, especially the national security angle. However, the *Times* also featured four opinion commentary columns by authors that defended Nixon on assorted bases, pointing to "an anti-Nixon vendetta…utterly appalling in its depth of hatred and recrimination" in Congress and the press,[212] and comparing Senator Ervin to Joe McCarthy.[213]

In the *Chicago Tribune*, 32% of the stories covered Nixon and/or his frames in a more positive light, but negative stories composed a plurality of 39% and neutral pieces 29% of the coverage. Additionally, the paper's coverage included some entirely positive portrayals of the president, such as an opinion piece about how successful Nixon's foreign policy moves had been and how beloved he was in Israel.[214] Only four editorials on Watergate appeared in the *Tribune* in this period, two negative and two neutral. It seems then that in prominent mainstream newspapers, Nixon was hard pressed to get a supportive editorial written.

The *Washington Post* had the most negative coverage of Nixon and his frames, at roughly 53% of the articles analyzed. The *Post* only featured three editorials, all of them negative, and the majority of the opinion pieces by commentators were also negative. The *Post* coverage tended toward very lengthy and detailed articles harshly critical of the

[211] Throughout this print outlet article analysis, a "positive" article was one that mainly conveyed President Nixon and/or his frames in a supportive light, "negative" those that were mostly critical or provided opposition to Nixon or his frames, and "neutral" those that did not provide content supportive or critical of the president and his frames, or that presented a fairly even representation of both sides/perspectives.
[212] Smith, Franklin B. "Outrageous Exploitation." *The New York Times*. August 15, 1973.
[213] Stein, Benjamin. "Mocking the Constitution." *The New York Times*. August 18, 1973.
[214] Thimmesch, Nick. "Nixon is popular with Israelis." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 16, 1973.

president and Watergate, often citing anonymous sources in the government to back the substance of their claims.[215]

Table 3.3

Nixon's Frames in Print Coverage

Frames Appearances[216] Undermined[217]

August Frames	NYT	CT	WP	NYT	CT	WP
Mistakes but…not that bad	21	31	22	15	11	10
…not really my fault	11	7	6	12	3	7
…not totally their fault	23	14	12	30	9	14
Innocent/Zealous Investigator	39	22	30	42	29	49
Move on/Real Problems/Courts	56	29	62	27	11	54
Noble Defense of Presidency	49	22	38	51	13	21
Persecuted by Partisan Enemies	31	24	21	11	2	7

Most Successful Frames

Overall in the *Times*, Nixon's call for the nation to move on from the scandal, focus on real problems, and turn remaining issues over to the courts was one of the president's most effective frames. It was extremely prominent the day after the speech,

[215] Use of anonymous sources however did not necessarily mean that the resulting article would be critical of the president and his frames. The *Tribune* made use of anonymous high-level White House sources in an article detailing Nixon's commitment to make government work more effectively and lead the country as president. The lack of opposing viewpoints included in the story demonstrates once again that perhaps the president was not his own best defender. (Beckman, Aldo. "Nixon and Watergate: what will happen now?" *The Chicago Tribune*. August 19, 1973).

[216] "Appearances" of a frame in the print news analysis were counted as the number of sentences that conveyed or supported that particular frame.

[217] In print, undermined stands for the number of sentences that contradicted or opposed the substance of Nixon's frames.

comprising a huge capital letter headline on the front page.[218] At times this frame was also echoed or supported by average citizens in the paper, as well as linked to general cynicism about government, apparent in statements such as "Those know-nothin' Senators are spending millions of the tax-payers' dollars just to get themselves on TV…everybody is so disgusted with Watergate. They're tired of it."[219] The president's call to move on was also well-represented in the *Tribune*. Unlike television news sources, however, print outlets on occasion asserted, "[I]t is doubtful that, without impeachment, a President can be prosecuted,"[220] creating some suspicion about Nixon's motives behind the "turn Watergate over to the courts" frame.

In the *Post*, one of the relatively successful frames was Nixon's assertion he was engaging in a noble defense of the presidency. The support for the frame was not overwhelming, but comparatively favorable given the negative tenor of much of the paper's coverage. Lengthy articles detailing the White House counsel's arguments in defense of the executive privilege claims Nixon outlined in his speech were given far more space than arguments challenging those claims. These accounts were even complete with compelling hypothetical examples provided by the attorneys demonstrating the concept's importance.[221] The print format allowed for far more explanation of the executive privilege frame than did television.

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[218] Apple Jr., R.W. "Nixon Asks Watergate Be Left to Courts and Nation 'Get On With Urgent Business'; Denies Any Part in Break-In or Cover-Up." *The New York Times.* August 16, 1973.
[219] Malcolm, Andrew H. "…and Many Other Things." *The New York Times*. August 19, 1973.
[220] Starr, Frank. "Thus spake Nixon about the Watergate." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 19,1973. This view is also expressed in "Letters to the Editor." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 20, 1973 and Fritchey, Clayton. "Mr. Nixon's Constitutional Strategy." *The Washington Post* August 18, 1973.
[220] Lardner, Jr. George. "President Responds to Cox." *The Washington Post* August 18, 1973.

Also fairly successful was Nixon's accusation of being persecuted by partisan enemies, which appeared the least amount in the *Times* and the *Post* of all five frames in the coverage, but was less likely to be undercut. This frame was most effective in the *Tribune*; as a more Republican-friendly outlet, the motif of Nixon-hating vindictive Democrats may have been a compelling one for the paper. Shoring up its right-leaning credentials, the *Tribune* was the only outlet to provide space for comments like those of Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz, who deemed Ervin's Senate Watergate committee the "committee to kill the President."[222] A neutral news piece on August 19th declared, "The Senate Watergate committee investigation has disintegrated into a partisan political fight" and emphasized the hearings and investigation were now far over budget, giving the impression the whole endeavor was a major waste of time and money.[223]

Ervin was also more likely to be subjected to criticism in print than on television– a story appearing in the *Times* and *Tribune* quoted some of his constituents saying they could not understand why he was going after the president and that with all his focus on the hearings, he was failing to work for them.[224] By contrast, the *Post* tended to cover Ervin positively, with one opinion column writer deeming him "the wise old senator," and publishing of a profile of the man and his personal history.[225] Any substantial articles detailing Ervin's life story and career certainly would make his persona appear to be more than just that of a two-dimensional vindictive liberal. There was a danger, however, that the "partisan enemies" frame could be labeled "divisive" or aimed only at Nixon's

[222] "Gives it a new name: Butz rips bug panel." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 16, 1973.
[223] Squires, Jim. "Partisan fights hamper bugging probe." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 19,1973.
[224] King, Wayne. "Back at home, Sen. Ervin has both friends and critics." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 22, 1973 and King, Wayne. "That Watergate Senator Down Home in Carolina." *The New York Times*. August 16, 1973.
[225] Anderson, Jack. "American System Is Still Holding Up." *The Washington Post* August 16, 1973 and Mitchell, Henry. "In the Land of His Fathers And His God." *The Washington Post* August 19, 1973.

base, as it was in the *Post*.[226] This was possibly a critique the president hoped to avoid by making his few references to the "partisan enemies" claim more veiled and muted than for other frames.

Nixon's assertion that mistakes had been made but with qualifying statements had the most appearances of any frame in the *Tribune*'s coverage, with reasons why it was "not that bad" a success, and "not totally the fault of the burglars" quite problematic. The *Tribune* was especially helpful in promoting Nixon's assertion that all recent presidents and administrations had employed such tactics, with several articles devoted to verifying this account, and citing Lyndon B. Johnson as the worst offender.[227] However, the national security elements of the "not that bad" frame were the subject of criticism even in the *Tribune*, as was the case on televised news, most notably through the disparagement of the frame by Secretary of State Rogers.[228]

"Not that bad" also fared reasonably well in the *Post*, undermined with less than half of the space with which it appeared, which made it better supported than in the *Times* but less so than in the *Tribune*. One commentator writing in the *Post* noted that Nixon had shown a remarkable amount of self-restraint given the fact he has been "publicly portrayed as a monster of iniquity for doing precisely what his most admired predecessors had also done, and sometimes on a far larger, more surprising scale."[229]

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[226] Will, George F. "Divide and Conquer?" *The Washington Post* August 20, 1973 and Childs, Marquis. "Mr. Nixon's Speeches to 'Friends.'" *The Washington Post* August 21, 1973.
[227] Squires, Jim. "LBJ's political use of FBI is bared." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 15, 1973; "An FBI myth is exploded." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune*. August 16, 1973; Safire, William. "How to put an end to eavesdropping." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 17, 1973 and Squires, Jim. "J. Edgar's private myth: President Hoover." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 19, 1973.
[228] "Rogers raps violations of civil rights by U.S." AP. *The Chicago Tribune*. August 21, 1973 and Marder, Murrey. "Rogers Hits 'Obsession' On Security." *The Washington Post* August 21, 1973.
[229] Alsop, Joseph. "The President: Standing 'Above the Battle'…." *The Washington Post* August 17, 1973.

Like the *Tribune*, but to a lesser extent, the *Post* covered past presidential uses of the FBI to gain information about their political enemies, focusing especially on FDR and LBJ.[230]

Least Successful Frames

Although Nixon's call to move on from the scandal was fairly successful in the *Times* and even more so in the *Tribune*, the *Post* treated the frame far more harshly, and it stood as the second most likely frame to be subverted within its pages. In a major article recounting the speech, the *Post* quoted an observer maintaining that "if, as the President says, it is time to turn Watergate over to the courts, it means that the time has come to turn over the tapes to the special prosecutor."[231] An opinion piece contended that there were no more significant matters to move on to, because "[n]o business before the American people is anywhere near as important as achieving honest government."[232]

The editors of the *Post* even took up their own investigation of Nixon's claims that the real problems of the country were being given short shrift by the "obsession" with Watergate. They demonstrated that Congress had acted upon a number of important issues while the hearings were going on, and perhaps even had been "spurred…to greater activity and independence."[233] A similar analysis by columnist George Will in the paper declared Nixon's assertions that "because of Watergate, the congressional calendar is gathering cobwebs" to be "nonsense."[234] In total, there are so many news and commentary pieces in the *Post* devoted to tearing down the "move on" frame compared

[230] Claiborne, William. "Sullivan Memo Cited FDR, LBJ Use of FBI." *The Washington Post* August 21, 1973.
[231] Broder, David S. "Says Tapes' Release Would Be 'Crippling.'" *The Washington Post* August 16, 1973.
[232] Kraft, Joseph. "America's Important Problem." *The Washington Post* August 19, 1973.
[233] "Congress, the Hearings and the Nation's Business." Editorial. *The Washington Post* August 19, 1973.
[234] Will, George F. "Divide and Conquer?" *The Washington Post* August 20, 1973.

to the other outlets analyzed, it appeared to be a conscious choice on the part of the paper's reporters, columnists, and editors. As this frame seemed to have some traction with the public, the *Post*'s hostility to it was no doubt damaging to the Nixon image rehabilitation project.

The specific narrative woven by Nixon most likely to be called into question in the *Times* was his framing of the actions of the Watergate conspirators as produced by the 1960s' subjective morality and disregard for the law, and so "not completely their fault." Though seldom mentioned or undermined in televised news, in the *Times* this frame was subject to substantial backlash. The paper quoted Sargent Shriver responding that Nixon "has no conception of standing up for what you believe in, compared to undercover, devious efforts to serve a partisan cause."[235] The *Times*' editors bluntly declared this connection made by the president was "a linkage that cannot survive serious analysis."[236]

The *Post* also devoted more space to refuting than supporting this assignment of blame to a skewed 1960's morality, and quoted religious leaders furious that Nixon would "equate with lawlessness the public expression of sorrow and indignation about war and injustice."[237] Even the *Tribune* joined in, with an article about the Southern Christian Leadership Conference whose leaders detailed why the civil rights movement was nothing like the actions taken by the president's supporters in Watergate.[238] However, the editorial board of the *Tribune* backed the president's frame, asserting that a decade prior, some of Nixon's currently most vocal critics were claiming a "higher

[235] Lydon, Christopher. "Reaction to Nixon Speech: Less in It Than Expected." *The New York Times.* August 16, 1973.
[236] "The President Replies." Editorial. *The New York Times*. August 16, 1973.
[237] Broder, David S. "Nixon Left Many Dissatisfied." *The Washington Post* August 17, 1973.
[238] Page, Clarence. "SCLC official assails President's Watergate speech." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 17, 1973.

morality" and "the right to take the law into their own hands."[239] Some prominent conservatives seemed willing to adopt the frame, as Senator Goldwater and Senator Jesse Helms both echoed it at a convention for young conservatives.[240]

Also ineffective in the *Times* were Nixon's frames that he personally was not really at fault, his portrayal of his role as one of innocence and a zealous investigator, and his assertion that he was primarily interested in defending executive privilege and the presidency as an institution. More space was given in the *Times* to refuting all three of these frames than to reiterating or supporting them. One *Times* columnist explicitly countered Nixon was "not the preoccupied, innocent victim of his 'overzealous' aides. The style of politics that the White House has played during these Nixon years is a style that he inspired, encouraged and approved."[241]

"Not really my fault" also took a beating in the *Post*, undermined with more sentences than with which it appeared. The paper's editors decried the "curiously detached status – almost that of bemused spectator – which Mr. Nixon assumed for himself" when these actions were taken on his behalf and on his watch as president.[242] The editorial portrayed Nixon as a man in denial, "yet to face up to the meaning of Watergate… yet to acknowledge, even to himself, what went wrong."[243]

Nixon's portrayal of himself as innocent and a zealous investigator was the weakest frame in the *Tribune* coverage, the only frame in the paper to have more space devoted to opposing it than supporting it. It also rarely appeared in the articles,

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[239] "The status remains quo." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune*. August 17, 1973.
[240] Frederickson, Ted. "Goldwater, Helms Echo Nixon Speech At YAF Convention." *The Washington Post* August 17, 1973.
[241] Shannon, William V. "Cover-Up." *The New York Times* August 21, 1973.
[242] "Mr. Nixon on TV." Editorial. *The Washington Post* August 17, 1973.
[243] "Mr. Nixon on TV." Editorial. *The Washington Post* August 17, 1973.

particularly problematic for Nixon's ability to argue a key component of his case. The primary focus of the paper's negative coverage toward the president was bent on tearing down Nixon's assertions of his innocence and zealous investigation. More space was given in this paper than in the *Times* and *Post* to disputing this frame.

Newspapers Cite Unanswered Questions and Character Deficiencies

Unanswered Questions

As on television, a consistent problem for Nixon's innocent/zealous investigator frame in print was the view that the president's speech fell short in leaving too many unanswered questions or not providing enough new information in response to the accusations against him. This critique was mentioned in fourteen stories in the *Times*, twelve in the *Post*, and eleven in the *Tribune*.[244] The day after the speech, the *Times*' James Reston declared that Nixon "introduced not a single new fact and answered none of the major ambiguities or contradictions of the Ervin hearings."[245] Even Republican Barry Goldwater was a source feeding the *Times* this line, proclaiming, "In my opinion the President did not add anything to his other speeches that would tend to divert suspicion from him."[246] Frequently the *Times* would allude to the many unanswered

[244] One of only a handful of times this claim of not enough new or specific appearing in Nixon's speech was refuted in the *Times* was in a letter to the editor by a reader who questioned, were Nixon to offer "a new denial, would he then be condemned for changing his story?" and asserted that "to complain of 'no new information' in the President's speech…is to reveal a bias toward a pretrial verdict of guilty on all counts" ("Letters to the Editor." *The New York Times*. August 19, 1973). Another instance was in a William Safire column where he claimed that even with new information or specific refutation of charges, Nixon's critics would not have been satisfied, a piece that also appeared in the *Tribune* (Safire, William. "Lessons of Watergate." *The New York Times* August 20, 1973). Finally, in the *Tribune*, an anonymous administration source claimed the reason for the lack of specifics was a fear "the controversy could go on and on without end" and further damage and distract the country (Beckman, Aldo. "Nixon and Watergate: what will happen now?" *The Chicago Tribune*. August 19, 1973).

[245] Reston, James. "Old Story, New Words. Nixon Merely Proclaimed Innocence and Questions Remain Unanswered." *The New York Times*. August 16, 1973.

[246] Lydon, Christopher. "Reaction to Nixon Speech: Less in It Than Expected." *The New*

questions as the primary reason the nation could not "move on" from Watergate as the president requested. A specific unanswered question was the focus of a lengthy news analysis piece by the *Post*, pertaining to how the president could have continued to use John Dean as "his chief Watergate reporter" for nine days after supposedly realizing on March 21st that updates he had been getting on the scandal were not entirely accurate.[247]

The *Times* also identified the omission of specific answers as a deliberate White House strategy, reporting the administration felt "the specific questions to which Mr. Nixon refused last night to address himself will gradually fade from public consciousness, while his general denial and his future activities will come to the fore."[248] The *Times* reported that the president's team also rejected a more complete response to the charges because of "the possibility that the details could have been refuted."[249] So the *Times* identified the risks in all options before the president, but deemed leaving so many unanswered questions to be greatly problematic, suggesting doubts about Nixon's innocence.

Nixon himself likely contributed to this problem as his speech included the lines:

> "It would not be right for me to try to sort out the evidence, to rebut specific witnesses, or to pronounce my own judgments about their credibility. That is for the committee and for the courts. I shall not attempt to deal tonight with the various charges in detail. Rather, I shall attempt to put the events in perspective from the standpoint of the Presidency."

York Times. August 16, 1973. Goldwater however was not a consistent critic of the president, and was quoted in the *Tribune* the following day backing Nixon's partisan enemies claim, saying liberal politicians were trying to "discredit everything the Nixon administration achieved or promised which runs counter to the liberal thesis of unlimited government" ("Nixon's speech upsets probers of Watergate." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 17, 1973).

[247] Hanrahan, John. "Speech Raises New Question." *The Washington Post* August 17, 1973.

[248] Apple Jr., R.W. "Nixon Aides Sure He Has Deflated Watergate Issue." *The New York Times*. August 17, 1973.

[249] Herbers, John. "Nixon and the Political Prospects." *The New York Times*. August 17, 1973.

In calling attention to this, Nixon identified shortcomings and unmet expectations in his own speech, and made it easy for even "objective" news pieces to stress this lack of specifics, without appearing as though journalists were making a value judgment.

Character/Psychology/Personal Coverage

The coverage of all three papers focusing on or making reference to character, psychology, or personal issues related to Nixon and Watergate was roughly the same as by television. But whereas on August television broadcasts a discussion of Nixon's psychology was typically event driven, that is, brought about because of telling behavior such as the president shoving his press secretary, in print such issues were discussed in full length stories.[250] For instance, the *Tribune* printed excerpts from Theodore H. White's book, The Making of the President 1972, which primarily engaged in psychologically profiling Nixon.[251] A commentary piece in the *Post* pinned the discrepancy between the president's foreign policy triumphs and domestic problems squarely on his psychological orientation. As media analysts decades later would do with President Clinton, the article identified a Nixon of dual personas, "conciliator with our

[250] To be sure, the Ziegler shove was still the focus of news and analysis in the papers, though interpretations of the president's motivations might vary. The *Times* attributed Nixon's action to annoyance because of the "confusion" of his entourage's movements due to the threat on his life ("Nixon Aide Calls Shoving Trivial." *The New York Times* August 22, 1973). The *Tribune* associated similar reasons with Nixon's behavior, while also throwing in the image of the president as an angry boss ("An angry President: The boss gives an order." *The Chicago Tribune* August 21, 1973 and Beckman, Aldo. "Nixon reported tired, under strain." *The Chicago Tribune* August 22, 1973). The *Post* meanwhile recounted White House officials' anonymous explanations, ranging from annoyance to strain and ill health produced by Watergate and his recent battle with pneumonia. The paper cited "reaction from the reporters…that the event [the shove] demonstrated Mr. Nixon's growing irritation with the press as he approaches the first news conference he has held in more than five months" (Cannon, Lou. "Nixon's Edginess Explained by Aides." *The Washington Post* August 22, 1973). Not only was Nixon's hostility to the media magnified by this explanation, but it also positioned journalists as credible sources of psychological analysis of the president.

[251] White, Theodore H. "Nixon molds an image, loses it in Watergate." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 17, 1973.

old enemies and combatant with internal elements," served well by his secrecy and tight control in one arena, but not the other.[252]

A media preoccupation with psychology and character of major politicians, discussed in the introduction as assumed to have escalated in 1960's and 70's, was also evident generally in the print coverage. One *Times* article detailed Nixon's emotional journey throughout the months of the Watergate hearings, from "shock and pain" to becoming "a recluse" to enduring "stress without publicly showing the effects of his frustration."[253] The *Post*'s coverage declared Nixon's demeanor during the August 15th speech to be "low-key" and "tightly controlled," a stark contrast with his April 30th address on Watergate during which he appeared "shaken" and "plaintive."[254] A *Post* opinion column identified Nixon during the address to be "uncharacteristically soft-spoken."[255]

Each newspaper's more positive or negative bent to covering Nixon was also reflected in their descriptions of his character and mental state. The president's character traits most often identified in the *Times* were dishonest, hypocritical, stressed, and frustrated, reflecting the negative tenor of the paper's psychological assessment. The most common characteristics attributed to the president in the *Tribune* were lonely/lonesome, tired, and angry, indicative of a more sympathetic portrayal. Assigned most commonly to Nixon in the *Post* were traits such as strained, angry, upset, grim, and irritated, falling somewhere in between sympathetic and critical.

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[252] Arbeiter, Solomon. "The Two Worlds of Mr. Nixon." *The Washington Post* August 18, 1973.
[253] Herbers, John. "Nixon's Speech: Beginning A Political Offensive." *The New York Times*. August 19, 1973.
[254] Broder, David S. "Says Tapes' Release Would Be 'Crippling.'" *The Washington Post* August 16, 1973.
[255] Evans, Rowland and Robert Novak. "…Buying Time on Watergate." *The Washington Post* August 17, 1973.

Hypocrisy and Contradictions

Another source of negative coverage for Nixon were media figures claiming hypocrisy within his key frames and in his actions, an especially frequent theme in *Times* stories. One editorial contended that even if executive privilege covered the tapes, Nixon waived that privilege by letting his dismissed aide H.R. Haldeman listen to them after he left office.[256] In an article detailing world reaction to Nixon's speech, a West German official was quoted as saying the taping was "something that you would expect to happen in Moscow." Another United Nations delegate weighed in that "the forthrightness that might accompany a 'between ourselves' session may now be drastically diminished."[257] Not only were Nixon's actions portrayed as undemocratic, his arguments supporting executive privilege and withholding the tapes appeared undermined by the very act of secretly recording conversations in the first place.[258]

Nixon also faced the problem that his August 15th speech contradicted some statements he had made in his April 30th address, as the papers pointed out, adding to the

[256] "False Conflict." Editorial. *The New York Times*. August 15, 1973 and "…No Excuse." Editorial. *The New York Times*. August 17, 1973.
[257] "World Reaction to Nixon's Taping is Divided." *The Washington Post* August 16, 1973.
[258] Further establishing the Nixon as hypocrite motif, several times a newspaper source or reader asserted that executive-privilege-advocate Nixon obviously did not believe in doctor-patient confidentiality, as evidenced by the Daniel Ellsberg incident. The White House "plumbers" had broken into Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office in September of 1971, seeking to obtain information that would discredit Ellsberg after he leaked the Pentagon Papers to major newspapers. (Lydon, Christopher. "Reaction to Nixon Speech: Less in It Than Expected." *The New York Times* August 16, 1973; Cannon, Lou and Peter Milius. "1st Reaction of Politicians Is Positive." *The Washington Post* August 16, 1973; "Letters to the Editor." *The Washington Post* August 19, 1973). In a story focused on Nixon's declining popularity with the public, the writer asserted, "Many people feel that the President is using his power unfairly, that the men who campaigned for 'law and order' are showing contempt for the law" (Roberts, Steven V. "Nixon's Popularity in Gallup Poll Declines to 31%, the Lowest Point for an American President in 20 Years." *The New York Times*. August 15, 1973). The *Times*' editorial board declared, "Presidential rhetoric about morality and ethics stood in glaring contrast to the morality and ethics practiced by his inner circle of aides and advisers" ("The Public Trust." Editorial. *The New York Times* August 19, 1973). Hypocrisy amongst the frames was even a topic within the less critical *Tribune*. Its editors pointed out "He vaguely takes 'full responsibility' for the affair, which suggests that it would be wrong to blame his subordinates; yet he repeats that he knew nothing of the Watergate break-in or of the cover-up until last March 21, which suggests that it would be wrong to blame him" ("The status remains quo." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune*. August 17, 1973).

appearance of impropriety on his part. In April, the president claimed he "personally" assumed responsibility for the investigation after March 21st, but in his August address, Nixon said nothing about this, and instead detailed turning to his aides like Dean and Ehrlichman for further reports.[259] Additionally, Nixon admitted that he was "not precisely accurate" when he said in May 1973 he had learned of the break-in at Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office on March 21st, because in fact he knew on March 17th.[260] That no explanation was given for that lapse hurt Nixon's credibility.

Still, looking at the August print coverage as a whole, impeachment did not seem a very real possibility. The most common assessment of the future fell along the lines of David Broder's prediction in the *Washington Post*: "So the legacy of Watergate, we can now say with some assurance, will be a protracted period – over three years – in which the American government is led by a crippled Chief Executive."[261]

Print Coverage During the Second Time Period: October 19th – 29th, 1973

In the *Times,* the October coverage took a far more negative turn from its tone in August. Now, nearly 60% of the articles could be characterized as portraying the president and his frames negatively, with 29% falling into the neutral category and only 11% positive. The *Times* carried thirteen editorials during these ten days, all of them negative. The *Tribune*, too, became more negative than in August, as only 19% of the stories could be classified as positive, about 50% negative, and roughly 30% neutral. Of the seven editorials published in the *Tribune* during this time, three were positive, three negative, and one more neutral. Most critical of the president was the coverage in the

[259] Hanrahan, John. "Speech Raises New Question." *The Washington Post* August 17, 1973.
[260] Hanrahan, John. "Speech Raises New Question." *The Washington Post* August 17, 1973.
[261] Broder, David S. "Truths and Consequences." *The Washington Post* August 19, 1973.

Post, where almost 64% of the stories were negative, about a third neutral, and under 5% representing positive portrayals for Nixon and his frames.

Within this time period some days were worse than others for the president. October 21st, after the Saturday Night Massacre, was particularly bad in the *Times*, with twenty negative articles published in a single day. Though Nixon's daughter Julie, Republican National Committee chairman George Bush, and California Governor Ronald Reagan all favorably likened the Cox firing to Truman's dismissal of General MacArthur during the Korean War, this analogy did not take hold in the *Times* coverage, received a passing reference in the *Post*,[262] and made just a few appearances in the *Tribune*.[263] According to the editors at the *Times*, the resignations of Richardson and Ruckelshaus "did much to persuade the American people and Congress that the President had so far overstepped the bounds of his lawful powers that he now would have to be stopped by any constitutional means necessary."[264]

The day with the most positive and neutral coverage in the *Times* was October 24th, when the paper covered Nixon's "stunning reversal" in agreeing to turn over the tapes to Judge Sirica.[265] The *Times* (as well as the *Post)* explained this development either by implying or directly asserting the president had been motivated out of fear of

[262] Broder, David S. "Nixon Political Clout Shrinks." *The Washington Post* October 22, 1973.
[263] "Parties' Chairmen Split on Legality." *The New York Times* October 23, 1973; Satter, David. "'Gone too far,' some say; Nixon's actions anger many here." *The Chicago Tribune* October 21, 1973.
[264] "Mr. Nixon Retreats." Editorial. *The New York Times* October 24, 1973. It was even subject to variation in the papers as to whether William Ruckelshaus had actually been fired or had resigned in protest. The *Times* and the *Post* tended to say the latter, and the *Tribune* the former. The *Tribune*'s depiction of Ruckelshaus as fired perhaps took some of the power out of the acting attorney general's so-called principled stand. The *Post* reported on October 28th that the White House announced Ruckelshaus had been fired as punishment for refusing to fire Cox. President Nixon had confirmed earlier that Ruckelshaus had officially resigned (Stern, Laurence. "Distrust, Isolation and a Series of Miscalculations." *The Washington Post* October 28, 1973).
[265] Oelsner, Lesley. "Abrupt Reversal. Crisis Over Watergate Appears Deflated for the Moment." *The New York Times* October 24, 1973.

impeachment and/or his loss of public support.[266] However, Nixon's Chief of Staff Alexander Haig contended that the move had been sparked by the president's concern for the public interest, and with an eye toward national security, "that the nation could not be torn at this time by such disunity as the events of the weekend created."[267]

Reflecting the *Tribune*'s less damaging coverage, the Cox firing was frequently portrayed as a political miscalculation on the part of the president, more benign than an abuse of power or admission of guilt. White House staff members were quoted as saying the administration did not realize there would be this degree of public outcry to the firing and that the Stennis plan would not be sufficient to end the impasse over the tapes.[268] When the president agreed to turn over the tapes, the *Tribune* alone featured stories like "Lawyers drop Nixon ouster call," which gave the appearance the concession had gone a long way toward quelling impeachment moves.[269] However, the *Tribune* also portrayed Nixon's decision as one he had been pressured to take by aides, because his inclination was to continue to stand on executive privilege principle.[270] Overall, the *Tribune*'s line of gentle criticism was exemplified by an editorial contending that Nixon's role as a statesman had been so successful in foreign policy that he had forgotten how to work for public support.[271] Even the *Tribune*, though, could portray the president's prospects

[266] Oelsner, Lesley. "Abrupt Reversal. Crisis Over Watergate Appears Deflated for the Moment." *The New York Times* October 24, 1973; Reston, James. "Mr. Nixon's Deceptive Compromise." *The New York Times* October 24,1973.
[267] Herbers, John. "Nixon Speaks at 9 P.M." *The New York Times* October 24, 1973.
[268] "Haig admits miscalculation." AP. *The Chicago Tribune* October 24, 1973; Beckman, Aldo. "How President backed down on tapes issue." *The Chicago Tribune* October 24, 1973.
[269] "Lawyers drop Nixon ouster call." *The Chicago Tribune* October 24, 1973.
[270] Beckman, Aldo. "How President backed down on tapes issue." *The Chicago Tribune* October 24, 1973.
[271] "A political failure." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune* October 25, 1973.

harshly – one news piece reliant on anonymous White House sources discussed the feeling within the administration that resignation was now more possible than ever.[272]

After the Saturday Night Massacre, the *Times* and the *Post* used primary source documents and prior statements of the president to illustrate hypocrisy and the problems with his actions. For example, the *Post* took "a glance through the record" to reiterate all of the public pledges President Nixon had made to the independence of the special prosecutor,[273] and later published a piece compiling many of Nixon's past statements advocating law and order and insisting he backed a zealous investigation of Watergate, clearly to make the president appear hypocritical.[274] Such pieces had the appearance of objectivity, as they did not include any editorial interpretation, and yet the choice to include them was damaging enough to Nixon's efforts to retain public support.

Assessment of Frame Coverage

Table 3.4

Frames Appearances Undermined

October Frames	NYT	CT	WP	NYT	CT	WP
Innocent/Zealous Investigator	21	12	28	75	47	105
Noble Defense of Presidency	62	29	42	52	14	36
Persecuted by Partisan Enemies	32	37	33	19	17	21

Coverage of some frames actually became more positive than it had been months earlier. Nixon's assertions that he was defending the presidency as an institution and citing the importance of executive privilege was the frame most likely to appear in the

[272] Beckman, Aldo. "Nixon aides feel chill of pessimism, aloof public." *The Chicago Tribune* October 29, 1973.
[273] "A Glance Through the Record." *The Washington Post* October 21, 1973.
[274] "Nixon and Law." *The Washington Post* October 28, 1973.

Times, twice as much as any other frame. However, 84% of the space provided that frame was also given to undermining it. This still represented an improvement over how the *Times* had covered the frame in August, when more space was devoted to challenging the frame than provided the original narrative. The frame fared better in the *Tribune*, as the second most likely to appear in its pages and less subject to challenge than in the *Times*. In the *Post*, Nixon's noble defense of the presidency frame was the most likely to appear, but frequently undercut.

The most successful frame in the *Tribune* was that of Nixon being persecuted by partisan enemies, which the paper devoted less than half as much space to contradicting. After Cox's firing, opinion columnists noted that conservative and White House opposition to the special prosecutor often stemmed from his previous position within the Kennedy administration and the belief the investigation had become partisan.[275] Straight news pieces sometimes spoke matter-of-factly about this as well, as when Nixon's assistant attorney general "was known to have expressed bewilderment that in turning the case over to Cox…the administration had put its dirty linen in the hands of its natural enemies." Additionally, the paper quoted congressional Republicans discussing impeachment procedures critically, warning, "If the Democrats do this in a partisan manner they could ruin the credibility of the committee and weaken any conclusions it might reach."[276]

"Partisan enemies" was also the second most likely frame to appear in the *Times* coverage, and the least likely of the three frames to be undermined in the paper. Several

[275] Anderson, Bill. "Some backing Nixon on Cox action." *The Chicago Tribune* October 23, 1973; Wiedrich, Bob. "The firing of Cox not a high crime." *The Chicago Tribune* October 23, 1973.
[276] Siddon, Arthur. "G.O.P. leaders back move; Prosecutor pressure rises." *The Chicago Tribune* October 26, 1973.

news stories in the *Times* dealing with the moves toward an impeachment inquiry in the House would specify that Democratic leaders were pushing for the measure, while Republicans expressed support for Nixon.[277] Nixon's frame may have found advantages in fitting easily into a common, familiar news media narrative of partisan conflict. Still, the frame was more likely to be subjected to challenge than it had been in August. Persecution by partisan enemies was second in appearances in the *Post*, but also the frame least likely to be opposed.

Finally, the frame with the least presence in the *Times*, *Tribune*, and *Post* was Nixon's maintaining his innocence and role as a zealous investigator. This frame was a disaster for the White House in all three newspapers in October, with three times as much space provided to undermining that frame than echoing it in all of them. This was worse than how the frame fared on television, which suggests that the more detailed and nuanced coverage in print allowed for even more space for questioning Nixon's innocence. Columnist Anthony Lewis in the *Times* bluntly declared the Cox firing made it "impossible now to resist the inference that Mr. Nixon has been trying to conceal evidence of his own violations of the criminal law."[278] Not only did dismissal of the special prosecutor undermine Nixon's claims of innocence, but it also undercut his self-portrayal as a tireless investigator. It would not make sense for one zealous investigator to oust another.

More space was devoted to questioning Nixon's innocence and self-identification as a zealous investigator in the *Post* than in either of the other papers. Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein co-authored a lengthy piece reliant on sources close to Richardson

[277] Madden, Richard L. "Democrats Agree On House Inquiry Into Nixon's Acts." *The New York Times* October 23, 1973.
[278] Lewis, Anthony. "The End Begins." *The New York Times* October 22, 1973.

detailing how the president and his aides had sought to curtail the investigation, and used foreign policy briefings on the Middle East with the attorney general to pressure him to fall in line with the administration's efforts.[279]

Print Coverage Turns From Bad to Worse

Abuse of Power

Questions of the president's guilt or innocence in Watergate that he had addressed via framing were compounded in October with questions as to whether Nixon had overstepped acceptable bounds of executive authority. A continual refrain during these ten days in October in the *Times* was that the president was guilty of abusing his power, and of acting "above the law." On several occasions the *Times* discussed the FBI's steps to secure Cox's offices after his dismissal as Nixon using the bureau "in the manner of a totalitarian police force"[280] and the news account of this action quoted one worker under Cox as saying "one thinks in a democracy this would not happen."[281]

The *Post* also alluded to this FBI takeover of Cox's office as an abuse of power, but went further in articles that likened the president to a dictator. Senator Edmund Muskie was quoted in the *Post* in response to the Saturday Night Massacre as saying, "What the President has done threatens to destroy our system of law. It smacks of dictatorship."[282] Throughout October, the *Post* presented perspectives of members of Congress, law professors, and other authorities who warned that if President Nixon was

[279] Woodward, Bob and Carl Bernstein. "Richardson Felt Nixon Curbed probe." *The Washington Post* October 23, 1973.
[280] "One-Man Law…." Editorial. *The New York Times* October 22, 1973.
[281] Oelsner, Lesley. "Cox Office Shut On Nixon's Order." *The New York Times* October 21, 1973. Though this same worker was quoted in the *Tribune*, the paper also provided an explanation for the use of the FBI, that they were there "presumably to protect the large amount of evidence already prepared" (Elsasser, Glen. "Tapes crisis explodes." *The Chicago Tribune* October 21, 1973).
[282] Witcover, Jules. "Pressure for Impeachment Mounting." *The Washington Post* October 21, 1973.

allowed to continue to place himself above the law, the United States was on the road to despotism.[283] Most blatantly, a commentary piece by historian Barbara Tuchman urged Congress to stop Nixon now, because "[t]he habit of authoritarianism which the President has found so suitable will slowly but surely draw a ruler, if cornered, to final dependence on the Army."[284] By contrast, President Grant in the Whiskey Ring scandal did far less to incur similar criticisms. This demonstrates that presidential authority had expanded in the 20th century, yet media commentators did identify a point at which it should be circumscribed.

Compromise vs. "Compromise"

Newspaper coverage of the Stennis proposal helps illustrate problems the president encountered in making the case for executive privilege. When the *Times* first reported the Stennis plan, the coverage discussed it explicitly as a compromise.[285] However, after Cox's firing, compromise became a contested term. Beginning on October 24th, several editorials and articles in the paper placed the word in quotation marks, to suggest that what the White House was calling the proposal might not necessarily be what it was.[286] The editorial staff of the *Times* also called it "no compromise" but rather "a bold and ingenious attempt to defy the courts…and confuse

[283] Saar, John. "4 Law Professors See Impeachment Grounds." *The Washington Post* October 23, 1973.
[284] Tuchman, Barbara. "Impeachment: 'The Issue Must Not Be Evaded.'" *The Washington Post* October 28, 1973.
[285] Naughton, James M. "Senator Baker Hails Nixon's Plan to Turn Over Authenticated Version of Tapes." *The New York Times* October 20, 1973.
[286] "Mr. Nixon Retreats." Editorial. *The New York Times* October 24, 1973; Lydon, Christopher. "Richardson Sidesteps Constitutional Issues." *The New York Times*
October 24, 1973; Lewis, Anthony. "The Avalanche." *The New York Times* October 25, 1973; Herbers, John. "A Fatigued Nixon Asserts He Will Not Quit His Post." *The New York Times* October 27, 1973. Lewis, Anthony. "A Bewildering Sequence Ends as a Circle." *The New York Times* October 28, 1973; Naughton, James. "A Test of Power." *The New York Times* October 28, 1973.

the issue,"[287] and one columnist pointed out it takes two sides to make a compromise, and therefore the plan was "more nearly a fiat."[288] There were occasional exceptions, as when anonymous White House sources cast the president "as having yielded an enormous amount of ground in the constitutional dispute over the Watergate tape recordings" with the Stennis plan.[289]

Like the *Times*, the *Post* initially conveyed the word compromise to its readers as an uncontested term, but by October 22nd featured an entire news analysis article titled "One Man's Compromise May Be Anathema to Another" which questioned, "Was the compromise a compromise? And if so, for whom?"[290] In other news pieces after this point, there appeared to be no consistent *Post* editorial policy on use of the word compromise, as it was sometimes presented uncontested, and occasionally placed in quotes, or called something else, like plan or proposal. The decision for how to define the Stennis plan seemed to be left to the individual reporter.

Reflecting its more White House-friendly view, compromise was never presented in quotation marks in the *Tribune* and characterization of the plan as such was only disputed a handful of times, usually with "so-called" placed before it. A fair amount of space in the *Tribune* was provided to the Nixon assertion that he felt he had to propose the plan because he wanted to avoid a "constitutional crisis," and "end the temptation abroad to test our resolve."[291] Seemingly objective news stories portrayed this linkage of

[287] "The Tape Cover-Up." Editorial. *The New York Times* October 21, 1973.
[288] Wicker, Tom. "Mr. Nixon Takes a Whitewash." *The New York Times* October 23, 1973.
[289] Herbers, John. "Nixon Defended; Top Assistants Doubt Action in the Capitol Will Be Instituted." *The New York Times* October 22, 1973.
[290] Stern, Lawurence. "One Man's Compromise May Be Anathema to Another." *The Washington Post* October 22, 1973.
[291] "Text of President's statement on Watergate tapes." AP. *The Chicago Tribune* October 20, 1973; Elsasser, Glen and Harry Kelly. "Nixon, Cox clash on tapes." *The Chicago Tribune* October 20, 1973.

the Stennis proposal with foreign policy events as an unquestionably legitimate one.[292] However, the editors of the paper drew the line at backing Nixon's view he acted to forestall disaster, declaring, "Mr. Nixon has made the constitutional crisis he sought to avoid a looming reality,"[293] a point echoed in the *Tribune*'s news analysis.[294] For all three papers, to the extent they did not convey the impression that the president had compromised and generously conceded ground on executive privilege by offering the Stennis plan, they devalued his initial framing of withholding the tapes as an important defense of his office.

A Conspiracy to Fire Cox

The circumstances under which the media and public believed Cox was fired also mattered for the success of Nixon's assertions of his innocence. Far more than televised news, print outlets questioned how and why the Saturday Night Massacre really unfolded. The *Times* often discussed the special prosecutor's firing as an elaborate plot, one in which "the confrontation over the tapes was either contrived or happened to give the President…a reason to discharge Mr. Cox."[295] Though Richardson in a post-departure press conference said a good deal positive about the president and defended Nixon's right to fire Cox, the *Times* chose instead to focus on the conspiracy angle in a story entitled,

[292] Squires, Jim and Frank Starr. "Tapes deal. Mideast crisis linked." *The Chicago Tribune* October 21, 1973; Starr, Frank. "Nixon purge sparks unprecedented crisis." *The Chicago Tribune* October 22, 1973.
[293] "Nixon's colossal blunder." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune* October 22, 1973.
[294] Starr, Frank. "Tape decision: Inflexibility turns into a concession." *The Chicago Tribune* October 24, 1973.
[295] Daniel, Clifton. "Capitulation and Critics; President's Foes Feel That His Aim In Tapes Dispute Was to Oust Cox." *The New York Times* October 24, 1973. Also expressing this idea were Reston, James. "Mr. Nixon's Deceptive Compromise." *The New York Times* October 24,1973; Crewdson, John M. "Richardson Says White House Aides Suggested Ousting Cox Before He Balked." *The New York Times* October 24, 1973.

"Richardson Says White House Aides Suggested Ousting Cox Before He Balked."[296] Cox himself contributed to these charges, saying in his post-firing news conference, "[I]t was my impression that I was being confronted with things that were drawn in such a way that I could not accept them."[297] The narrative was also reinforced when Nixon subsequently agreed to turn over the tapes to Judge Sirica, diminishing the credibility of his reasons for withholding them. When the president left a framing void as to why he changed his mind on releasing the tapes, the media were free to construct their own storylines explaining the move.

The *Tribune*, by contrast, never mentions the possibility of an administration plot to fire Cox. However, on several occasions, usually in quoting a Democratic congressperson or an aggrieved citizen, the coverage implied that Cox was fired because he was leading the investigation into areas that would implicate Nixon, a theory that was also occasionally found in the *Times* and on television.[298] Senator Edward Kennedy was a major proponent of this claim and was frequently quoted in the papers advocating it. Such assertions struck at the heart of Nixon's frame that he was both innocent and a zealous investigator in the scandal. The *Post* also provided a great deal of content on both conspiracy angles, that Cox's firing was strategically engineered by the president[299] and

[296] Crewdson, John M. "Richardson Says White House Aides Suggested Ousting Cox Before He Balked." *The New York Times* October 24, 1973.
[297] "Excerpts From Transcript of Cox's News Conference on Nixon's Decision On Tapes." *The New York Times* October 21, 1973.
[298] Satter, David. "'Gone too far,' some say; Nixon's actions anger many here." *The Chicago Tribune* October 21, 1973; Margolis, Jon. "House girds for moves on impeachment." *The Chicago Tribune* October 23, 1973; Margolis, Jon and Philip Warden. "Nixon tape concession cools House impeachment fever." *The Chicago Tribune* October 24, 1973; "Was probing large cash contributions, Cox says." *The Chicago Tribune* October 25, 1973.
[299] Evans, Rowland and Robert Novak. "Was Mr. Cox Getting Too Close?" *The Washington Post* October 24, 1973; Anderson, Jack. "Nixon Seen Deeply Suspicious of Cox." *The Washington Post* October 25, 1973.

that he was ousted because he was on to too much, assertions backed by anonymous sources.[300]

Character/Psychology/Personal Coverage

Though psychology became a less visible component of the Watergate story on the nightly news in October, it remained a significant part of the *Times* coverage. Similar adjectives (nearly all negative) continued to be used to describe the president throughout this second time period, such as angry, untrustworthy, arrogant, of questionable judgment, and cool. This last attribute was Nixon's self-characterization during his October 26th press conference. When Nixon attacked the media during his October 26th press conference, the *Times* frequently conveyed his words as a loss of temper and control, and a sign of erratic behavior and questionable judgment.[301] More isolated instances, such as Meany's contention the president was dangerously emotionally unstable, were also covered in the newspapers, as they were on television.[302]

The *Tribune* meanwhile was most likely to refer to the president as tough, relaxed, having a temper/angry, emotionally unstable (referring to Meany's comment) and cool (Nixon's self-characterization). The more favorable cast to the *Tribune*'s coverage of Nixon's character was evidenced by an entire article detailing how well the president dealt with problems and turmoil, which also featured a Nixon mask one could

[300] Stern, Lawurence. "One Man's Compromise May Be Anathema to Another." *The Washington Post* October 22, 1973.
[301] Kneeland, Douglas E. "Many Smiles, but Little Warmth." *The New York Times* October 27, 1973; Reston, James. "Provocative President." *The New York Times* October 27, 1973; "Steadiness Under Fire." Editorial. *The New York Times* October 28, 1973; Reston, James. "Where Are We Going?" *The New York Times* October 28, 1973.
[302] Herbers, John. "President Talks To Press Tonight." *The New York Times* October 25, 1973; "White House blasts Meany view on Nixon." *The Chicago Tribune* October 25, 1973.

cut out, with the caption, "Next time you face a crisis, wear this."[303] Like the *Post* coverage in August, the article also told the story of two Nixons, and explained that the tough, controlled exterior Nixon displayed in public might be very different from the way the man acted behind closed doors. This duality also came into play in the *Tribune*'s assessments of Nixon's press conference, noting that though Nixon claimed "the tougher it gets the cooler I get," the meeting with the press was "distinguished for its lack of cool."[304] This same article portrayed the president and the media as equally at fault for the sparring that erupted during the conference, unlike the *Times* coverage that placed the blame squarely on Nixon. A later *Tribune* editorial claimed, "Responsibility for this degeneration in Presidential press conferences must be shared between reporters and President. There is too great a willingness to goad the President, a human being after all, with insulting questions."[305]

Though the *Post* covered the president's attacks on the media at his news conference, it failed to use them as a springboard for intensive discussions of Nixon's psychology, as the other papers did. The traits the *Post* coverage was most likely to ascribe to the president were lacking moral integrity, of questionable competence, suspicious, cool, angry/furious, and fearful/scared.

Impeachment Looming

The possibility of the president being impeached and removed from office became far more real in the October coverage, largely due to the Saturday Night

[303] Beckman, Aldo. "Richard Nixon's crisis-forged mask works again." *The Chicago Tribune* October 21, 1973.
[304] Kelly, Harry. "Angry Nixon 'cools' it with the TV reporters." *The Chicago Tribune* October 27, 1973.
[305] "…at a press conference." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune* October 28, 1973.

Massacre.[306] As the *Times* put it, such threats had been mentioned before, "but none of these statements were taken very seriously until the startling developments over the issue of the Watergate tapes suddenly brought the possibility of impeachment to the forefront tonight."[307] After recounting the events of the tumultuous weekend, the *Tribune* declared in a news analysis piece, "Impeachment of Nixon has become a distinct possibility."[308] Even while criticizing the president, however, the *Tribune*'s editorial staff expressed opposition to impeachment, maintaining it would be very dangerous to rush into the process.[309]

The *Tribune*'s coverage of the impeachment angle also included an element not dealt with in depth by the other papers: Speaker of the House Carl Albert, Democrat of Oklahoma, would become president if Nixon were impeached before Ford was confirmed as vice-president.[310] The "dangers" of an Albert presidency were frequently outlined in its pages, with an editorial maintaining that U.S. laws "imply no turnover of power from one party to another except by decision in a national general election."[311] An opinion column quoted an anonymous government source as saying "Carl Albert right now is an

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[306] According to Lang and Lang (1983), Nixon felt this development would be quite damaging, as he saw "the main danger of being impeached resided in the public's becoming conditioned to the idea he was going to be impeached" (2).
[307] Madden, Richard L. "Outcry in House; Impeaching Nixon Is Openly Discussed by Leadership." *The New York Times* October 21, 1973.
[308] Starr, Frank. "Nixon purge sparks unprecedented crisis." *The Chicago Tribune* October 22, 1973.
[309] "Nixon's colossal blunder." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune* October 22, 1973; "Too many blunders already." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune* October 23, 1973.
[310] Starr, Frank. "Nixon purge sparks unprecedented crisis." *The Chicago Tribune* October 22, 1973. One of the few times such an idea was floated in the *Post* was by columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak when they accused "fire-eating liberal Democratic congressmen" of conspiring to block Ford's confirmation indefinitely and thus hand the presidency to Albert. However, the authors made clear that Albert himself was opposed to such a move (Evans, Rowland and Robert Novak. "The Democrats' Delay for Mr. Ford." *The Washington Post* October 21, 1973). Elsewhere in the *Post*, the notion that Democrats would make this move was frequently dismissed for how controversial and divisive it would be in the country (Rich, Spencer and Richard L. Lyons. "New Inquiry Is Proposed." *The Washington Post* October 22, 1973).
[311] "Too many blunders already." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune* October 23, 1973.

insurance policy for the President holding onto his office. Carl is not all that bad, but he does have his problems," which the author of the piece then filled in as a "fondness of liquor."[312]

The *Post*, reflective of its negative bent, featured opinion columnists advocating impeachment even before the Cox firing took place.[313] After the firing, the paper described sources in the White House as believing "it was now inevitable that Congress would move to impeach."[314] Adding legitimacy to impeachment calls, the *Post* ran a story in which "four of the country's leading law professors" articulated what they found to be sufficient legal grounds for impeachment of the president.[315] However, after Nixon agreed to turn over the tapes to Judge Sirica, it was not uncommon for even the *Post* to convey the impression that though impeachment inquiries would probably go on, much of their urgency had disappeared.[316]

The impeachment process was far more likely to be described and explained to the American public in print as compared to television, making the newspapers more hostile to Nixon's efforts to stay in office. Thirteen stories that appeared in the *Times* during this latter time period provided such an education on the process, with several articles whose main purpose was conveying such information. The *Tribune* and *Post* each contained five articles that explained how impeachment worked.[317] Such explanations, particularly that impeachment did not necessarily require the ultimate removal of the

[312] Anderson, Bill. "What's next? Nixon case confused." *The Chicago Tribune* October 24, 1973.
[313] Raspberry, William. "The President Should Be Impeached." *The Washington Post* October 19, 1973.
[314] Witcover, Jules. "Pressure for Impeachment Mounting." *The Washington Post* October 21, 1973.
[315] Saar, John. "4 Law Professors See Impeachment Grounds." *The Washington Post* October 23, 1973.
[316] Lyons, Richard L. and Mary Russell. "Democrats to Press Impeachment Study." *The Washington Post* October 24, 1973.
[317] Part of the reason for such stories may have been the actions of Congress. The House Judiciary Committee had compiled a book explaining the history of impeachment and its procedures some time earlier ("House, Senate roles; Process of impeachment." AP. *The Chicago Tribune* October 22, 1973).

president, no doubt made the process less frightening and more palatable to the public.[318] The dramatic concerns expressed on television about the "agony" impeachment might put the country through were not evident here; the newspapers instead helped to normalize the process.

"Wag the Dog"

Though foreign policy affairs might have been a source of more positive, "rally-round-the-flag" coverage during this October period, instead they were sometimes viewed through the prism of Watergate. In the *Times*, some columnists and Nixon opponents took to insinuating that President Nixon had ordered a worldwide military alert of the U.S. military not because he thought the Soviet Union was going to send troops to the Middle East, but to divert attention from the scandal.[319] This "Wag the Dog" accusation[320] was denied by both major White House officials and prominent Democrats like House Majority Leader Thomas O'Neill -- journalists themselves seemed to be the main purveyors of such charges.[321] The *Times* tried to justify raising such points by noting that first "White House officials themselves had connected the Watergate case

[318] Though television coverage in this time period did not play a role in legitimizing impeachment, Lang and Lang (1983) argue that televised debates in June of 1974 in the House Judiciary Committee regarding the articles of impeachment convinced many Americans that the move had a solid legal basis rather than merely a political one (137).

[319] Reston, James. "'A Crisis A Day.'" *The New York Times* October 26, 1973; Herbers, John. "Nixon's Motives in Alert Questioned and Defended." *The New York Times* October 26, 1973; "'Crises of Authority.'" Editorial. *The New York Times* October 29, 1973.

[320] *Wag the Dog* is a 1997 film directed by Barry Levinson in which political consultants working for a president caught in a sex scandal right before his reelection seek to distract the voters and media by constructing a fake war with Albania.

[321] One of President Nixon's most vocal opponents, Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine, was quoted in the *Times* as saying the president was attempting to "'divert our attention'…by overstating developments in the Middle East," but such insinuations from major politicians were rare (Rosenbaum, David E. "Democrats in Congress Unsatisfied, Demand a Totally Independent Prosecutor." *The New York Times* October 27, 1973). For instance, even Senator Edward Kennedy expressed support for the military alert, as did House Majority Leader Thomas P. O'Neill ("Kennedy Endorses Nixon Move in Crisis." *The New York Times* October 27, 1973 and Kilpatrick, Carroll. "President's Leadership Is Questioned." *The Washington Post* October 26, 1973).

with foreign policy…they said repeatedly that Mr. Nixon had sought a compromise [on the tapes] in part because he felt the issue might weaken his hand abroad."[322] Additionally, the paper argued regardless of Nixon's real motivations in ordering the alert, the problem was that such allegations would even be considered, as they illustrated the depth of the administration's credibility problem.[323]

The *Tribune* also took up the "Wag the Dog" issue, but only while recounting Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's interaction with the press, where "reporters' questions" suggested this possibility. Though Kissinger appeared angered by the questions, the *Tribune* noted, "the reporters persisted,"[324] giving the sense that such accusations were generated and sustained by the media.

The *Post* not only covered the "Wag the Dog" angle, but also conveyed that perhaps the Soviets were pushing the U.S. during the Middle East crisis because of the Nixon administration's perceived weakness. Rather than chastising the president's detractors for hurting the nation's foreign policy, however, these developments were presented as another reason why Nixon should leave office.[325] In this view, Watergate was inviting foreign policy crises. Additionally, the *Post* gave the impression that insinuating the military alert was a distraction from Watergate was not a charge manufactured by reporters, but that such "blunt questions" echoed public concerns "raised earlier in telephone calls to newspaper offices and in some broadcasts."[326]

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[322] Herbers, John. "Nixon's Motives in Alert Questioned and Defended." *The New York Times* October 26, 1973.
[323] "'Crises of Authority.'" Editorial. *The New York Times* October 29, 1973. This view was also expressed in the *Tribune* - Kelly, Harry. "The days that rocked the nation." *The Chicago Tribune* October 28, 1973.
[324] Starr, Frank. "Kissinger pleads for unity in U.S." *The Chicago Tribune* October 26, 1973.
[325] Kraft, Joseph. "Combined Crises." *The Washington Post* October 28, 1973.
[326] Kilpatrick, Carroll. "President's Leadership Is Questioned." *The Washington Post* October 26, 1973.

Protest Coverage

Whereas on television coverage of protesters seemed to veer toward portrayals of more radical elements, with accompanying dramatic visuals like burning Nixon effigies on college campuses, in the *Times* protesters were depicted as more mainstream and moderate. The paper noted that protesting students "deliberately avoided holding noisy demonstrations, for fear of spurring a backlash and…providing the President with an anti-student rallying point."[327] In a related article, the *Times* claimed that at these protests "moderation prevailed, an element absent in campus demonstrations several years ago."[328] The *Post* quoted one man at an anti-Nixon rally outside the White House who declared, "We're not professional demonstrators, professional rabble-rousers or anything like that," with the reporter then noting that speeches at the protest were "devoid of radical rhetoric."[329] For its part, the *Tribune* placed less emphasis on public expressions of dissent, for instance discussing the way that some campus protests lost steam when Nixon agreed to turn over the tapes.[330]

The *Post* covered a rally of seventy-five people outside the White House right after the Saturday Night Massacre who the paper cited as having "decided independently to come when they learned of the dismissal of Cox." This magnified the severity of the president's actions by insinuating his behavior was so egregious as to produce spontaneous public demonstrations.[331] "Honk for Impeachment" protester signs outside the White House got a great deal of verbal and visual exposure in the *Post*, often

[327] "Tapes Reviving Campus Protest." *The New York Times* October 25, 1973.
[328] "Campus Rallies Urge Nixon's Impeachment, but Tone of Moderation Prevails." *The New York Times* October 28, 1973.
[329] Meyer, Eugene. "Honking Marks Impeachment March." *The Washington Post* October 23, 1973.
[330] Unger, Rudolph. "Anti-Nixon protests on 3 campuses." *The Chicago Tribune* October 27, 1973.
[331] "75 Rally To Protest Nixon Actions." *The Washington Post* October 21, 1973.

accompanied by commentary on how successful they were at getting motorists to comply.[332] Government cracking down on protesters was another angle covered only by the *Post*, in stories about a failed effort to decrease the limits on demonstrators in front of the White House and tickets given out by police officers to those who honked in response to signs.[333]

Nixon's Partisan Backing and Opposition

President Nixon's efforts to frame the Watergate scandal in the most positive light possible rested in part on encouraging the public to think of his critics as partisans who had long had it out for him. If Watergate could be chalked up to typical bickering and conflict between the parties, the president stood a better chance of retaining public support as the scandal unfolded. Furthermore, as discussed in the dissertation introduction, whether or not Nixon's opposition was in fact mainly composed of partisan enemies is important toward determining the significance of presidential framing in scandal management. Were the president's fellow party members divided in whether or not to support him and the political opposition unified, this would have to be considered a major explanatory factor toward Nixon's inability to politically survive.

The president was not abandoned by all Republicans. In August, two of the Senate Watergate committee's Republican members, Edward Gurney and Howard Baker Jr., were profiled in the *Times* as supporting Nixon, in part because of their constituents'

[332] "Dismay Continues Over Cox Firing." *The Washington Post* October 22, 1973; Meyer, Eugene. "Honking Marks Impeachment March." *The Washington Post* October 23, 1973.
[333] Valentine, Paul W. "U.S. Fails in Move to Curb Protesters." *The Washington Post* October 27, 1973 and Feinberg, Lawrence and Ronald Taylor. "Anti-Nixon Honks Earn D.C. Tickets." *The Washington Post* October 28, 1973.

continued backing of the president.[334] In this same article, the intense criticism lobbed at President Nixon by Connecticut's Republican Senator Lowell Weicker was disparaged by many of his fellow party members. At times, Republican support for Nixon took a dramatic turn, as when a representative from Tennessee responded to impeachment calls by warning his colleagues not to be "part of a legislative lynch mob" and held up a noose as "a symbol of your action."[335] Party line splits were identified in October on issues such as whether the president could only be impeached for violations of criminal law or if other kinds of transgressions would also qualify.[336]

Still, Republican support for the president was often inconsistent. A Republican figure like Barry Goldwater could be a critic one moment and a supporter the next – after lamenting Nixon had not said enough new in his August 15th speech, he told a convention the following day that the Left sought to "discredit everything the administration achieved or promised which runs counter to the liberal thesis of unlimited government."[337] After the Cox firing, Goldwater was one of only a handful of Republicans who supported the move by Nixon, arguing the special prosecutor had overstepped the bounds of his position and that the investigation had taken on a partisan cast.[338]

Republican critics were not hard for news organizations covering Watergate to find. Republican Representative John B. Anderson was "publicly disappointed and

[334] Lydon, Christopher. "Hearings Strengthen Watergate Senators." *The New York Times*, August 21, 1973.
[335] Hunter, Marjorie. "Trouble Far From Over." *The New York Times* October 24, 1973.
[336] Naughton, James M. "House Unit Faces Procedure Split." *The New York Times* October 27, 1973.
[337] Frederickson, Ted. "Goldwater, Helms Echo Nixon Speech At YAF Convention." *The Washington Post* August 17, 1973.
[338] Broder, David S. "Goldwater Backs Nixon, as Outcries Mount." *The Washington Post* October 23, 1973.

privately 'appalled'" by Nixon's August speech according to the *Times*.[339] In a *Tribune* article titled "Reaction mixed on Nixon speech," that mixed reaction was decidedly evident just within the Republican Party, as four of the eight Republican members of Congress cited in the piece were critical of Nixon's speech.[340] It certainly did not help Nixon's cause when his vice presidential nominee Gerald Ford said in October that he felt a House inquiry into impeachment should continue, and a new special prosecutor appointed if a majority in Congress so desired.[341] In fact, many Republicans after the Cox firing called for a new special prosecutor, undercutting the credibility of the president's action.[342]

A few Republican members of Congress even backed impeachment; Rep. Paul McCloskey of California introduced his own resolution for it.[343] David Broder in the *Post* identified a split going on in the Republican Party, between its conservative and progressive wings, with the former believing Cox never should have been appointed in the first place, and the latter that the administration could not afford to lose honest, admirable officials like Richardson and Ruckelshaus.[344]

On the other side, though most Democrats rejected Nixon's interpretations, some were cited in the news in support of the president and his frames. The *Tribune* in August quoted Philadelphia mayor Frank Rizzo commending Nixon for his "courage" and

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[339] Lydon, Christopher. "Illinois Republican Finds Watergate and Prices Hurting G.O.P." The New York Times August 22, 1973.
[340] Hutchinson, Louise and Michael Kelly. "Reaction mixed on Nixon speech." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 16, 1973.
[341] Naughton, James M. "Ford Backs Study On Impeachment." *The New York Times* October 26, 1973.
[342] Ripley, Anthony. "Senate Republican Leaders Ask Nixon To Name New Prosecutor; Impeachment Inquiry Is Widened; Fast Action Urged." *The New York Times* October 25, 1973; Beckman, Aldo and Glen Elsasser. "Nixon weighs naming Cox replacement." *The Chicago Tribune* October 25, 1973.
[343] "Nixon foe sets plan of attack." *The Chicago Tribune* October 23, 1973.
[344] Broder, David S. "Nixon Political Clout Shrinks." *The Washington Post* October 22, 1973.

agreeing Watergate should be turned over to the courts.[345] The *Post* cited Democratic members of the House from New York and Louisiana saying about the president's speech, "Who am I to take the word of John Dean against that of the president?" and "He came through…in this part of the country the people are going to agree with him."[346] The *Post* also quoted three Democratic members of Congress supporting the "move on" frame in Nixon's statement.[347]

An opinion piece that ran in the *Post* drew attention to the "black and ultra-liberal" Democratic Congressman from Michigan, John Conyers, contending that the educational value of the Ervin committee had reached its limit and the nation should move on.[348] When Nixon announced the Stennis proposal, Democratic Senator Stennis was questioned for his sometime support for the president, ranging from his backing for Nixon's foreign policy to publicly urging the president to tough out Watergate.[349] The *Tribune*'s coverage of its local political officials in October noted that Democratic Mayor Richard Daley and Governor Daniel Walker felt that impeachment moves were being rushed; they were confident some other compromise could be worked out.[350] Generally, however, after the Saturday Night Massacre the *Post* tended to identify Democrats as unified in their opposition to the firing of Cox.[351] Further, it is possible that with an eye toward the 1974 elections, political considerations would cause Republicans to prefer the

[345] "Nixon's speech upsets probers of Watergate." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 17, 1973.
[346] Cannon, Lou and Peter Milius. "1st Reaction of Politicians Is Positive." *The Washington Post* August 16, 1973.
[347] Broder, David S. "Nixon Left Many Dissatisfied." *The Washington Post* August 17, 1973.
[348] White, William S. "Plain Facts About Watergate." *The Washington Post* August 18, 1973.
[349] Rosenbaum, David E. "Stennis Says Tapes Audit Depended on Ervin Consent." *The New York Times* October 21, 1973.
[350] Schreiber, Edward and Stanley Ziemba. "Daley, Walker hit impeachment talk." *The Chicago Tribune* October 23, 1973.
[351] Crenshaw, Albert. "Ervin, Stennis Feel Firings Don't Affect Tapes Plan." *The Washington Post* October 21, 1973.

president to resign and disappear from the spotlight as quickly as possible, while Democrats would like to have him to run against for as long as possible.[352] In total, it is difficult to discount the damage that intra-Republican criticism and unified Democratic opposition on some issues did to Nixon's ability to weather the scandal.

Still, in this historical moment, the very nature of the political parties may help explain why it would be difficult to expect unified party backing for the president. As Aldrich (1995) notes, in the 1970's, a coalition of conservative Southern Democrats and conservative Republicans often took precedence over party line splits.[353] Just as Southern Democrats might be willing to abandon their party, so might conservative and moderate Republicans part ways over Watergate. In August 1973 at a youth-oriented conservative convention, for instance, Senator Jesse Helms was given a standing ovation "when he identified himself as a conservative first and a Republican second."[354] The convention also approved a resolution chastising Nixon for being too moderate –it charged the president had failed to "adhere to conservative principles…and to live up to a conservative mandate given by the voters in 1972."[355] In the same vein, a piece profiling Sam Ervin in the *Post* noted many of his liberal admirers had difficulty reconciling their support for his Watergate investigation with some of his previous issue positions, such as opposition to civil rights and support for Vietnam.[356] Nixon's subtle framing of his detractors as partisan enemies in his August 15th speech may have been with precisely these party dynamics in mind. The president perhaps sought to build a base of

[352] Ambrose, 310.
[353] John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 196.
[354] Frederickson, Ted. "Goldwater, Helms Echo Nixon Speech At YAF Convention." *The Washington Post* August 17, 1973.
[355] "YAF Condemns Nixon on Watergate." AP. *The Washington Post* August 19, 1973.
[356] Mitchell, Henry. "In the Land of His Fathers And His God." *The Washington Post* August 19, 1973.

conservative support, irrespective of party, by identifying Watergate critics and investigators as bitter liberals.[357] Though Nixon did not enjoy unified Republican support during Watergate, his elections and political successes had never rested solely on card-carrying party members.

The News Media of the 1970's

The media increasingly viewed themselves as important players, and not merely observers, in the unfolding Watergate drama. An August article in the *Post* detailed the "warfare" between the president and the press, and discussed how the media had been unmoved by Nixon's speech.[358] Certainly, a no-holds-barred form of adversarial journalism was evident in some of the interactions between politicians and press analyzed here. The aforementioned "Wag the Dog" insinuations following President Nixon's move to put military forces on alert in October illustrates this combative relationship that became prominent in the 1960's and 70's.[359] Even in the sensitive realm of national security, journalists were unafraid to question politicians' motivations and truthfulness, often casting themselves as representatives of the public in doing so. In comparison to

[357] Nixon was also not universally beloved in the Republican Party. When he sought support from members of Congress during Watergate, many were annoyed, believing that the president for years had failed to campaign for them, siphoned off campaign donations from their districts, and yet still insisted they work to save him (Ambrose 268).

[358] Cannon, Lou. "Nixon Watergate Talk Fails to Dispel Press Skepticism." *The Washington Post* August 17, 1973.

[359] As a sample of adversarial questioning of major politicians in this instance, one reporter said to Secretary of State Kissinger in his news conference on the 25th, "It seems to me that you are asking the American people…who are already badly shaken by the events of the past week to accept a very traumatic military alert involving nuclear forces on the basis of a kind of handful of smoke without telling them exactly why…I wonder if you can give us any more information that will help convince people that there's some solid basis for the action that has been taken?" Later, another reporter asked whether this decision of the president's was "rational." It is worth noting that these questions were posed to Kissinger, at the time one of the more revered and widely praised members of the administration. Additionally, reporters were not citing other political elites or prominent politicians who had made these charges, but making them independently.

President Grant in the Whiskey Ring scandal, journalists also had more access and ability to pose such questions to White House officials.

A personal focus on the president and psychological assessments of his actions, though evident in the Grant case, was more prevalent in the 1970's, and seldom yielded positive coverage for Nixon. That the media asked a White House representative whether the president was on any medications, as an attempt to get to the bottom of why he shoved his press secretary, was evidence of a more intrusive form of mid-20th century journalism.[360] Similarly, journalists often sought to uncover the president's true motivations beyond official White House statements – for example, in trying to explain the aforementioned shove, reporters relied in part on what they "overheard" Nixon say to his personal secretary on the phone, indicating he was irritated his motorcade had been cancelled.[361] One *Tribune* opinion column articulated that among the press corps talk about Nixon, there are "whispers that he's drinking, something which, like insanity, is attributed to all unpopular presidents."[362] Though the author might acknowledge the gossipy, unverified nature of such charges, publishing of such rumors was a precursor to the kinds of information circulated today by twenty-four hour news networks and the Internet. At this juncture though, the media was more responsible than they had been in the Whiskey Ring scandal at separating hearsay from established fact.

An element of press coverage not seen in the Grant case was the degree to which media outlets made White House efforts to combat the scandal transparent for their audience. Through the use of anonymous administration sources or journalists' own

[360] Cannon, Lou. "Nixon's Edginess Explained by Aides." *The Washington Post* August 22, 1973.
[361] Chapman, William. "Long Probe Seen in Plot On Nixon." *The Washington Post* August 22, 1973.
[362] Von Hoffman, Nicholas. "Where to go for news that's fit to print." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 17, 1973.

conjecture about presidential strategies, coverage went "behind-the-scenes" to show how Nixon and his surrogates were trying to regain public support. For instance, several news organizations reported on the administration's clandestine contacting of various interest groups (especially those representing veterans) asking them to express publicly "spontaneous" support for the president after his October news conference.[363] Additionally, the press sometimes focused on White House internal attempts to prevent information from getting to the media, as when one *Post* reporter revealed that the administration "was in the midst of a frantic effort to uncover and silence our sources."[364] If the public believes it is the target of a systematic effort to bolster the president's image, scandal management becomes that much more difficult.

Further, Nixon may have been hurt by the ability of his detractors to use the media to their advantage. The *Tribune* noted that the real surge of public disapproval of the president only occurred after the Cox firing, and perhaps this was partly because "Cox cut an impressive figure on television, giving the appearance of an honest man trying to do a good job against great resistance."[365] The modern media's tendency to personalize news stories was quite evident in coverage that often depicted the events of October as a personal conflict between Richard Nixon and Archibald Cox. Seeking to give both sides of the story, outlets made sure to cover Cox and his take on what had occurred.

Finally, comparing how Nixon fared in television and print coverage, the latter was far more damaging to the president's scandal management tactics. More detailed,

[363] Claiborne, William. "White House Seen Seeking VFW Calls." *The Washington Post* October 26, 1973.
[364] Anderson, Jack. "Nixon Seen Deeply Suspicious of Cox." *The Washington Post* October 25, 1973.
[365] Margolis, Jon. "Telegrams, letters pour in; Cox-firing outcry rings in capital." *The Chicago Tribune* October 28, 1973.

nuanced stories in newspapers provided far more space for information and arguments undermining Nixon's frames. The greater amount of editorial and commentary content in print news compared to the nightly news generally yielded far-reaching and extensive outright criticism of Nixon and Watergate. If the Nixon administration believed television to be relentlessly hammering away at its credibility, this was not apparent on the nightly news.

Public Opinion

Despite the general negative tone of much of their coverage, the *Post* seemed to offer a boost to the president the day after his August 15th speech with an article reporting that, though public reaction to the speech was not yet evident, politicians in Washington and elsewhere were responding favorably, particularly to his call for the nation to move on.[366] Four days after Nixon's speech, however, a Gallup poll commissioned by the *Times* showed that many of the president's key frames were not taking hold with the public. Half of the audience did not believe Nixon's assertion he was not involved in the planning or cover-up of Watergate, 56% thought he should turn over the tapes to the Senate and courts, and 58% disagreed with his claim that the culture of protest movements of the 1960's helped contribute to Watergate.[367]

[366] Cannon, Lou and Peter Milius. "1st Reaction of Politicians Is Positive." *The Washington Post* August 16, 1973.

[367] Herbers, John. "44% in Poll Find Nixon's TV Address Not Convincing and 27% Are Persuaded." *The New York Times*. August 19, 1973. However, it is worth noting that question wording may have played a role in the poll results on the executive privilege/defense of the presidency frame. When the question was asked "President Nixon said he has not turned over the tapes of his conversations with former aides because people in the future would be reluctant to talk freely with the president. Do you think this is a valid reason for not turning over the tapes?" 41% said yes and 51% no. Without that explanation, support for Nixon's actions on the tapes went down.

Other aspects of Nixon's frames fared better. August polls found that 57% of the public agreed with the president's call for the nation to move on and turn Watergate over to the courts. But such success was short-lived -- when asked in October whether Watergate should be "put behind us," 42% said yes and 54% no.[368] An Opinion Research Corporation poll found that 49% of Americans thought that confidentiality between a president and his aides was similar to that between lawyers and clients, priests and penitents, or husbands and wives, and a plurality of 46% agreed releasing the tapes would be damaging to the office of the presidency.[369] However, this same poll showed that those who saw or heard the August 15th speech were no more likely to accept or reject these Nixon themes than those who were not aware of it. Overall, surveys also indicated that the public viewed the speech as lacking – 58% who saw or heard the address said they were "dissatisfied with his explanation regarding Watergate."[370] Scandal management in the age of scientific polling created problems for Nixon that President Grant did not have to deal with. Once polls showed a majority rejected the president's frames and statements, the "objective" media reported as fact that Nixon's efforts were a failure, which could only compound that sentiment amongst politicians and the people.

All of the media emphasis on unanswered questions in August seemed to filter down to the public (or perhaps have originally reflected its view). After the speech, 66% of the public felt Nixon "has yet to answer the serious doubts about his involvement in Watergate which have come out of the Senate hearings."[371]

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[368] "44% in Poll Favor Impeaching Nixon." AP. *The New York Times* October 23, 1973.
[369] Lang and Lang, 83.
[370] Gallup, George. "Nixon's Popularity Rises, But Most Doubt Speech." *The Washington Post* August 22, 1973.
[371] Harris, Louis. "Harris Analysis: Most find Nixon not convincing." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 22, 1973 (also appeared in *The Washington Post*).

If the content of the August 15th speech relied in part on the listener taking President Nixon at his word, this proved to be a major problem for his framing efforts. As Louis Harris pointed out in the *Tribune*, "Richard Nixon has never had the personal appeal to allow the public to trust him on pure faith," in comparison to some of his predecessors.[372] Credibility problems plagued Nixon, creating public doubts about his ability to be an authoritative source of an accurate and honest version of events.

During August, all hope was not lost for the president's political survival. Even as Nixon's support was falling on his handling of most major domestic issues, he retained and even increased his levels of support on foreign policy issues like "working for peace in the world" and "ending the Vietnam War."[373] Further, a Harris poll at the time showed 63% of Americans did not want to see the president resign over Watergate, though those in favor of resignation had doubled in number since May of 1973.[374]

However by October of 1973, and after the Saturday Night Massacre, public opinion had turned against the president. In what the Associated Press termed a "thin plurality," 44% of respondents said they favored impeaching Nixon, with 43% opposed and 13% undecided. President Nixon's approval ratings fell to 22% in this same poll.[375] A full 75% of Americans disagreed with the president's actions in firing Cox.[376] Presidential framing deficiencies were only exacerbated by new actions that did not fit the narratives he had created.

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[372] Harris, Louis. "Criticism of Nixon toughens." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 20, 1973.
[373] Harris, Louis. "Criticism of Nixon toughens." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 20, 1973.
[374] Harris, Louis. "Harris Analysis: Most find Nixon not convincing." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 22, 1973.
[375] "44% in Poll Favor Impeaching Nixon." AP. *The New York Times* October 23, 1973.
[376] "Poll finds 75% condemn Nixon for firing Cox." UPI. *The Chicago Tribune* October 23, 1973.

At times, media portrayals of public opinion could be misleading. The *Times* and the *Post* on several occasions zeroed in on the dramatic deluge of telegrams received by members of Congress, urging representatives to impeach the president. The Senate Watergate committee, according to the *Post*, received more than 8,000 telegrams following the Cox firing, with only ten that supported the president.[377] As the *Times* later pointed out though, polls often contradicted such lopsided appraisals of public outcry, with a majority still wary of impeachment.[378] The tidal wave of telegrams made a compelling news story, but also conveyed the false impression that calls for impeachment were nearly unanimous.

Conclusion – Could Nixon Have Survived?

To be sure, Nixon's August 15th speech included failures of framing. The president's assertion that he personally was not really at fault, having been deceived and let down by his aides, was quite problematic. As the *Post* pointed out, a significant omission in Nixon's speech was "any hint that he should have been more alert or concerned about the unfolding Watergate scandal."[379] A close look at public opinion about this admission by the *Times* contended, "The thought that he did not know what was going on in his own Administration is deeply unsettling" to the American people.[380] But this profound disturbance would not necessarily have emerged with regard to any president who claimed not to know all that occurred in his or her own administration.

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[377] Claiborne, William. "Telegrams Continue; Impeachment Demands Flow Even After Tapes Turnaround." *The Washington Post* October 25, 1973.
[378] Naughton, James M. "Rodino Vows Fair Impeachment Inquiry." *The New York Times* October 29, 1973.
[379] Johnson, Haynes. "Nixon View: Wronged If Not Betrayed." *The Washington Post* August 16, 1973.
[380] Roberts, Steven V. "Nixon's Popularity in Gallup Poll Declines to 31%, the Lowest Point for an American President in 20 Years." *The New York Times*. August 15, 1973.

President Grant during the Whiskey Ring scandal was the beneficiary of the perception he was susceptible to the manipulations of unsavory characters. President Reagan during the Iran-Contra scandal made very effective use of the frame that he was "in the dark" about much of what happened. Reagan, however, had long been known for his detachment from the office and frequent delegation of responsibilities. Nixon, on the other hand, had no such reputation, instead often showing he was immersed in the details of decision-making in office. It was an unconvincing narrative to say his aides had kept Watergate secret or outright fooled the president.

What Nixon *had* built his reputation on was a commitment to "law and order." This was an irony not lost on the *Times*, which proclaimed that part of the paradoxical nature of the scandal was "that a so-called 'law and order' administration could apparently be guilty of gross illegalities and actions of dubious propriety."[381] David Broder in the *Post* noted after the Cox dismissal, "A 'law and order' President has, not for the first time, but in the most naked fashion, subverted the agencies of the law."[382] One of the more damaging aspects of the scandal was that the president's predicament could be portrayed as shocking and hypocritical – the "Elliot Spitzer problem," it might be deemed. Should a presidential scandal subvert one of the primary positive traits the public associates with that politician, recovering support becomes far more arduous.

As far back as his 1950 race for U.S. Senate in California, the public had also been exposed to the impression of Nixon as "Tricky Dick" and the perpetrator of "dirty

[381] Kammen, Michael. "Herewith: Hist-ants, Inst-hists, Hist-rets." *The New York Times.* August 19, 1973.
[382] Broder, David S. "Resigning In the Name of Principle." *The Washington Post* October 24, 1973.

tricks."[383] Though clearly not a well of political support for the president, perhaps Nixon would have been better served by apologizing for Watergate, while simultaneously seeking to entrench it firmly in the category of "dirty trick." Had he portrayed Watergate and any cover-up as strictly a dishonorable, underhanded effort to hurt his political enemies, Nixon might have avoided a far more damaging focus on how the public interest might be hurt, presidential power run amuck, and illegal activities engaged in. Unscrupulous partisan fighting and sabotage might be distasteful to the public, but not necessarily viewed as a crime. Louis Harris, analyzing poll numbers in August of 1973, contended that the public thought Nixon was involved in the cover-up. If he would just admit this, citizens might forgive him, but in implausibly denying everything he was quickly losing support.[384] By making an admission to unsavory and unethical political tactics, Nixon might have drawn on his off-putting image as "Tricky Dick," yet possibly avoided being identified as a dangerous tyrannical figure who must be removed from office. The "move on" to real problems frame, initially so successful in the news coverage, could have supplemented this narrative, that Watergate did not represent a real concern to the nation.

The president's ability to weather a scandal also cannot be divorced from his or her political performance and real-life conditions. Whereas President Clinton was able to retain some support in the face of scandal based on the public's support for his management of the economy, the fall of 1973 was not a period of great economic

[383] This nickname was reportedly first given to Nixon by Helen Gahagan Douglas, Nixon's opponent in the 1950 Senate race, and who was on the receiving end of such tricks. Douglas ascribed to Nixon, for instance, the passing out of leaflets ("Pink Sheets") at her rallies tying her to communist sympathies (Sally Denton, *The Pink Lady: The Many Lives of Helen Gahagan Douglas*, London: Bloomsbury Press, 2009).
[384] Harris, Louis. "Harris Analysis: Most find Nixon not convincing." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 22, 1973.

strength. Potentially, Nixon might have instead drawn on his perceived success in the foreign policy realm as a means of retaining citizens' backing. As the October coverage makes clear however, even a crisis in the Middle East involving the Soviet Union could not save the president from substantial negative Watergate press. What this tells us is that not all presidents embroiled in a scandal may be able to highlight some aspects of their political identity and sacrifice others to retain their office. Clinton successfully relinquished any sense of his personal moral integrity to focus public attention on his performance as president. By contrast, Nixon in 1973 was facing a public more concerned with domestic affairs than foreign policy. That public also believed Kissinger deserved a great deal of the credit for the administration's foreign policy successes, rather than the president alone.

Of course, it is possible that no amount of skillful framing could have saved Nixon once the June 23, 1972 tape became public, a recording on which Haldeman reported to the president Dean's plan to have the CIA instruct the FBI to back off the Watergate investigation, and to which the president agreed. As Stephen Ambrose contends, Nixon's best bet for surviving Watergate would have been burning the tapes as soon as their existence was made public, before they were subpoenaed.[385] Ultimately, if the tapes were not destroyed, Nixon had a greater chance for political survival had he properly constructed his role in the crisis from the outset, as opposed to coming clean in August of 1974 when this recording was finally released.

[385] Ambrose, 196.

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Beckman, Aldo. "Nixon denies knowledge of Watergate or coverup." *The Chicago Tribune*. August 16, 1973.

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Chapter 4: President Clinton and the Lewinsky Scandal

On January 21, 1998, several major news organizations reported that President Bill Clinton was being accused of having an affair with a White House intern and lying about it under oath in a deposition given as part of the Paula Jones sexual harassment lawsuit. The very nature of how the story broke demonstrated the profound changes the American media had undergone by 1998. Though mainstream media journalists like Michael Isikoff of *Newsweek* had been quietly investigating the Lewinsky story for a year, outlets like the *Washington Post* were pressured to run the story by Internet gossip columnist Matt Drudge's posts about the details of the scandal. New media outlets, including web sources lacking journalistic prestige or credibility, were now dictating the pace of the news cycle and playing an agenda setting role. The feeding frenzy (Sabato 1991) the scandal created in the media was also indicative of the hyper-adversarial press that had developed over the decades since Watergate. The media were quick to scrutinize the character and psychology of politicians like President Clinton and increasingly focused on the strategic and game-like aspects of politics in their news coverage (Patterson 1993; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000; Jamieson and Waldman 2003).

As the scandal was made public, Clinton was alleged to have urged the intern, Monica Lewinsky, to lie about their relationship to lawyers in the Jones case, and obstructed justice by prompting her to get rid of subpoenaed gifts he had given her. Other charges against the president included whether he had coached his personal secretary, Betty Currie, to lie about his interactions with Lewinsky and hide the aforementioned gifts, and whether he asked friend Vernon Jordan to obtain a job for Lewinsky after she became subject to investigation. Initially, the Clinton administration's strategy in

combating the charges was principally denial. In particular, his January 26, 1998 statement, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky," was an oft-repeated clip on media programs for its directness in responding to the accusations.[386]

However, by summer, it had become apparent that Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr had obtained DNA evidence that tied Clinton to the affair and denial could not be plausibly maintained.[387] On August 17th, 1998, after testifying before the Grand Jury, President Clinton gave a primetime address admitting that he had a relationship with Lewinsky that was "inappropriate" and "wrong." Clinton gave this critical speech from the White House map room, not the Oval Office, because his political advisers felt it was best if appeared to be "an ordinary citizen who had suffered public humiliation" rather than an official figure amidst all the trappings of his office.[388] Adding to the noteworthy events of this particular week, just days later Clinton announced that military strikes were being carried out on suspected terrorist training sites in Afghanistan and the Sudan.

I argue that President Clinton was able to secure supportive media coverage for several of the key frames he applied to the Lewinsky affair in his August 17th speech, and that much of the news content was more positive or neutral than might be expected at the height of a scandal. The president's claims that the affair was a "personal mistake" and that he was suffering at the hands of "partisan enemies" were the frames most effective at allowing him to retain office. However, the press treated other Clinton narratives, most notably that the president had not taken illegal actions, far less hospitably. Further, though operating in a new media environment that included 24-hour news networks and

[386] Joseph Hayden, *Covering Clinton: The President and the Press in the 1990's* (Connecticut: Praeger, 2002), 85.
[387] Robert Busby, *Defending the American Presidency: Clinton and the Lewinsky Scandal* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 88.
[388] Ibid, 78.

the Internet, the president's frames were still apparent even in an unwieldy cable news setting. Clinton was able to achieve framing success throughout the press by capitalizing on coverage norms and familiar news narratives, crafting frames that fit in with how the media of the 1990's tended to cover political stories.

In this chapter, I review Clinton's August 17, 1998 address and evaluate the main frames the president employed to cast the scandal events in the most favorable light possible. I then analyze the content of nightly news broadcasts, major newspapers, and cable news programming to ascertain the extent to which these frames appeared in the media, and whether news content supported or undermined them. Turning to a second time period to evaluate how well the president's frames fared after some time had passed and as other prominent political actors weighed in, I examined the news content for these same outlets over the week in mid-December 1998 when the impeachment debate and vote took place in the House of Representatives. Throughout the chapter I will explore the role of the White House, political parties, journalists, pundits, and the public in shaping both the scandal events and the news coverage.

Clinton's Framing of the Lewinsky Scandal: Persecuted and Personal

One central frame Clinton employed in the August 17th address was that of portraying himself as a persecuted figure, to which he added the element of depicting his enemies as particularly unsavory characters. Clinton described the events leading to the current investigation as tied to "a politically inspired lawsuit" and asserted that the

independent counsel conducting the investigation "is now under investigation."[389] These descriptions served to make those investigating the president appear to be partisan extremists engaged in a vindictive witch-hunt. They also fostered the belief that an illegitimate case was being mounted against Clinton, and so any misconduct on his part in relation to it was not as problematic as if it were a legitimate investigation.[390] In addition, shifting focus to the president's adversaries was conceived as a means to limit the amount of critical coverage the president himself would receive.[391] The persecuted frame also might induce some sympathy on the part of the public for the president's position – Clinton claimed he had been forced to answer questions in the course of his testimony that "no American citizen would ever want to answer."

The second frame Clinton articulated was assuming responsibility for his actions and expressing regret about them. Clinton stated that he took "complete responsibility" for his actions, and admitted that he had a relationship with Lewinsky that was "not appropriate" and "wrong." After thus revealing that his previous denials of a relationship were not truthful and he had misled people, Clinton maintained, "I deeply regret that." The goal of this frame was to meet the public's expectations that the president should be sorry for the actions that the public now knew unequivocally that he had taken. Clinton sought to indicate he was a leader who was not in denial about the reality of the situation, by being forthright about what occurred and taking responsibility. However, it is

[389] A video and transcript of President Clinton's August 17, 1998 address can be found in President Clinton's Speech Archive at the Miller Center of Public Affairs website: http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3931.
[390] Joseph R. Blaney and William Benoit, *The Clinton Scandals and the Politics of Image Restoration* (Connecticut: Praeger, 2001), 90.
[391] Stephen J. Farnsworth and S. Robert Lichter, *The Mediated Presidency: Television News and Presidential Governance* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006),115.

important to note that while this frame emphasized regret, there was no formal apology and no begging of forgiveness by the president.

Clinton was also eager to deemphasize the criminal accusations against him. He utilized a frame stressing that his actions did not include asking "anyone to lie, to hide or destroy evidence or to take any other unlawful action." Furthermore, he maintained that the answers he gave at the January deposition were "legally accurate," though he admitted that he "did not volunteer information." A key goal of Clinton's framing of the Lewinsky scandal was to convince the public that this presidential transgression was not comparable to Watergate, specifically in terms of illegal action and cover-up. Watergate looms large in the collective American political memory, and it behooves presidents who have made a mistake to distance themselves as convincingly as possible from this scandal that resulted in the collapse of a presidency.

The fourth frame employed by Clinton was related to the previous one, and encompassed his attempts to classify the affair as a *personal* mistake. In relating that he misled individuals over the course of these events, Clinton pointed out specifically that this included "even my wife." He brought up his family again further along, declaring that "Now, this matter is between me, the two people I love most – my wife and our daughter – and our God." This focused attention on the sexual aspect of the scandal, which worked to Clinton's advantage because adultery was an offense the public tended to view as violating moral and family relationships, but not as a criminal activity. The

"narrative of infidelity" would also be familiar to the American audience, in a society where affairs and divorces are quite common.[392]

The goal of this frame was to further establish a differentiation in the public mindset about Clinton the man and Clinton the president, between his private and his public roles. Failure in his private capacity as a husband and father would not then necessarily impact his public capacity as chief executive. Throughout the speech, Clinton stressed that his actions constituted a "personal failure," insisting that "[e]ven presidents have private lives." Framing the events in this way even included an aspect of essentially shaming those who continued to dwell on the president's private life, apparent in statements such as, "It's nobody's business but ours." The public/private dichotomy set up here by Clinton sought to allow him to face up to the indisputable evidence of his mistake while simultaneously justifying why he should be able to continue in his job.

Finally, like Nixon, Clinton made an appeal to our civic duty to move on from the scandal. Whereas Nixon's plea to this effect rested on the argument he was being prevented from fulfilling the public mandate he was given in his reelection, Clinton's appeal was strengthened by the nature of the very scandal he was facing. He argued, "It is time to stop the pursuit of personal destruction and the prying into private lives and get on with our national life," including "real opportunities to seize, real problems to solve, real security matters to face." The repetition of the word "real" here implied to the viewer that the issues focused on by the investigation of Clinton were somehow "fake," or at least unlikely to create any kind of real danger or problem for the country. Clinton asked the American people to think of the public good and "turn away from the spectacle

[392] Craig Allen Smith, "Bill Clinton in Rhetorical Crisis: The Six Stages of Scandal and Impeachment," in eds. Denton and Holloway, *Images, Scandal, and Communication Strategies of the Clinton Presidency* (Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), 180.

of the past seven months." The unprecedented amount of information about the intimate details of the president's sexual exploits that were a part of the Lewinsky scandal did seem to aid Clinton's framing of the scandal as a tawdry affair. The scandal was filled with issues that made Americans felt uncomfortable and voyeuristic, potentially giving them an incentive to heed the president's advice and "turn away."

Nightly News Coverage in August: Some Positives, Though Clinton's Effectiveness in Question

Table 4.1

Tone of Stories[393]	**ABC**		**CBS**		**NBC**	
	Number of Stories	Percentage	Number of Stories	Percentage	Number of Stories	Percentage
Positive	4	40%	1	11.1%	3	18.8%
Negative	3	30%	3	33.3%	6	37.5%
Neutral	3	30%	9	55.6%	7	43.8%

[393] Throughout the media content analysis in this chapter, a "positive" article or story was one that mainly conveyed President Clinton and/or his frames in a supportive light, "negative" those that were mostly critical or provided opposition to Clinton and his frames, and "neutral" those that did not constitute content supportive or critical of the president and his frames, or that presented a fairly even representation of both sides/perspectives.

Table 4.2

Frames

	Appearances[394]			Undermined[395]		
August Frames	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC
Persecuted by partisan enemies	6	6	5	2	2	1
Takes responsibility/regrets	2	0	3	1	0	4
No illegal action/didn't lie	4	3	4	8	4	5
Personal mistake	8	2	7	0	0	0
Move on/to real problems	5	3	3	0	1	1

I analyzed nightly news broadcasts on the three major networks for a full week after the speech, from August 17th – 24th, 1998.[396] The two frames utilized by Clinton that garnered the most mentions on the nightly news were the president's assertions (1) that he was being victimized by unsavory partisan enemies and (2) that the scandal constituted a personal mistake. Occasionally independent confirmations of the former frame could be found on the news, as when Tom Brokaw of NBC mentioned the role "judicial zealotry" played in the scandal while simultaneously flashing a picture of Kenneth Starr on the screen. Footage of the special prosecutor appeared again while

[394] "Appearances" of a frame in the televised nightly news analysis were counted when one of Clinton's frames was mentioned in the broadcast, or a statement with the same general meaning as a frame he articulated. A single news segment was counted as having more than one appearance of a frame if that frame was articulated in different contexts, or by different individuals.

[395] The undermining of a frame was counted any time one of Clinton's frames appeared in the televised broadcast, and then was contradicted or criticized, or when sentiments representing the opposite of what Clinton sought to argue were found on the program.

[396] All stories were viewed using the database of the Vanderbilt Television News Archive located in Nashville, TN. Any story involving President Clinton and the Lewinsky scandal, or simply the scandal itself, was included in this analysis.

Brokaw declared there were "no heroes with universal admiration" in the saga.[397] ABC described Starr and the prosecution as pushing the president "unmercilessly" for graphic details of his relationship with Lewinsky.[398]

The media's attraction to personalized, dramatic content (Bennett 2005) led them to focus on the impact of the affair on the president's family. The heavy emphasis on President Clinton's damaged relationship with his wife and daughter certainly did not make him appear saint-like, but it did support the framing of the affair as a personal transgression. The human drama of how the president would atone for his mistakes in his marriage made for a compelling narrative that the nightly news was only too happy to focus on. All three networks presented quotes from the Reverend Jesse Jackson as he touted the "amazing strength" of Hillary Clinton, and how Psalm 51 comforted the president during the minister's counseling session with the First Family.[399]

Six stories on the networks referred to the president's high job approval and plummeting personal favorability ratings, adding to the perception that this was a problem restricted to Clinton's personal life. Yet it would be too simplistic to conclude that the coverage entirely divorced Clinton's private behavior from his official capacity. Seven news pieces presented the view that the Lewinsky scandal damaged the president's ability to lead and made him less effective. Polls were also cited which made this connection between the president's private and public roles: one survey taken soon after the August 17th speech showed 52% of the American people felt the scandal was affecting Clinton's ability to lead.[400] At other times journalists spearheaded this

[397] *NBC Evening News*, August 18, 1998.
[398] *ABC Evening News*, August 18, 1998.
[399] *ABC Evening News*, August 17, 1998 and *NBC Evening News*, August 17, 1998.
[400] *NBC Evening News*, August 17, 1998.

argument, as when Andrea Mitchell concluded an NBC story on the damaging effects the Lewinsky scandal might have on American foreign policy by speculating, "The president admits the scandal has distracted him and the nation for too long. The question tonight – has it also weakened America abroad?"[401]

Clinton's adamant insistence that he had done nothing illegal and did not lie was also a substantial part of the coverage, but one frequently subject to criticism. Lewinsky herself was a source challenging the frame, as all the networks reported that her testimony before the prosecution directly contradicted the president's on the nature of their sexual relationship and the perjury charges.[402] NBC, however, covered this in part by creating a graphic labeled "He said…She said…"[403] which seemed to push the controversy into a more nebulous area typically associated with sexual harassment cases, where it might be assumed difficult to determine who was telling the truth. On August 19th, all three networks covered the story that Clinton had reportedly worn a necktie Lewinsky had given him to encourage her to testify favorably toward him. This emphasized potential illegal action by the president, and illustrated how Clinton's "personal" mistake might be tied to breaking the law. Implicitly then, all coverage that undercut the president's assertions he had done nothing illegal also challenged his claim that the affair was a personal transgression, though it was never explicitly charged on the nightly news that the scandal was not solely "personal."

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[401] *NBC Evening News*, August 18, 1998.
[402] *ABC Evening News*, August 19, 1998; *CBS Evening News*, August 19, 1998 and *NBC Evening News*, August 20, 1998.
[403] *NBC Evening News*, August 21, 1998. A source in *The Washington Post* also described the discrepancy in Clinton and Lewinsky's testimony in this way (Schmidt, Susan and Peter Baker. "Lewinsky, Clinton Testimony in Conflict." *The Washington Post* August 20, 1998).

The call to move on from the scandal received a fair amount of attention on the nightly news, and was seldom undermined. Clinton and his White House surrogates as well as members of the public pushed this frame in the broadcasts, but never major political actors outside of the administration. It would have been difficult for journalists or commentators independently to call for the nation to move on while lavishing such massive attention on the story. Additionally, the above examples of the nightly news linking Clinton's affair to a diminished capacity to lead could be viewed as the dark side of the president's call for the nation to move on to real problems. A focus on the scandal as distracting might emphasize a president who had compromised his job capabilities in a dangerous way.

The president's expression of regret and his assumption of responsibility for his actions was more rarely mentioned, and often called into question. One citizen reacting to the speech told NBC News, "I didn't feel he really apologized."[404] Republican Representative Henry Hyde, shown on NBC, maintained that he did not believe what Clinton said amounted to an apology.[405] Further, the broadcasts discussed the hurt and sadness felt by Monica Lewinsky and her family that they were issued no apology, raising questions of not only whether Clinton had not been sorry enough, but also whether he directed his apologies to all the right people.[406]

Making White House Strategy Transparent

As in the Nixon case, the media referred frequently to the ways the president's statements and actions were strategically orchestrated to win back public and political support. One CBS reporter claimed that the White House wanted the First Family hidden

[404] *NBC Evening News*, August 18, 1998.
[405] *NBC Evening News*, August 21, 1998.
[406] *ABC Evening News*, August 19, 1998.

away in Martha's Vineyard after the president's speech so it would at least give the appearance they had time to put the affair behind them, allowing them to credibly push later for a change of subject.[407]

Unlike the print outlets analyzed, the major networks seldom mentioned a "Wag the Dog" angle to the Middle East strikes. Only NBC referred to a possible "Wag" connection during the August broadcasts.[408] One expert featured by the network called the military move "tacky but inevitable," but the White House's emphatic denials of the charge were also included in that story. At this juncture, the connection seemed to be made for entertainment value rather than questioning the integrity of the government, as was the case in the coverage when President Nixon placed American troops on high alert during Watergate. Reporter Brian Williams even included the playful aside that the press corps was actually watching the film Wag the Dog when the word of the strikes reached the journalists.[409]

Psychological/Personal/Character Focus

As in the Grant and Nixon cases, scandal coverage was accompanied by psychological assessments of the president. Nearly half of the nightly news stories referred to one or more of Clinton's psychological attributes or personal characteristics, almost all of them negative. The president was most likely to be associated with being humiliated, dishonest, untrustworthy, angry and defiant (while giving his testimony), and having low ethical standards. The only more positive trait ascribed to Clinton was effectiveness in psychologically compartmentalizing, which was cited by both ABC and

[407] *CBS Evening News*, August 19, 1998.
[408] *NBC Evening News*, August 20, 1998.
[409] This coincidence was also noted in *The Washington Post* (Harris, John F. "In the Midst of Scandal, Clinton Planned Action." *The Washington Post* August 21, 1998).

NBC.[410] Three stories during this time period also identified Clinton as exhibiting a remarkable ability throughout his political career to get into, and then out of, trouble.[411] Though this highlighted some of the president's self-destructive tendencies, it also encouraged expectations that he would be able to survive yet again.

Two pieces introduced the concept of "two Clintons," a dichotomy that encouraged the public to see several different sides to the president. This might indirectly bolster the "personal mistake" frame. NBC juxtaposed two images of the president side by side, one deemed "confessor in chief" giving his August 17th speech, and the other in the Oval Office after the military strikes, titled "commander-in-chief."[412] The tenor of the story was that Clinton used his compartmentalizing skills to easily transition from one role to another. The following day, ABC correspondent Mike von Fremd extolled Clinton's ability to separate different parts of his life, as his mother had taught him from a young age, allowing the president to plan his testimony and the military attack simultaneously, while he "never seemed distracted in either."[413]

As Jamieson and Waldman (2003) argue, the contemporary media do not shy away from engaging in some amateur psychological analysis of major politicians as part of their coverage, and the nature of the Lewinsky scandal only further encouraged this. Sam Donaldson of ABC took it upon himself to analyze the body language of the Clintons as they boarded a plane for Martha's Vineyard, relating that some observers

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[410] This was far less likely to be a trait focused on in the August print coverage analyzed here. One exception to this was when, following the missile strikes, the *Times* chose to emphasize Clinton's ability to handle both the scandal and the military effort. Straight news coverage in the paper lauded, "Never has Mr. Clinton's ability to compartmentalize his life been more starkly demonstrated than in the last two weeks."[410]

[411] *ABC Evening News,* August 17, 1998; *NBC Evening News,* August 19, 1998.

[412] *NBC Evening News,* August 21, 1998.

[413] *ABC Evening News,* August 22, 1998.

"winced" as the First Lady brushed by the president in the doorway of the plane.[414] NBC's Brokaw meanwhile declared, "As his own worst enemy, the president is in a class by himself."[415]

Print Coverage in August: Success for "Private" and "Persecuted," Trouble for "No Illegal Action"

Table 4.3

Tone of Coverage	NYT		CT		WP	
	# of articles	Percent	# of articles	Percent	# of articles	Percent
Positive	17	25.8	15	26.3	17	21
Negative	23	34.8	22	38.6	32	39.5
Neutral	26	39.4	20	35.1	32	39.5

I analyzed the same period of August 17th – 24th, 1998 in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Chicago Tribune*.[416] Despite President Clinton's admission that he had an inappropriate relationship with Lewinsky and that he "misled" people, print news outlets the week of his address still presented a substantial amount of coverage that represented positive or neutral coverage of the president and/or his frames.[417] A plurality (39.4%) of the *Times*' coverage following the president's speech was neutral, and in the *Post*, negative and neutral articles made up the same percentage (39.5%) of the overall coverage. The *Tribune* veered toward the negative more than the

[414] *ABC Evening News,* August 18, 1998.
[415] *NBC Evening News,* August 18, 1998.
[416] *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were selected because of their national prominence, and as part of the "prestige press" in the United States they are considered to be influential throughout the rest of the media. *The Chicago Tribune* was chosen to allow for a non-east coast media perspective, and because the paper's editorial board was typically more right-leaning. The *Times* and the *Post* tend to have more left-leaning editorial content.
[417] In total, 66 *New York Times* articles, 57 *Chicago Tribune* articles, and 81 *Washington Post* articles were analyzed here, that appeared in the newspapers between August 17th and August 24th.

other two papers, with a plurality of 38.6% of stories offering negative coverage. However, the *Tribune* also provided the largest percentage of positive coverage of all three outlets, indicating a greater presence of opinion-oriented coverage in its pages generally.

Table 4.4

Frames	**Appearances**[418]			**Undermined**[419]		
August Frames	NYT	CT	WP	NYT	CT	WP
Persecuted by partisan enemies	137	85	123	36	35	63
Takes responsibility/regrets	50	29	41	46	30	55
No illegal action/didn't lie	54	39	82	103	68	122
Personal mistake	134	97	132	27	18	36
Move on/to real problems	46	17	44	12	6	28

President Clinton's most successful frames in the *Times* were casting the affair as a personal mistake and persecution by partisan enemies. Each had roughly the same number of appearances, and both were among the frames least likely to be challenged. On several occasions, the *Times* cited Starr's critics' declarations that the special prosecutor was obsessed and out of control, willing to do anything to "get" Bill Clinton. At times, the paper even implicitly backed this frame in its objective coverage. For example, the *Times*, noting Starr's efforts to determine whether Clinton had committed perjury, added

[418] "Appearances" of a frame in the print news analysis were counted as the number of sentences that conveyed or supported that particular frame.
[419] "Undermined" stands for the number of sentences that contradicted or opposed the substance of Clinton's frames.

that this was "a new subject for an investigation that has already lasted seven months."[420] Additionally, the paper's articles on the scandal were all prefaced with the header, "Testing of a President," which made it appear the actions of others (like Starr), were really the main issue, and this was an occasion Clinton could rise to (withstanding the "test"). Opinion pieces in the paper also touched on the "persecuted" theme – one columnist asserted that the special prosecutor pursued the case because "he saw a chance to destroy Bill Clinton."[421] As on the nightly news, the frame fit in well with the personalization and conflict-oriented biases[422] of the press – the *Times* quoted one expert observer of the case as saying of Clinton and Starr, "I'm reminded of two heavyweights who are determined to go 15 rounds."[423] On the front page of the *Tribune* on August 17th, the paper juxtaposed two photos and corresponding stories headlined "The Witness" (Clinton) and "The Prosecutor" (Starr), visually highlighting the "battle" between the two.

Yet some frames may succeed with a particular audience and fail with others. As the *Post* reported, some Clinton advisers were unhappy with the president's speech because they believed "its seething tone toward Starr…inflamed an already hostile environment in Washington."[424] Many public officials and political figures in Washington might have viewed Clinton's claims to persecution and victimhood with scorn, but the general public appeared more receptive to those arguments.

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[420] Bennet, James and Don Van Natta, Jr. "Testing of a President: The Prosecutor; Starr Summons Lewinsky Again, Seeking Flaws in Clinton Account." *The New York Times* August 19, 1998.
[421] Lewis, Anthony. "Abroad at Home; Politics Dressed as Law." *The New York Times* August 24, 1998.
[422] Shah, Dhavan V., Mark D. Watts, David Domke and David P. Fan, "News Framing and Cueing of Issue Regimes: Explaining Clinton's Public Approval in Spite of Scandal," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 66 (2002): 339-370.
[423] Abramson, Jill. "Testing of a President: The Confrontation; Tightening of Tensions Signals an Uglier Round." *The New York Times* August 19, 1998.
[424] Harris, John F. "Words Were Clinton's Own, Too Much So, Aides Worry." *The Washington Post* August 19, 1998.

In the *Post*, the personal mistake frame was the most effective, and though Clinton's charge he was persecuted by partisan enemies garnered the second most appearances in the paper, it was more likely to be contradicted than in the *Times*. "Personal mistake" also worked best for the Clinton cause in the *Tribune*, appearing the most times and less likely to be undercut in its pages than in the other two papers. *Tribune* articles with titles such as, "Issue is seen primarily as one of privacy," explicitly validated that thread of the White House narrative.[425]

The least effective Clinton frame in the *Times* and the *Tribune* was that he had taken no illegal action; it was routinely disputed in the two papers. As the *Times* coverage noted, when Clinton emphasized the mistake as a personal one, he seemed "to suggest that the difficult question of perjury was the intrusion of nasty little busybodies."[426] The *Times* was the original source for the story discussed on the nightly news that Clinton was perhaps trying to send Lewinsky a signal by wearing a tie she had given him. Although the paper acknowledged the president's denials of anything untoward, the reporters noted that "the tie has meant a lot to Ms. Lewinsky, who has looked at television reports to see if the President was wearing it," subverting his denials.[427]

The no illegal action frame also suffered in the pages of the *Post*, but was actually challenged with less frequency than it was in the *Times* and the *Tribune*. Three major articles in the *Post* focusing on the legal implications of the scandal showed roughly

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[425] Jones, Tim. "Issue is seen primarily as one of privacy." *The Chicago Tribune* August 19, 1998. A graph accompanying the article also supported this divorcing of Clinton's private life from his public performance, showing the disparity between his declining favorability ratings with the public and sustained high job approval. Editorially, however, the paper pointed out the ways the scandal was not solely private but negatively impacted the public and the office of the presidency ("The scarlet presidency." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune* August 19, 1998).

[426] Apple Jr., R.W. "Testing of a President: The Scene; As President Testifies, a Subdued Capital Waits for Word." *The New York Times* August 18, 1998.

[427] Van Natta Jr., Don and James Bennet. "Testing of a President: The Attire; Did President Send Lewinsky a Signal With His Necktie?" *The New York Times* August 19, 1998.

equal appearances of both Clinton's "no illegal action" frame and sentiments that the president had in fact broken the law.[428] In contrast to the relatively even-handed coverage in the *Post* articles mentioned above, a typical *Tribune* article focusing on Clinton's legal difficulties included much more attention to the president's potentially criminal behaviors as opposed to his denials of such wrongdoing.[429] The *Post*, then, appeared to be taking a very precise approach to "balanced" journalism, while the *Tribune* gave greater priority to the damaging allegations against the president.

Clinton's assertions that he regretted what had occurred and was taking responsibility for his actions was perhaps the least successful frame in the *Post*, and also frequently challenged in the *Times* and *Tribune*. The *Post* noted that though Clinton said he was taking responsibility, "he did not use words like 'apology' or 'sorry,' as some advisers had urged."[430] In an editorial, the *Post* asserted Clinton "made a show of taking responsibility that in fact he once again sought to dodge."[431] The *Tribune*, perhaps unintentionally, did bolster the president's frame through headlines that termed Clinton's statement an apology, such as "Apology doesn't clear the air, many say."[432] In light of some of the coverage discussed above, identifying the speech as an apology would be contested terminology, but the *Tribune*'s coverage did not reflect that concern.

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[428] In the August 20, 1998 article "Lewinsky, Clinton Testimony in Conflict" by Susan Schmidt and Peter Baker, "no illegal action" appeared six times, with challenges to that frame appearing seven times. An August 21st article by the same authors entitled "President Acknowledges Effort to Keep Affair Secret; But Said He Didn't Intend to Encourage Perjury" included the same number of appearances of the frame and challenges, at eight. Finally, "A Defense for Clinton Begins to Take Shape," written by Peter Baker, Ruth Marcus and Susan Schmidt and published August 24th contained eighteen appearances of no illegal action and seventeen sentences that undermined that frame.

[429] For instance, in an August 19th *Tribune* article by James Warren entitled, "Admission may worsen legal woes, experts say," the "no illegal actions" frame made only four appearances, while there were fourteen sentences challenging those assertions.

[430] Baker, Peter and John F. Harris. "Clinton Admits to Lewinsky Relationship, Challenges Starr to End Personal 'Prying.'" *The Washington Post*, August 18, 1998.

[431] "Mea Not So Culpa." Editorial. *The Washington Post*, August 19, 1998.

[432] Secter, Bob and Karen Brandon. "Apology doesn't clear the air, many say." *The Chicago Tribune* August 19, 1998.

Calling for the nation to move on had the fewest appearances in the *Times* and the *Tribune* of any frame employed by the president, but was also seldom undermined. Overall, the *Post* was more likely to include challenges to the move on frame than the *Times* and the *Tribune*, reminiscent of its systematic dismantling of Nixon's call for the nation to move on during Watergate.

Psychological/Personal/Character Focus

The newspapers depicted Clinton's character and psychology with a remarkable sameness. All three newspapers were most likely to describe Clinton as a liar/dishonest, angry, embarrassed/humiliated, of questionable morality, untrustworthy, and as lacking credibility. The *Times* and the *Post* were also prone to descriptions of Clinton as "reckless" and "defiant." The *Times* frequently called the president combative, the *Post* focused on his demeanor as lacking contrition, and the *Tribune* referred to him as a political showman or performer.[433] Though Clinton took pains in his speech to say he "created a false impression" or "misled" people rather than lied, journalists and their sources were far less generous. The president was referred to as lying/a liar/deceptive over seventy times in the *Times*, seventy-three times in the *Tribune*, and a whopping 127 times in the *Post*.

Nor did the papers' emphasis on Clinton's psychological traits always serve to bolster his effort to sever his private life from his public performance as president. Some articles directly related the president's psychological flaws to policy questions and actions he took in office. One article in the *Times* connected the president's propensity for "shading the truth" about his affair with Lewinsky to his broken promise not to raise

[433] Each of these listed traits were used to refer to Clinton in the papers on five or more occasions during the time period analyzed.

taxes as governor of Arkansas and his deflection of criticism about administration campaign fundraising tactics.[434] A *Post* op-ed piece cited a reporter from Little Rock who had closely followed Clinton's career and asserted, "He has no principles he would not abandon if it costs him votes."[435]

Clinton's psychology was also portrayed as in part driving his rehabilitation strategy. The *Times* and the *Post* reported that Clinton emerged from his four hours of testimony on the day of his speech angry and frustrated with Starr, and his subsequent address reflected those sentiments.[436] The *Tribune* echoed these claims, but added that Clinton had not only "raged" but also "pouted about Starr for months."[437] Only one article in the *Post* countered this idea, as anonymous Clinton advisers told the paper the attacks were a conscious and carefully calculated strategy "to remind Americans of what he believed were Starr's violations of privacy and fairness."[438]

Much of the coverage of Clinton's psychology and character established these negative traits as long apparent in his patterns of behavior. To the extent that some argued the president's survival was positively affected by the unsurprising nature of the scandal, these outlets helped foster the White House's position.[439] As one reader of the *Times*

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[434] Purdum, Todd S. "Testing of a President: The Background; Strong at Politics, Weakened by Lapses." *The New York Times* August 18, 1998.

[435] Hentoff, Nat. "A Legacy Lost." *The Washington Post* August 22, 1998.

[436] Purdum, Todd S. "Testing of a President: The Speech; In Umbrage and Admission, It Was Vintage Bill Clinton." *The New York Times* August 19, 1998 and Baker, Peter and John F. Harris. "Clinton Admits to Lewinsky Relationship, Challenges Starr to End Personal 'Prying.'" *The Washington Post*, August 18, 1998.

[437] Fournier, Ron. "Angry at Starr, Clinton rejected attempt to delete attack from speech." *The Chicago Tribune* August 19, 1998.

[438] Balz, Dan and John F. Harris. "Clinton May Court Democrats on Hill; Neglected Lawmakers Key to Survival." " *The Washington Post* August 23, 1998.

[439] The deficiencies of this explanation are noted by Renshon (2002), including that Clinton had continually and forcefully denied the accusations of individuals like Gennifer Flowers, and that during the 1992 campaign he had given the impression "whatever happened in the past, he's different now" (Stanley A. Renshon, "'The Polls': The Public's Response to the Clinton Scandals, Part 1: Inconsistent Theories, Contradictory Evidence," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32 (1) (March 2002), 172.

wrote to the paper, "It was abundantly clear both in 1992 and 1996 that the draft-dodging, pot-smoking, philandering Bill Clinton had little to offer in the way of character…the American people got precisely the man they elected."[440] The *Times* editorial staff concurred with this idea, posing the question "Why should Mr. Clinton be blamed for a failing that was known in advance?" The *Post* also identified a pattern of mendacity in Clinton's past, "where language is malleable and meaning is opaque," with the president's rhetoric getting him into, but then also frequently out of, trouble.[441] The newspapers often alluded to how President Clinton had previously engaged in this manipulation of his public statements and parsing of the truth in controversies ranging from past marijuana use, to his Vietnam draft status, to improper fundraising in the White House.[442]

As on the nightly news, the "amateur psychologist" aspect of modern reporting was apparent, as the *Times* noted upon arrival in Martha's Vineyard, "Mr. and Mrs. Clinton worked the crowd together without speaking to one another or touching."[443] One *Post* op-ed proffered that when the author listened to Clinton's speech, he heard not "a guy who had learned his lesson" but "the bad boy's heartbroken remorse at being caught."[444]

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[440] "Letters to the Editor." *The New York Times* August 19, 1998.
[441] Harris, John F. "Day's Events Could Narrow Credibility Gap; Clinton Aides, Scholars Urge Forthright Disclosure." *The Washington Post* August 17, 1998.
[442] Though Clinton's established public persona ensured the extramarital affair would not be altogether shocking, one aspect of the scandal that did point to hypocrisy was pointed to in the *Times*: "Had the man who won the Presidency by speaking out for the people who 'play by the rules' once more surrendered to a lifelong compulsion to bend and break them?" (Purdum, Todd S. "Testing of a President; The Background; Strong at Politics, Weakened by Lapses." *The New York Times* August 18, 1998). The president's behavior seemed to contradict his expectations for his fellow citizens, as a central theme of the 1992 Clinton campaign called for greater "personal responsibility."
[443] Broder, John M. "Testing of a President: The President; On an Island Retreat, a Time for Healing." *The New York Times* August 19, 1998.
[444] Raspberry, William. "Find A Way Out; Seek a compromise for the incorrigible." *The Washington Post* August 21, 1998.

Making White House Strategy Transparent

The perception that every aspect of the Clinton White House's handling of the scandal was carefully managed and orchestrated seemed to only be magnified by the long-established connection of the administration with spin, polling, and image management. In its primary article recounting the president's speech, the *Post* explicitly pointed out that "the White House hoped to frame the debate in a way that focuses attention on the sex aspects of the case rather than the allegations of obstruction of justice."[445] A *Times* headline rang out: "President's Strategy: Put Burden on Starr."[446] The modern media's tendency to focus on the "inside baseball" elements of political stories also contributed to the perception that Clinton had not sufficiently expressed remorse. The speech was called a compromise between his political advisers who wanted him to give a full and complete confession, and his lawyers, who wanted him to say as little as he could about the affair, the latter group standing in the way of a more robust apology.[447]

Further, the *Times* even questioned Hillary Clinton's role in the scandal as more calculated than it was portrayed to be. More than one article detailing the difficulties of the First Lady in weathering the president's disclosures also devoted much of their space to sources that believed she knew about the affair long ago, contrary to what the White

[445] Baker, Peter and John F. Harris. "Clinton Admits to Lewinsky Relationship, Challenges Starr to End Personal 'Prying.'" *The Washington Post*, August 18, 1998.
[446] Lewis, Neil A. "Testing of a President: The Legal Issues; President's Strategy: Put Burden on Starr." *The New York Times* August 18, 1998.
[447] Broder, John M. "Testing of a President: News Analysis; Testy Finale, Risky Gambit." *The New York Times* August 18, 1998 and Abramson, Jill. "Torn Between His Lawyers and Political Aides, Clinton Chose Strategy of Denial." *The New York Times* August 24, 1998.

House was claiming.[448] Such charges were rarely if ever mentioned in the other papers or forms of media. The implication of these claims was that the administration deliberately orchestrated the appearance of Hillary Clinton having been blindsided by the revelations, to garner public sympathy and support for her, and avoid accusations she herself had been dishonest in denying the affair earlier in the year. The *Post* noted that Clinton's surrogates strategically kept emphasizing how angry the First Lady was, to make it appear that the president had already suffered enough for his wrongdoing.[449]

Whether or not Clinton's scandal management strategy included the bombing of terrorist sites abroad was contested in the three papers, and loomed larger than it had on the nightly news. Thirteen *Post* articles referred to the "Wag the Dog" charges. The paper's detailed coverage of political matters within the capital was apparent in its quoting lesser known figures like Senator Dan Coats of Indiana, who questioned the president's motives: "After months of lies and deceit and manipulations…it raised into doubt everything he does and everything he says."[450] At the same time, the *Post* also gave ample space to prominent Republicans who refuted the "Wag" theory, such as House Speaker Newt Gingrich who stated, "Anyone who watched the film of the bombings, anyone who saw the coffins come home, knows better than to question the timing."[451] Overall, it seemed the public was not buying the "Wag" angle either, as 61% agreed that

[448] Abramson, Jill. "Testing of a President: The First Lady; Still Playing Key Role On a Most Painful Day." *The New York Times* August 18, 1998 and Henneberger, Melinda. "Testing of a President: The First Lady; Words of Commitment, Hints of Anger." *The New York Times* August 19, 1998.
[449] Harris, John F. "Words Were Clinton's Own, Too Much So, Aides Worry." *The Washington Post* August 19, 1998.
[450] Harris, John F. "In the Midst of Scandal, Clinton Planned Action." *The Washington Post* August 21, 1998.
[451] Gugliotta, Guy and Juliet Eilperin. "Tough Response Appeals to Critics of President; Several Question Clinton's Timing of Raids." *The Washington Post* August 21, 1998.

the strike was meant "to punish terrorism," while 27% thought it was meant to distract from the Lewinsky scandal.[452]

Ten articles in the *Tribune* made mention of "Wag the Dog," with six stories entirely devoted to those charges. Only six pieces in the *Times* referred to the "Wag the Dog" possibility, and many of them discredited the idea that the Clinton administration had ulterior motives in launching the military attack. As in the Nixon case, coverage in all of the papers included assertions that the fact that these questions were raised was the real problem, evidence of the damage the scandal had inflicted on Clinton's credibility.[453] The media could also defend their decision to cover the accusations via such sentiments – they did not have to assess whether or not the "Wag" charge was true, because its significance really lay in its being made against the president.

Effectiveness Damaged?

Clinton's effort to cast the affair as a personal mistake was weakened by coverage that identified the scandal as hurting his performance as president. Four *Post* pieces focused entirely on Clinton's leadership and effectiveness as compromised by the scandal. In one op-ed, Jim Hoagland predicted, "His plight will encourage rogue regimes in Baghdad, Belgrade, Pyongyang and elsewhere to test his attention to their depredations and his resolve in deterring or punishing those acts. It will encourage allies to resist even more strongly U.S. pressure to do things they do not see as in their interest."[454] A *Post* week in review article concluded, "Lying – even about matters deemed private by some –

[452] Broder, David S. and Richard Morin. "Americans See 2 Distinct Clintons; They Laud His Work, Not His Character." *The Washington Post* August 23, 1998.
[453] Purdum, Todd S. "U.S. Fury on 2 Continents: Congress; Critics of Clinton Support Attacks." *The New York Times* August 21, 1998; Harris, John F. "In the Midst of Scandal, Clinton Planned Action." *The Washington Post* August 21, 1998 and "Voice of the People." *The Chicago Tribune* August 22, 1998.
[454] Hoagland, Jim. "American Undermined." *The Washington Post* August 20, 1998.

does corrode presidential credibility and with it, the president's power to persuade, and to lead."[455]

Four articles in the *Tribune* also focused on the damage to the president's effectiveness, and the sentiment that his leadership capabilities had been eroded by the scandal made seventy appearances in the paper's pages, more than in any other print outlet. This certainly fed into the more negative cast to the *Tribune*'s coverage, as a consistent theme of the scandal stories became the detrimental impact of the matter on Clinton's ability to perform his official duties. News articles titled "Other nations see a leadership void in troubled time" and "Europe fears crisis in U.S. leadership" argued that sources around the world now saw Clinton as having lost the moral authority and credibility necessary to lead and the United States as a "'distracted' superpower."[456]

Two pieces in the *Times* were devoted entirely to questioning President Clinton's ability to effectively lead the country moving forward, and that sentiment appeared sporadically elsewhere in its pages. Overall, though each paper at times hypothesized Clinton's ability to be an effective world leader was compromised by the scandal, the military offensive against terrorist sites in Afghanistan and Sudan did undercut the claim that America's enemies might be emboldened because the president would be reluctant to take action against them. Whatever its motives in the attacks, the administration clearly did not allow fear of "Wag the Dog" charges to dissuade it from ordering the offensive.

[455] Krepinevich, Andrew. "About Last Week…The Strike: It Begs Some Questions." " *The Washington Post* August 23, 1998.
[456] Atlas, Terry. "The Global Impact: Other nations see a leadership void in troubled times." *The Chicago Tribune* August 18, 1998 and Moseley, Ray. "Europe fears crisis in U.S. leadership." *The Chicago Tribune* August 20, 1998.

Table 4.5

24-Hour News Network Coverage: More Extensive (And Partisan) Coverage

Frames	**Appearances**[457]		**Undermined**[458]	
August Frames	CNN	Fox News	CNN	Fox News
Persecuted by partisan enemies	138	63	93	47
Takes responsibility/regrets	94	36	84	39
No illegal action/didn't lie	72	53	120	104
Personal mistake	217	62	68	33
Move on/to real problems	96	25	17	4

To identify how the president's frames fared on cable news, I analyzed CNN and Fox News transcripts from the evening of Clinton's August 17th speech through the end of the following day.[459] The personal mistake frame was a successful one for Clinton on CNN and Fox News, garnering numerous appearances and less likely to be undermined. Cable news was just as prone as the nightly news and print to analyzing the implications of what had occurred for Clinton's family and personal life, and exploring whether the president's privacy had been invaded.

Persecuted by partisan enemies also had a good showing on the news networks. As the media determine newsworthiness based in part on whether information is

[457] "Appearances" of a frame in the 24-hour news networks analysis were counted as the number of sentences that conveyed or supported that particular frame, as these programs were analyzed from written transcripts of their content.
[458] "Undermined" stands for the number of sentences that contradicted or opposed the substance of Clinton's frames.
[459] All CNN and Fox News program transcripts on Lexis-Nexis making mention of Clinton and the Lewinsky scandal from 9:00 pm on August 17th through midnight August 18th, 1998 were included in this analysis.

surprising or novel, coverage leading up to the speech's delivery illustrated why this frame dominated much of the subsequent airtime. In the moments leading up to Clinton's appearance, journalists and pundits on CNN speculated as to what the president's speech would contain, sometimes based on what administration sources were telling them, at other times merely unsubstantiated conjecture. Wolf Blitzer, reporting on *Larry King Live*, made the woefully mistaken prediction that "you're not going to hear President Clinton tonight say anything bad about Ken Starr" because the president was "to a certain degree, at the mercy of" the special prosecutor.[460] Cable news gave the attacks on Starr outsized attention precisely because they were unexpected.

The media's tendency to cover political news through the lens of personalized conflict was also particularly evident on cable news: commentators depicted the "war" between Clinton and Starr as a "blood feud,"[461] "showdown,"[462] and described the two men "pushing and shoving" over the questions asked during Clinton's testimony.[463] The language used to describe relations between the two men tended toward metaphors of physical fighting. Unintentionally, cable news' propensity for focusing on political strategy and what inside sources were saying also aided the president's persecuted frame. There was extensive recounting of Clinton's advisers warning him against attacking Starr, and yet he included these remarks in his address. It was reported the president did this because he and the First Lady truly felt this way, and the speech was "coming from the gut."[464] Though this coverage highlighted the political liabilities of President

[460] King, Larry, Wolf Blitzer, Jeff Greenfield, John King. August 17, 1998, 9 pm. Larry King Live. CNN.
[461] Bob Woodward on Larry King Live, August 17, 1998.
[462] Tony Snow on Hannity and Colmes, August 17, 1998.
[463] Bob Franken on August 18, 1998, 12:30 am. Burden of Proof. CNN.
[464] Wolf Blitzer on Waters, Lou, Natalie Allen, Bob Franken, and Candy Crowley. August 18, 1998, 1:34 pm. CNN Today. CNN.

Clinton's statements, it also made his words appear genuine and sincere, an important component of any image rehabilitation project. Cable news did not only echo the "persecuted" frame, though, as evident in the substantial space provided to undermining it on both networks. Fox News subverted the frame through commentary that President Clinton was really the figure in the scandal bent on destroying his enemies, by tearing down the reputations of Ken Starr, Monica Lewinsky, and others.

A hallmark of 24-hour news network coverage, its endlessly speculative orientation toward events of the day, presented problems for the president's "regrets/takes responsibility" frame. Reporter Jim Angle informed the hosts of *Hannity and Colmes* moments before the speech, "It will be very personal, direct, very contrite, apologetic in tone."[465] Expectations were set for an exceptionally remorseful Clinton offering a robust apology with relative certainty of language ("It will"), causing the "regrets" frame ultimately employed by the president to fall short of preconceived notions. Additionally, even neutral reporters on the cable networks frequently called attention to Clinton's omission of the words "I'm sorry" from his speech,[466] implying the president had not gone far enough in apologizing.

Consistent with print and nightly news, the "no illegal/didn't lie" frame was the narrative most likely to be challenged on the cable news networks. Tony Snow of Fox News described as "one of the key questions" about the president's grand jury testimony that "if he didn't admit perjury, he would commit perjury."[467] This standard was only apparent on Fox News and made it difficult for Clinton to disassociate himself from

[465] Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. August 17, 1998, 9 pm. Hannity and Colmes. Fox News.
[466] For instance, John King on August 18, 1998, 9 pm. Larry King Live. CNN.
[467] Snow, Tony, Jonathan Turley, Fred Barnes, Dick Morris, Juan Williams. August 18, 1998, 6 pm. Fox Special Report With Brit Hume. Fox News.

alleged criminal actions. The amount of broadcast time available to twenty-four hour news networks allowed for specialized programming – for instance, CNN's Burden of Proof focused exclusively on legal issues in the news. Coverage of the Lewinsky scandal on this show tended to undermine Clinton's efforts to deflect attention from accusations of law breaking.

CNN's coverage was at odds with how commonly the "move on" frame appeared in most of the other outlets I analyzed, where it was typically the frame least likely to appear. On CNN, "move on" was the third most prevalent frame, and undermined only 17 times. One of the reasons for this frame's pervasiveness on the network is the time devoted to airing the views of average citizens (who, polls demonstrated, strongly supported "move on").[468] CNN correspondents treated "move on" as the one thing uniting all citizens despite their disparate reactions to the scandal. A reporter wrapped up his report from Little Rock by saying citizens of the city "want, just like people all over the country, for this to stop, to move on to other things."[469] Another correspondent on the streets of Washington D.C. cited a woman pushing for the country to go about its business, to which the reporter added, "That is what virtually everyone we talked to agreed upon. Despite their feelings about the president, they are tired of that scandal, and simply wish it would end."[470]

Yet the speculative nature of the news network industry presented some short-term problems for the "move on" frame, though in the long-term the president may have

[468] This included programs allowing for call-in viewers, such as *Larry King Live*, "town hall"-style news specials where audience members could question network commentators, and reports from journalists stationed around the country conducting "person on the street" interviews to gauge public reaction to Clinton's speech.
[469] Waters, Lou, Natalie Allen, Bob Franken, and Candy Crowley. August 18, 1998, 1:34 pm. CNN Today. CNN.
[470] Chen, Joie and Wolf Blitzer. August 18, 1998, 8:01 pm. CNN The World Today. CNN.

benefited. Not infrequently commentators referred to the possibility that Starr might have more damaging evidence against the president as a reason the nation would not be able to move on as Clinton advocated. However, when the special prosecutor did ultimately submit his report to Congress, this speculation worked in the president's favor, as many were taken aback Starr did not have more on Clinton.[471]

Above the Law or "Below the Law"?

Though often maligned for producing endless hours of mindless chatter, the more extensive coverage featured on the twenty-four hour news networks allowed for detailed and informative discussions of aspects of the scandal that went uncovered in other outlets. A lengthy roundtable discussion about whether or not Clinton's words actually constituted perjury and whether it was material to the Paula Jones case on *Hannity and Colmes* on August 17th raised views and information on the "no illegal action" frame that were not apparent elsewhere.

The news network format also meant that claims that were seldom given a full hearing in most mainstream media outlets were forcefully disseminated by partisan personalities on 24-hours news programming. Clinton's supporters who appeared on the cable news networks promoted an argument not seen anywhere else in the coverage analyzed, that the president was actually being treated worse than an average citizen, or "below what would have been the standard for others," as Representative Barney Frank (D-MA) explained it on Fox News.[472] Host Alan Colmes added to this contention that

[471] When Starr finished his testimony before the House Judiciary committee, Democrats asked him directly if he had any additional evidence on the original Whitewater and related scandals. Starr conceded had known for months that he did not. Even Representative Hyde later admitted, "We were really surprised at his testimony – that he did not have more material on any of these other matters" (Ken Gormley, *The Death of American Virtue: Clinton Vs. Starr*, New York, Crown Publishers, 596).

[472] Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. August 17, 1998, 9 pm. Hannity and Colmes. Fox News.

Clinton was suffering precisely because of his position, because "he could take the Fifth, if he were not the president."[473] Representative John Conyers (D-MI) opined that the office was being damaged when Clinton's "lawyer-client privilege is invaded, when the president is considered to be below the law and not equal to the rights of all citizens."[474] Countering such assertions, Sean Hannity of *Hannity and Colmes* not only consistently raised the point that letting Clinton off the hook allowed him to exist "above the law," but also applied the phrase "imperial presidency" to the administration and made comparisons to President Nixon and Watergate.

In essence, the 24-hour news networks allow for a robust "partisan press" to exist alongside their objective coverage, and give such subjective views a far greater platform than they would otherwise have. In the case of President Grant and the Whiskey Ring scandal, I found that rabidly partisan views were seldom a major focal point in mainstream newspapers, even when associated with a political party. The partisan viewpoints expressed on cable news appear more comparable to the fringe perspectives purveyed by the "Whiskey Ring organs" of the 19th century, which reached a far smaller segment of Americans.

Psychological/ Personal/Character Focus

Illustrating that generic journalism elements appeared across the scandal coverage, cable news networks characterized Clinton with many of the same attributes that appeared in print. The president was referred to as lying/dishonest 98 times on CNN and 63 times on Fox News. Clinton was also most likely to be depicted as of questionable

[473] Ibid.
[474] Greenfield, Jeff, Bruce Morton, Robert Novak. August 18, 1998, 10 pm. CNN Live Event/Special: A National Town Hall Meeting: We the People…. CNN.

morality/lacking moral authority, angry, untrustworthy, contrite/remorseful, defiant, and engaging in verbal trickery/gymnastics on the cable news networks.[475] This last Clinton behavior was distinct to this form of media, and indicative of their in-depth evaluations of how the president sought to clear himself of perjury charges. The characterization also fit neatly with the aforementioned long-standing Clinton character frame of ducking and weaving around the truth, tied to his past defenses about marijuana use and his draft status during Vietnam. CNN also added to the list of frequently ascribed attributes that Clinton was brilliant/intelligent, honest/truthful, in pain, of questionable judgment, only human/a human being, a user/exploiter of women, of questionable/damaged credibility, humiliated/embarrassed, and suffering from a (self-inflicted) wound. Overall, then, the vast majority of the traits used to describe Clinton came with negative connotations, though CNN offered some more sympathetic portrayals than Fox News.

The news networks also indicated that they were more willing to give airtime to more controversial or extreme characterizations of Clinton's behavior and psychology than other types of outlets. This was typically due to the presence of partisan pundits who might be valued for their willingness to make attention-grabbing and dramatic statements on-air. On more than one occasion, commentators on both networks described the president as a sex addict or sexual predator. The vast amount and more spontaneous nature of live coverage on the networks also meant subjects that print and nightly news outlets may have felt inappropriate received a fair amount of attention. Chelsea Clinton was rarely mentioned elsewhere, but as anchors and pundits narrated the footage of the First Family departing for and arriving in Martha's Vineyard, they did not shy away from

[475] These were characteristics attributed to President Clinton five times or more on CNN, and four times or more on Fox News.

topics like Chelsea's upbringing and her public visibility in the wake of the scandal. Finally, Larry King brought a bizarrely personal angle to the story on his August 18th program by interrogating all of his guests as to whether they had daughters and if so, were she a White House intern who had an affair with the president, "would you be ticked?" Such questioning highlighted the personal side of the affair and made it appear detached from the official presidency.

Assertions that the scandal was damaging Clinton's effectiveness as president appeared forty-three times on CNN, demonstrating this was an oft-repeated argument by the president's critics on the network, as it had been in print.

Clinton's Frames in December, Impeachment, and Iraq

I analyzed media coverage in a second time period, from December 15th to the 22nd, 1998, to demonstrate how Clinton's frames fared over time and in the heat of an impeachment debate during which his opponents enjoyed great prominence. Just as in August, a military strike coincided with a major turning point in the scandal. On December 16th, President Clinton ordered the bombing of hundreds of sites in Iraq in response to Saddam Hussein's defiance of United Nations weapons inspectors. In response, Bob Livingston (R-LA), Speaker-designate of the House, delayed the start of the impeachment debate one day, to December 18th.

Prior to the vote on the articles of impeachment, Republican leaders in the House prevented a Democratic Party-proposed vote on censuring of the president, thereby removing an alternative to impeachment. As the week unfolded, Livingston admitted his own extramarital affairs and unexpectedly resigned in the wake of Hustler magazine

publisher Larry Flynt's investigations into the personal indiscretions of the president's detractors. Finally, on December 19th, the House of Representatives impeached President Clinton, voting 228 to 206 in favor of Article I, involving perjury before the grand jury, and 221 to 212 for Article III, charging the president with obstruction of justice.

Although it seemed clear there were not enough votes for conviction and removal in the Senate, Clinton's political future was still very much in doubt. The administration was particularly concerned that after the president was impeached, public support would collapse and calls for resignation would become irresistible.[476] Three frames remained relevant in December to the president's efforts to weather the scandal: that he was still the subject of persecution at the hands of partisan enemies, that he had taken no illegal action, and that the affair was a personal mistake.

Nightly News Coverage in December: The Evolution of "Partisan Enemies"

Table 4.6

Tone of Stories	**ABC**		**CBS**		**NBC**	
	Number of Stories	Percentage	Number of Stories	Percentage	Number of Stories	Percentage
Positive	4	25%	8	50%	6	35.3%
Negative	1	6.3%	1	6.3%	2	11.8%
Neutral	11	68.8%	7	43.8%	9	52.9%

[476] Some polls confirmed that public support for Clinton's resignation presented a significant threat to his presidency at this juncture. However, as the *Post* pointed out, "public opinion on resignation remains highly volatile," varying depending on poll question wording. The article concluded that "most of those favoring resignation do so mainly because they want the scandal to end and not because of Clinton's behavior" (Morin, Richard. "In Poll, Most Expect House to Impeach; Preferring Censure for President, Public Also Doubts Senate Would Convict Him." *The Washington Post* December 17, 1998).

Even as he faced impeachment, President Clinton was the subject of little coverage that treated himself or his frames negatively over this December week. A majority of the stories aired on ABC and NBC could be classified as neutral, while half of the stories on CBS actually treated Clinton and his interpretation of events mostly positively.

Table 4.7

Frames	**Appearances**[477]			**Undermined**[478]		
December Frames	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC
Persecuted by partisan enemies	13	7	8	1	2	2
No illegal action/didn't lie	1	2	2	2	5	2
Personal mistake	2	2	5	0	1	1

By December, the Clinton administration's most effective frame was his persecution by partisan enemies. It garnered even more mentions on the nightly news than it had in August. The frame had also evolved, no longer directed primarily at Kenneth Starr, and instead came to apply to Republican politicians, particularly figures in the House like Texas Representative Tom Delay who were viewed as harboring great hostility for Clinton. The personalization bias of the media was still very much apparent, only now Clinton was locked in a battle with conservative House Republicans rather than the special prosecutor. Lisa Myers of NBC, interviewing DeLay, asserted, "Some say the

[477] "Appearances" of a frame in the televised nightly news analysis were counted when one of Clinton's frames was mentioned in the broadcast, or a statement with the same general meaning as a frame he articulated. A single news segment was counted as having more than one appearance of a frame if that frame was articulated in different contexts, or by different individuals.

[478] The undermining of a frame was counted any time one of Clinton's frames appeared in the televised broadcast, and then was contradicted or criticized, or when sentiments representing the opposite of what Clinton sought to argue were found on the program.

vote to impeach will be a personal victory for you" (though DeLay responded by denying this).[479] At the same time, several reporters pointed out the White House benefited from a public perception that the impeachment process was partisan, a focus on political strategy that might hurt the effectiveness of the frame.

Clinton's casting of the affair as a personal mistake and one in which he took no illegal action appeared fewer times on the major networks than immediately after his August 17th speech. "No illegal action" was challenged fewer times on ABC and NBC than just a few months earlier, but "personal mistake" was now undermined on CBS and NBC, unlike in August. It seems the president's opponents had finally become savvy to his effective classification of the affair as divorced from his official capacity, and they took pains to point out the scandal had public interest ramifications. However, when Livingston made his revelation and resigned, Clinton, borrowing a phrase from Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt, responded: "We must stop the politics of personal destruction." This television-ready soundbite drew on both the "enemies" and "personal" frames.[480]

Republicans pushing impeachment in the House also suffered from media depictions that painted them as out of step with mainstream public opinion. Seven stories on the nightly news alluded to a disconnection on impeachment between the American people and either politicians in Washington generally or the Republican Party specifically. References to polls on the broadcasts illustrated the lop-sided nature of the public's support for the president remaining in office. However, networks' adherence to the norms of "balanced" journalism meant that when interviewing citizens on the street

[479] *NBC Evening News*, December 15, 1998.
[480] *ABC Evening News*, December 19, 1998.

about these events, pro and anti-Clinton sentiments were alternated,[481] giving the appearance of a more narrowly divided public.

The "Wag the Dog" concept was referred to in nine stories over this December week, though it had come to mean that the president was attempting to delay impeachment through military action rather than merely distract from the scandal. NBC's Andrea Mitchell noted this was not the first time Clinton had been accused of this, boosting the credibility of the charges.[482] Unlike in August, prominent Republicans like Senators Orren Hatch and Trent Lott directly expressed suspicion about the timing of the attacks, with Lott articulating he could not support the bombing (though he later backtracked from this statement).[483] Simultaneously, Democratic congresspersons sought to capitalize on the national security context: Minority Whip David Bonior said bluntly about impeachment on the floor of the House, "We shouldn't be having this debate now while our troops are in battle."[484] Only two stories, one on CBS and one on NBC, entirely focused on tearing down the "Wag" claim.[485]

The nightly news programs' depiction of President Clinton's mindset and behavior was closely tied to their efforts to make the administration's efforts to persevere transparent for the public. All three networks described Clinton as "on the job" as president, too busy with working to pay close attention to the impeachment proceedings. This was an improvement over the stories that directly questioned his effectiveness in office back in August. On ABC, Sam Donaldson called Clinton's focus on his work into

[481] As in an *ABC Evening News* on December 19, 1998 where reporters conducted interviews on the streets of Chicago and *NBC Evening News* on December 19, 1998, in New York and Arkansas.
[482] *NBC Evening News*, December 16, 1998.
[483] *ABC Evening News*, December 16, 1998 and *CBS Evening News*, December 16, 1998.
[484] *ABC Evening News*, December 17, 1998 and *NBC Evening News*, December 17, 1998.
[485] *CBS Evening News*, December 17, 1998 and *NBC Evening News*, December 17, 1998.

question, claiming it was "amazing, and a little hard to believe."[486] Another liability was that Clinton might be cast as too flippant about the proceedings, as when CBS' Scott Pelley declaring the White House had "scoffed" at impeachment and then segued into reporting the Republican criticism that this demonstrated the president's "arrogance."[487] Journalists and their sources also frequently mentioned Clinton as lying or having a problem with the truth, a dimension of his character portrayal that had not gone away since August.

Print Coverage in December: Partisan Conflict Dominates, but Republicans Become More Frame-Savvy

Table 4.8

Tone of Stories	**NYT**		**WP**		**CT**	
	Number of Stories	Percentage	Number of Stories	Percentage	Number of Stories	Percentage
Positive	55	31.4%	51	28%	21	30%
Negative	25	14.3%	27	14.8%	10	14.3%
Neutral	95	54.3%	104	57.1%	39	55.7%

For a period encompassing only the second time an American president has been impeached, the print coverage of December 15th – 22nd is remarkably positive.[488] The small percentage of negative stories defies conventional wisdom that scandals produce a

[486] *ABC Evening News*, December 18, 1998.
[487] *CBS Evening News*, December 21, 1998.
[488] All three newspapers were opposed to impeachment in their editorial content, which also may help explain the prevalence of more favorable coverage for the president. The papers were also fiercely critical of Clinton and his behavior, however, and the *Tribune* in December was still advocating his resignation, though they knew "he will not do it" ("Impeached but unrepentant." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune* December 20, 1998).

non-stop barrage of damaging news. As the developments in the scandal now shifted to impeachment in the House, journalistic norms of "balanced" coverage kicked in. Reporters took pains to provide perspectives from both sides of the issue, particularly when quoting members of Congress. This contributed toward the majority of stories in this period falling into the "neutral" coverage category.

Table 4.9

Frames **Appearances[489]** **Undermined[490]**

December Frames	NYT	WP	CT	NYT	WP	CT
Persecuted by partisan enemies	383	496	154	73	97	35
No illegal action/didn't lie	81	82	10	325	371	88
Personal mistake	117	169	72	45	47	11

The media's familiarity with covering political stories through the lens of partisan conflict greatly enhanced the prominence of the persecuted by partisan enemies frame in December. *The Washington Post* was an especially prolific purveyor of this frame, given its close following of the operations of the national government. As on the nightly news, the frame had successfully evolved and expanded, to no longer include merely an indictment of Starr but now most House Republicans. The reality of the party-line impeachment vote led media outlets to cover the scandal as a battle between the political parties, confident they were still being objective – one article in the *Times* declared, "a

[489] "Appearances" of a frame in the televised nightly news analysis were counted when one of Clinton's frames was mentioned in the broadcast, or a statement with the same general meaning as a frame he articulated. A single news segment was counted as having more than one appearance of a frame if that frame was articulated in different contexts, or by different individuals.

[490] The undermining of a frame was counted any time one of Clinton's frames appeared in the televised broadcast, and then was contradicted or criticized, or when sentiments representing the opposite of what Clinton sought to argue were found on the program.

primer on impeachment is also one on partisanship."[491] Democrats in Congress championed this frame, calling the proceedings a Republican "coup d'etat."[492] Such portrayals aided Clinton, as much of the American public opposed a partisan cast to impeachment. Many stories cited sources pointing directly to a vehement hatred of Clinton as the chief motivating factor behind impeachment. Editorially, the *Times* also backed this frame, predicting, "History, in our view, will condemn the Republicans for using their constitutional powers as an instrument of partisan vengeance."[493] Even the "Wag the Dog" charges, discussed further on, were portrayed in some articles as representing hyper-partisanship. One straight news *Tribune* article identified the criticisms as "casting aside the time-honored principle that partisanship stopped at the water's edge."[494]

In explaining impeachment, the historical touchstone for many articles was the 1868 partisan impeachment of President Andrew Johnson, contributing to the "persecuted" narrative.[495] Henry Hyde was no longer portrayed as the reputable statesman many media commentators had identified him as earlier in the year.[496] Now he

[491] Schmitt, Eric. "Judiciary Panel Sums Up Its Work in 500 Pages (the Majority by Republicans)." *The New York Times* December 16, 1998

[492] The *Post* cited six congressional Democrats who used this exact term (Baker, Peter and Juliet Eilperin. "Divided House Debates Impeachment; Republicans Are Poised Today To Force Senate Trial of Clinton." *The Washington Post* December 19, 1998).

[493] "The Partisan Bias." Editorial. *The New York Times* December 16, 1998

[494] Tackett, Michael. "Criticism points out new rules of politics." *The Chicago Tribune* December 17, 1998.

[495] Sachs, Susan. "A Snowy February, 1868: How a Distant Postwar Drama Played Out." *The New York Times* December 18, 1998; Sobel, Richard. "Impeach not expediently, lest you so impeach again." *The Chicago Tribune* December 17, 1998; Bendavid, Naftali. "Vicious partisanship characterized nation's first impeachment." *The Chicago Tribune* December 20, 1998. Though Nixon was also mentioned in print, his impeachment proceedings with bipartisan support were often cast in contrast to Clinton's.

[496] For instance, CNN's Candy Crowley described him in August as "known on both sides of the aisle as a fair-minded judicious adult."Shaw, Bernard, John King, Roger Cossack, Greta Van Susteren, Charles Feldman, William Schneider, Charles Zewe, Tony Clark, Candy Crowley, Frank Sesno, Greg Lefevre, Bruce Morton. August 18, 1998, 11:19 pm. CNN Live Event/Special: Investigating the President: The President Speaks. CNN.

was labeled both fiercely partisan and at times hypocritical.[497] Tom DeLay remained a prominent and ruthless Clinton adversary in the coverage, evident in stories like the *Post*'s "How GOP's Enforcer Propelled the Process; Attacks, Shrewd Tactics Mark DeLay's Anti-Clinton Crusade."[498] When the frame was undercut, it was typically by Republican sources or right-leaning columnists who depicted their impeachment votes as motivated by respect for the rule of law and a vote of conscience, not by deep-seated animosity for the president.[499]

As in August, the no illegal action frame suffered in print. This frame was far more likely to be challenged in the coverage than supported.[500] The *Tribune* was particularly unreceptive to including this narrative in its pages, as indicated by its paltry ten appearances. The president's fellow party members were not consistently pushing this frame, as they were "partisan enemies." More commonly, prominent Democrats in the impeachment debate maintained that the president's actions did not reach the level of "high crimes and misdemeanors," but stopped short of saying Clinton had done nothing

[497] One *Post* article contended, "The Republican from Illinois spent years building an illustrious reputation and saw it shredded in a matter of weeks by the impeachment hearings" (Von Drehle, David. "Yesterday Was Not a Chapter in a Washington Novel; It Was the Unplotted, Unscripted, Head-Spinning Real Thing." *The Washington Post* December 20, 1998). After noting Hyde's focus on Clinton's lies, Linda Greenhouse noted in the *Times* that in 1987 during the Iran-Contra affair Hyde himself had asserted, "It just seems to me too simplistic to condemn all lying" (Greenhouse, Linda. "On the Highway to Impeachment, Several Exit Ramps Still Beckon." *The New York Times* December 18, 1998). Other pieces chided Hyde for his own extramarital dalliances (Cohen, Richard. "The GOP Children." *The Washington Post* December 15, 1998).

[498] Pianin, Eric and Kevin Merida. "How GOP's Enforcer Propelled the Process; Attacks, Shrewd Tactics Mark DeLay's Anti-Clinton Crusade." *The Washington Post* December 16, 1998.

[499] The occasional Republican in print, such as Rep. Dana Rohrabacher of California tried to turn the persecuted enemies frame entirely on its head, arguing that it was Clinton who truly persecuted his enemies, having "done everything they could to try to intimidate people. All these women that he's abused, every one of them has been threatened" (Kurtz, Howard. "White House Angry About GOP Charge; 'No Evidence' of Role in Livingston Story." *The Washington Post* December 18, 1998). These claims were prevalent on cable news, but did not catch on in the mainstream print coverage.

[500] While Republicans succeeded in casting Clinton as taking illegal actions, other alternative framings for the scandal were less consistently pushed by the party and less likely to find their way into coverage. For instance, Representative Tom Campbell (R-CA) applied a sexual harassment lens to the Lewinsky scandal, but this was not dwelled upon by other congresspersons and did not take hold in the media.

illegal.[501] Even President Clinton himself, in his remarks just after the House impeachment vote, failed to rearticulate this frame, instead reminding the public that this was a wrong "in my personal life" and "we must get rid of the poisonous venom of excessive partisanship, obsessive animosity, and uncontrolled anger."[502]

The personal mistake frame was reasonably successful in December's print articles. A news piece in the *Post* declared Clinton "famous as the Great Compartmentalizer, skilled at insulating his personal problems from his performance as president."[503] The personal mistake narrative was useful for journalists seeking to create a coherent storyline in December that encompassed both impeachment and the president's persistent popularity. After Livingston's resignation, the media endlessly repeated soundbites that encompassed partisan enemies and personal mistake, like the "sexual McCarthyism," cited by Rep. Jerrold Nadler of New York and Minority Leader Gephardt's aforementioned condemning of the "politics of personal destruction."[504]

Overall, "personal mistake" was more likely to be challenged in the *Times* and *Post* than "partisan enemies." Many prominent Republicans explicitly disputing this frame were quoted at length in the papers. Representative Hyde specifically tackled this frame in his opening remarks of the impeachment debate, maintaining this was "not a question of sex…it's not even a question of lying about sex. The matter before the House

[501] This also helps demonstrate one of the difficulties Republicans faced in pushing impeachment in the coverage as compared to Nixon's opponents during Watergate. As recounted in the Nixon case, one goal of the president's detractors in Watergate was to make impeachment seem less frightening or devastating to the country. For Clinton's critics, the project was to make impeachment seem appropriate and warranted for Clinton's transgressions. It was easier, even unintentionally, for the media to foster the goals of those for impeachment in Watergate. They could do so by merely recounting the impeachment and removal procedures, in an educational way, as opposed to making impeachment seem appropriate in the Lewinsky scandal, where they would be veering into advocacy.
[502] "Remarks by President Clinton; 'Continue to Do the Work of the American People." *The Washington Post* December 20, 1998.
[503] Harris, John F. "For Clinton
[504] "'Government of Men, Not Angels.'" *The Washington Post* December 20, 1998.

is a question of lying under oath. This is a public act, not a private act."[505] The personal mistake frame was infrequently challenged in the *Tribune*, in part because the newspaper offered far fewer transcripts of the impeachment proceedings to its readers than the *Times* or *Post*. The inclusion of these primary documents bolstered the Republicans' efforts to undercut "personal mistake" and "no illegal action," as the substance of the impeachment articles was Clinton's alleged lawbreaking.

Wag the Dog

The president's decision to launch military strikes in Iraq was often subject to a cynical lens in the December newspapers. Thirty-three stories in the *Times*, twenty-six in the *Post*, and ten in the *Tribune* explicitly made mention of "Wag the Dog" and/or the president's use of the strikes to delay impeachment. Only six *Times* stories, nine in the *Post*, and seven in the *Tribune* focused on evidence and views refuting the "Wag" proposition.[506] Again Clinton suffered from the fact that he was now the subject of a pattern of "Wag" charges; as the *Post* pointed out, "This was the third time this year that questions have been raised about the juxtaposition of possible or actual U.S. attacks and critical junctures in Clinton's sex and perjury scandal."[507] Though prominent GOP members such as Newt Gingrich publicly backed the president's military action, far more attention was given in the press to Wag-championing Republicans including Trent Lott.

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[505] "The Debate on Articles of Impeachment Against President Clinton." *The New York Times* December 19, 1998. Hyde gave a similar trajectory to his comments following Livingston's disclosure of marital infidelity – the congressman cast adultery as a private act but perjury about an affair to be a public one ("Weighing a Presidency: Excerpts From the Impeachment Debate." *The New York Times* December 20, 1998).

[506] Clinton himself helped contribute to some of this content by responding to a question about the "Wag" charges by saying, "I don't think any serious person would believe that any president would do such a thing. And I don't believe any reasonably astute person in Washington would believe that Secretary Cohen and General Shelton and the whole rest of the national security team would participate in such an action." Clinton thus borrowed the credibility of others in the administration for those for whom his own word was insufficient.

[507] Dewar, Helen and Eric Pianin. "This Time, Partisanship Doesn't Stop With Strikes; Lott, Other GOP Leaders Question Timing, Policy." *The Washington Post* December 17, 1998.

In fact, the *Tribune* treated "Wag" as closer to the consensus position in the Republican party, in one straight news piece contending, "Many Republicans, some of them in top leadership positions, accused Clinton of bombing Iraq to push the impeachment vote into next year, when Democrats will have five more members in the House."[508] Unlike in the Nixon case, however, "Wag the Dog" was only rarely linked to a major credibility loss for the president and evidence he was no longer an effective leader. Appearances of the sentiment that Clinton had lost his effectiveness as president numbered only thirty-six in all three newspapers combined.

Above or Below the Law?

Clinton's critics were far more successful at forcing the assertions that the president was not "above the law" into the pages of these newspapers than his supporters that he was being treated "below the law." Nineteen articles in the *Times,* eighteen in the *Post* and four in the *Tribune* included the "above the law" argument. By contrast, only four stories in the *Times* and five in the *Post* suggested that Clinton was essentially "below the law," and none in the *Tribune* did.[509] The claims that the president was being treated less fairly than average citizens accused of crimes was not a framing of the situation uniformly adopted and proclaimed by the president's supporters, inhibiting its ability to break through into the coverage.

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[508] Nelkirk, William and Mike Dorning. "GOP eager to resume the debate on charges." *The Chicago Tribune* December 17, 1998.

[509] Some of the evidence provided for Clinton's being treated "below the law" included the president having been "trapped" in trying to conceal an extramarital affair by a partisan prosecutor with limitless time and money, by his inability to plead the 5th amendment rather than testify to the grand jury, and facing perjury charges without the perjurious statements being identified and for which another person would be unlikely to be prosecuted. Ordinary citizens, according to this argument, would never be subject to such treatment (Lewis, Anthony. "A Dangerous Invitation." *The New York Times* December 15, 1998). Representative Chet Edwards (D-TX) was cited using this specific phrase "below the law" during the impeachment debate on December 18th ("The Debate on Articles of Impeachment Against President Clinton." *The New York Times* December 19, 1998).

Psychological/Personal/Character Focus

Again, depictions of the president as having lied or being a liar were the most common action/attribute ascribed to Clinton. The most prevalent Clinton characteristics in all three papers were the president as disgraced/disgraceful; of questionable morality; and having betrayed trust or unable to be trusted. In the *Times*, other frequently mentioned attributes were unapologetic/not contrite; contrite; of diminished credibility and honor; reprehensible; good (as either president or a man); and dishonest. The *Post* also favored diminished credibility and reprehensible, but added embarrassed; deplorable; and an entire article discussing how Clinton got the moniker Slick Willie and was continually living up to the name. The *Post* and the *Tribune* were also likely to refer to the president's behavior as his having "sinned," a characterization that aided the "personal mistake" frame.

24-Hour News Network Coverage in December: "Shocking" Events, Controversial Coverage

I analyzed CNN transcripts that referred to President Clinton and the Lewinsky scandal on December 19, 1998, the day of the impeachment vote in the House of Representatives.[510] As fewer Fox News programs were available as transcripts for the 19th, I looked at all broadcasts on Lexis-Nexis mentioning Clinton and the scandal for December 17 to 22, 1998.

[510] The military strike against Iraq was also ongoing on this date, and though broadcasts dealing solely with this offensive were not analyzed here, it was apparent the day's coverage switched back and forth between these dramatic events. Conceivably this was only helpful to President Clinton, as it highlighted him in his role of commander-in-chief, and potentially underscored the claim of many Democrats that the impeachment vote should not be going on during a military offensive.

Throughout the day on December 19th, CNN commentators and reporters on the networks emphasized the "shocking" nature of the unfolding events. At times, this characterization seemed warranted, as in the case of Livingston's sudden resignation. Even then, commentators could be guilty of hyperbole. CNN's Jeff Greenfield declared, "The last time we have seen anything this remotely shocking was…when Lyndon Johnson told us he wouldn't run again."[511] At other points, CNN's depiction of the impeachment debate and vote in general as "bizarre" or "shocking" reinforced the perception that the House had gone too far and was taking extreme, groundless action. The intention of network personalities may have merely been to retain viewer interest and their ratings, but the effect was to indirectly bolster the president's "partisan enemies vendetta" frame.

The day's coverage also showed the best of what 24-hour news networks could provide to the viewing public. After a lengthy period of CSPAN-like coverage that directly showed the proceedings on the House floor as the censure motion the Democrats sought was ruled not germane, the CNN commentators then "translated" what had actually occurred for their viewers. In such moments, CNN brought the audience first-hand footage of the events and yet also made the information more accessible to a wide audience.

[511] Sesno, Frank, Jeff Greenfield, Wolf Blitzer, Candy Crowley, and Michael Gerhardt. December 19, 1998, 9:24 am. CNN Live Event/Special: House Impeachment Debate: Livingston to Resign from House, Won't Be Speaker. CNN.

Table 4.10

Frames	**Appearances**[512]		**Undermined**[513]	
December Frames	CNN	Fox News	CNN	Fox News
Persecuted by partisan enemies	170	69	54	45
No illegal action/didn't lie	34	48	132	95
Personal mistake	66	27	15	12

In December, persecuted by partisan enemies overtook personal mistake as the most frequently apparent frame on CNN, and remained the most prevalent on Fox News. Additionally, it was less likely to be challenged on both networks during this time period than it was back in August. As in other media outlets, Democrats and White House spokespersons were very consistent in pushing this frame in their public statements and interviews. Still, Fox News treated the frame more harshly then CNN, as was the case in August. Tony Snow and Sean Hannity, backed by frequent guest and former Clinton strategist Dick Morris, consistently contended that it was actually the president who was prone to persecuting his enemies. On numerous occasions, these commentators illustrated this point by accusing the White House of being connected with the outing of Representative Livingston's affairs, a charge that the administration denied.[514] Those

[512] "Appearances" of a frame in the 24-hour news networks analysis were counted as the number of sentences that conveyed or supported that particular frame, as these programs were analyzed from written transcripts of their content.

[513] "Undermined" stands for the number of sentences that contradicted or opposed the substance of Clinton's frames.

[514] Snow, Tony. December 22, 1998, 6:00 pm. Fox News Special Report With Brit Hume: Interview with Dick Morris. Fox News; Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. December 22, 1998, 9:00 pm. Fox Hannity and Colmes: Interview with Senator Allard. Fox News; Snow, Tony. December 20, 1998, 4:30 pm. Fox News Sunday. Fox News. Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. December 18, 1998, 9:00 pm. Fox Hannity and Colmes: Impeachment and Iraq Bombings. Fox News. The evidence that was provided to back up this claim was that media figures Cokie Roberts and Linda Douglas said that administration officials "floated"

receiving their information from Fox News received a very different impression of the Livingston story, not of the speaker-designate as fellow victim alongside Clinton, but as victimized *by* Clinton.

The no illegal action frame fared worse on CNN during the impeachment process than it had in the immediate wake of the president's August 17th address, and was treated roughly the same on Fox News. The hostility to this frame was unsurprising, as CNN frequently turned coverage over to a live feed from the House floor, where the charges against the president discussed by representatives centered largely on his alleged illegal actions.

Cable news' psychological evaluations of the president remained mostly negative in December. CNN on the 19th was most likely to describe Clinton or his actions as wrong, reprehensible, betraying trust/couldn't be trusted, disappointed (in the impeachment vote), fighting, and again, most commonly, as lying/a liar. Fox News favored lying/liar and untrustworthy as well, and added to that draft dodger and serial adulterer (the latter two mostly due to the repetition of such designations by guest and former California representative Bob Dornan).

As in August, cable news network personalities could get away with citing far more controversial content than their colleagues in print and the nightly news. This had been a problem for the Clinton administration throughout the scandal's duration, as unsubstantiated rumors appeared on 24-hour news networks and the Internet that Secret Service agents actually witnessed Clinton and Lewinsky engaged in illicit behavior, and

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the Livingston and Hyde stories respectively to them a few weeks earlier. Morris was particularly fond of using the term "Clinton's secret police" to describe the president's alleged efforts to dig up dirt on his enemies.

that there were several other White House interns who had affairs with the president.[515] Sean Hannity raised several times contentious content in the form of questions to guests such as, "Did you hear about these moderate Republicans going over to the Ford building and hearing about a Jane Doe number five who had charged the president with a sexual assault and that that changed the minds of some of these so-called moderate Republicans?"[516] The charge was not depicted as being fact, but raising it indicated more damning evidence against Clinton could come out at any moment.

Cable news network reporters' usage of their background conversations with anonymous contacts and administration officials allowed them to make bolder pronouncements about how the president was feeling. During the impeachment vote, Wolf Blitzer told the CNN anchors, "The president's obviously depressed about this. One of the reasons that House leadership is going to come over here on the Democratic side later this afternoon is to try to cheer him up a bit."[517] Commentators' immediate reactions to what they were seeing also sometimes led them to make dubious statements about the president's state of mind on the air. When President Clinton emerged from the White House for a showing of solidarity with congressional Democrats, CNN's Frank Sesno

[515] Gormley, 528.

[516] Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. December 22, 1998, 9:00 pm. Fox Hannity and Colmes: Impeachment Discussion with Rep. Hayworth and Rep. Traficant. Fox News. Hannity had raised the question the day before as well, asking Representatives Alcee Hastings (D-FL) and David Dreier (R-CA), "There are allegations that there is information that the president was involved in a sexual assault. Do either of you know about that? Have you heard about that?" (Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. December 21, 1998, 9:00 pm. Fox Hannity and Colmes: Censure Debate. Fox News). These questions referred to secret evidence that the Office of the Independent Counsel had brought over to Congress involving a woman named Juanita Broaddrick. She had at first denied any sexual involvement with Clinton to Paula Jones' lawyers, but then told FBI agents who had been sent by Kenneth Starr to question her that Clinton, then Attorney General of Arkansas, had sexually assaulted her in the 1970's (Gormley 586).

[517] Sesno, Frank, Jeff Greenfield, Wolf Blitzer, Candy Crowley. December 19, 1998, 10:41 am. CNN Live Event/Special: Capitol Hill Reels After Livingston Announcement. CNN.

conjectured, "I could swear I just saw the president brushed what may have been tears away from both eyes."[518] This was not reported in any of the other outlets analyzed.

Unlike the analyzed newspapers in December, no commentator or guest on CNN on the 19th articulated the claim that President Clinton was being treated "below the law," though several times the "above the law" concern was raised, mainly by Republican sources. Alan Colmes of Fox News argued the president was being treated as below the law on one occasion on his program.[519] This was countered on Fox News by the citation of specific cases of citizens who had been convicted of perjury and served jail time for lying under oath about sexual matters,[520] bolstering the "above the law" claim, and subverting the "personal mistake" frame.

Partisan Supporters and Critics, When They Could Be Found

To demonstrate the importance of President Clinton's framing of the Lewinsky affair to his political survival, I must also illustrate that his fate did not rest on the solidarity of his fellow Democrats or the blunders of the Republican opposition. After Clinton's August 17th address, the embattled president found few of his co-partisans rushing to his defense.[521] Journalists looking for reactions from Democrats found this apparent. On the CBS broadcast just before Clinton would give his speech, reporter Bob

[518] Shaw, Bernard, Judy Woodruff, Wolf Blitzer, Jeff Greenfield, Bob Franken, John King, Frank Sesno, and Candy Crowley. December 19, 1998, 3:57 pm. CNN Breaking News: Clinton Speaks on Impeachment, Democrats Show Support. CNN.
[519] Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. December 21, 1998, 9:00 pm. Fox Hannity and Colmes: Censure Debate. Fox News.
[520] Such examples included Barbara Battalino and Pam Parsons. Their cases appear to have been highlighted in more conservative-leaning media outlets, including *The Washington Times*, *The Weekly Standard*, and *The New York Post* (http://rpc.senate.gov/releases/1998/battalino.htm).
[521] As Gormley (2010) notes, Clinton and his team were acutely aware of this lack of Democratic support. Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle would not take the president's calls from Martha's Vineyard, Senator Joe Lieberman would go on to harshly chastise him in September, and Bob Graham and Dick Gephardt refused to communicate with him for several days after his August 17th address (556).

Schieffer experienced what he termed "a rare Washingon day" where he could scarcely find a politician willing to comment on the president's situation.[522] The following day, Schieffer reported that Democrats were giving only "tepid support" to the president, much to the White House's disappointment.[523] The *Times* echoed this assessment, depicting Republicans as united and harsh in their judgment of Clinton's address, and Democrats as expressing tentative backing for the president, usually coupled with pointed criticism.[524] The *Post* coverage speculated that this was in part due to the fact the Clinton administration had "traditionally neglected" Democrats in Congress.[525] The *Tribune* claimed he angered the party through his "triangulation" strategies and was not close to members of a legislature he had never served in.[526] The initial silence of many Democrats also strongly suggests they were waiting to see what the public's reaction would be, circumstances which would heighten the importance of the president's efforts to successfully interpret the scandal for the American people.

Further highlighting the importance of Clinton's framing and deemphasizing the impact of his party's actions, Democratic critics were quite prevalent in the news content in the wake of the August 17th speech. The novelty and sensation of intra-party criticism clearly caused the media to give such sentiments ample attention. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan was quoted on the *CBS Evening News* as declaring the address "inadequate." Anonymous sources were more emphatic, such as one Democratic politician who relayed

[522] *CBS Evening News*, August 17, 1998.
[523] *CBS Evening News*, August 18, 1998.
[524] Sack, Kevin. "Testing of a President: The Reaction; President Explanation Apparently Fails to Quiet the Republicans or Fire Up the Democrats." *The New York Times* August 18, 1998 and Berke, Richard L. "Testing of a President: The Reaction; Scathing and Sad, Democrats React to Clinton Speech." *The New York Times* August 19, 1998.
[525] Balz, Dan and John F. Harris. "Clinton May Court Democrats on Hill; Neglected Lawmakers Key to Survival." " *The Washington Post* August 23, 1998.
[526] Neikirk, William. "Democrats' distrust a problem for Clinton." *The Chicago Tribune* August 23, 1998.

he or she was "nauseated" by the speech and that Clinton "blew it."[527] Several other anonymous Democrats chastised the president in a *Post* article entitled, "Hill Democrats View Speech As a Failure."[528] Senator Dianne Feinstein of California's post-speech quote, "My trust in his credibility has been badly shattered," was a constant refrain in the coverage.[529]

Further, it was a Democrat, Representative Paul McHale of Pennsylvania, who was one of the first to call for Clinton's impeachment or resignation, though McHale was also about to retire. He was the subject of a complimentary portrayal in the *Times*, which described his position as dramatic, quixotic, and courageous.[530] His stand also allowed journalists to depict forces against Clinton as bipartisan: on CNN, Candy Crowley reported, "There are some lawmakers who are well past limbo. Senators Bob Smith and John Ashcroft, both conservative Republicans and presidential hopefuls, both think the president ought to resign, as does Paul McHale, who is a Democrat from Pennsylvania."[531] Bob Franken on CNN described McHale as "probably the most significant Democrat" prior to describing his position,[532] but it would be difficult to argue the retiring representative was the most significant Democrat from any other standpoint than the press' standards of sensationalism and newsworthiness.

By December 1998, however, Democratic Congress members were much more likely to appear unified in support of the president. The party even took advantage of

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[527] *ABC Evening News*, August 19, 1998.
[528] Balz, Dan. "Hill Democrats View Speech As a Failure." *The Washington Post* August 20, 1998.
[529] Baker, Peter and Susan Schmidt. "Starr Pushes Forward Despite Clinton Admission; Lewinsky Summoned for Second Time." *The Washington Post* August 19, 1998.
[530] Sack, Kevin. "Testing of a President: The Dissident; An Iconoclastic Congressman Takes a Dramatic Stand." *The New York Times* August 20, 1998.
[531] Woodruff, Judy, William Schneider, Wolf Blitzer, Candy Crowley, Eileen O'Connor, Jeff Greenfield, John King. August 18, 1998, 5 pm. Inside Politics. CNN.
[532] O'Brien, Miles, Wolf Blitzer, John King, Bob Franken, and Howard Kurtz. August 18, 1998, 3 pm. CNN Talkback Live. CNN.

visual news norms by staging a dramatic walkout to protest being denied a censure vote in the House, an image that was covered on all the networks and in newspaper photos on December 19th. (Yet the impact of such a move was undoubtedly blunted by the media's propensity to identify it as strategic and manufactured – the *Tribune* called it "one of several scripted moments"[533] and CNN kept announcing the planned walkout well before it actually occurred). By this point, however, the president's effective use of frames may have made opposition to his impeachment politically popular and thereby the preferred position of congressional Democrats. Further, the fact that Democrats wholeheartedly embraced and repeated the "partisan enemies" frame in December speaks to the effectiveness of that Clinton narrative in generating support.

Still, lingering tensions between Democratic congressional members and the president continued to be highlighted by the press – the party was portrayed as motivated more by outrage at Republicans than a deep-seated affection or loyalty for Clinton.[534] Further, as previously mentioned, during the impeachment debate several Democrats backing the president did not champion the "no illegal action" frame. This version of limited support is evident in Senator Charles Schumer's (D-NY) contention, "Lying under oath about an extramarital relationship requires significant punishment such as censure, but not the political version of capital punishment, impeachment."[535]

For the opposition in August, Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah's public statements on Clinton's speech demonstrated that leading Republicans were perhaps not predisposed to

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[533] Warren, James. "Proceedings a seminar on nation's own conflict." *The Chicago Tribune* December 20, 1998.
[534] Berke, Richard L. "Democrats Stand By Clinton, but It Isn't Personal." *The New York Times* December 21, 1998.
[535] Sesno, Frank, Jeff Greenfield, Wolf Blitzer, Candy Crowley. December 19, 1998, 10:41 am. CNN Live Event/Special: Capitol Hill Reels After Livingston Announcement. CNN.

attack the president's August 17th speech in advance, but reacted negatively afterwards to its content. Appearing on "Meet the Press" before the address, Hatch declared that if Clinton were to be straightforward and truthful, "I think the polling shows that the American people are probably willing to allow him to finish out his term."[536] However, immediately after the speech, Hatch told NBC News that after Clinton's attacks on Starr, Hatch was about ready to "blow my cork" and off-air called Clinton a "jerk" and his speech "pathetic."[537] By the December impeachment period, Republican Party members, shown speaking on the floor of the House or quoted/appearing throughout the news, were consistently pushing the same narrative, that the president had broken the law, abused his power, and betrayed the public trust. The party's unified message at this crucial moment in the scandal demonstrates that Clinton's survival was not dependent on the fragmentation of the opposition.

As in the case of Richard Nixon during Watergate, however, the parties may have been experiencing a bit of a role reversal in their positions on the president's continuing in office. As several observers in the media noted, some Republican leaders would much rather have a humiliated, ineffectual Clinton in the White House than navigate the unpredictable waters of impeachment and deal with an incumbent President Gore in 2000.[538] Perhaps reflecting those priorities, Newt Gingrich commented a week after the August 17th address that "he believed only 'a pattern of felonies' and not 'a single human

[536] Baker, Peter and Dan Balz. "Clinton Prepares for Historic Test; Relationship With Lewinsky May Be Termed 'Inappropriate.'" *The Washington Post* August 17, 1998.
[537] Gugliotta, Guy. "Hatch Is Presidential Critic, Backer in Tumultuous Week." " *The Washington Post* August 22, 1998.
[538] Herbert, Bob. "In America; Clinton's Own Web." *The New York Times* August 17, 1998; Page, Clarence. "It's time, Mr. President." *The Chicago Tribune* August 19, 1998; Tillotson, Mary. August 18, 1998, 11:30 am. CNN & Company. CNN.

mistake' could constitute grounds for an impeachment inquiry."[539] These more tempered reactions among Republican leaders allowed for harsher Clinton critics to face tough questions – on CNN's *Crossfire,* Senator Ashcroft was asked whether he was "guilty of a little premature judgment" given the pronouncement of Gingrich and others they would not rush to any conclusions.[540]

Clinton's decision in August to order anti-terrorist bombing in Afghanistan and Sudan did gain him praise in news coverage from some of the same Republican figures who had been harshly criticizing him for the Lewinsky scandal just days before.[541] Fresh off of calling Clinton a "jerk," Senator Hatch was quoted in the *Tribune* saying, "Thank you, Mr. President. Thanks for being willing to take this type of action. Don't make it the last time. Let's wage a war against terrorism in the world."[542] Because the president faced an opposition party more hawkish than his own, many Republicans were compelled to greet the move with support and praise. Nixon did not enjoy this dynamic when instituting a military alert during the Watergate scandal. One oddity in comparing the Nixon and Clinton cases on this point is that the Clinton administration Defense Secretary William Cohen, widely revered and trusted by members of both parties, helped bolster Clinton's case that the attack was not ordered as a distraction.[543] However, Henry Kissinger was ineffective in boosting administration credibility when Nixon was charged with "wagging the dog."

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[539] Balz, Dan. "Gingrich Raises Bar For Impeachment; House Likely to Seek Wider Starr Report." *The Washington Post* August 24, 1998.
[540] Buchanan, Pat, Bill Press and Wolf Blitzer. August 18, 1998, 7:30 pm. Crossfire. CNN.
[541] Gugliotta, Guy and Juliet Eilperin. "Tough Response Appeals to Critics of President; Several Question Clinton's Timing of Raids." *The Washington Post* August 21, 1998.
[542] Neikirk, William and Mike Dorning. "Most lawmakers publicly approve raids." *The Chicago Tribune* August 21, 1998.
[543] "In Self-Defense." Editorial. *The Washington Post* August 21, 1998.

Public Opinion and Clinton's Frames

Immediately after the August 17th address, polls identified supportive majorities for some of the president's frames in the Lewinsky affair. In a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll, 63% of Americans described the situation as "only a private matter," as opposed to 37% who said it was "something that also concerns the public."[544] Fifty-one percent of the public felt that Clinton "apologized sufficiently for misleading the country," while 47% believed he needed to apologize further.[545] The week of Clinton's speech, polls showed that only 19% of the public viewed Starr favorably, and 5% viewed Monica Lewinsky favorably.[546] Those perceived to be his adversaries or potentially hurt by him were deeply unpopular figures, bolstering the president's persecuted by partisan enemies frame.

President Clinton's high job approval ratings might also be considered evidence of support for "personal mistake," but it is unclear whether the public truly separated his personal life from his public role. Although it was widely reported that President Clinton's personal favorability ratings took a hit in the wake of his address, falling by as much as twenty points, the *Times* reported on August 20th that the drop seemed to be attributable to a wording change. After the phrasing was reworked, Gallup recorded a far less significant five-point decrease in favorability. Furthermore, as the *Times* pointed out,

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[544] Johnson, Dirk. "Testing of a President: The Public; Reactions in Milwaukee Include Disappointment and a Sense of Betrayal." *The New York Times* August 19, 1998.
[545] Broder, David S. and Richard Morin. "Americans See 2 Distinct Clintons; They Laud His Work, Not His Character." *The Washington Post* August 23, 1998.
[546] Nagourney, Adam with Michael R. Kagay. "High Marks Given to the President But Not the Man." *The New York Times* August 22, 1998. As others have noted, one of the remarkable things about the Lewinsky scandal was that there were essentially no players in the entire drama that proved to be likeable or sympathetic to the public, which made it easier for Clinton to exploit the weaknesses of his detractors (Molly W. Andolina and Clyde Wilcox, "Public Opinion: The Paradoxes of Clinton's Popularity" in eds. Rozell and Wilcox, *The Clinton Scandal and the Future of American Government* Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2000, 188).

with the exception of a poll from February 1998, President Clinton had never garnered a favorability rating over 50%, making such low scores less directly attributable to the scandal or speech.[547] Still, the media emphasized that the public condemned the president's personal failings and yet continued to approve of his job as president, evident in headlines such as this one from the *Post*: "Americans See 2 Distinct Clintons; They Laud His Work, Not His Character."[548]

"No illegal action" fared no better with the American people than it had in the media -- an NBC/Wall Street Journal poll revealed that 52% of the public did not agree with Clinton's assertion that he had done nothing to obstruct justice in the investigation of his relationship with Lewinsky.[549] Further, August polls demonstrated Clinton's precarious position with the public. When asked, "If Starr reports to Congress that, in addition to the Lewinsky matter, he has evidence that Clinton covered up other instances of wrongdoing in the past, do you think Congress should or should not impeach Clinton and remove him from office?", 52% of the public said Congress should impeach.[550] Furthermore, with regard to whether Clinton's effectiveness as a leader was in question in August, a plurality (40%) of the public felt that the Lewinsky scandal was "interfering a lot" with Clinton's ability to deal effectively with terrorism and other international problems, with 23% believing it interfered "a little" and 35% not at all.[551]

CNN featured many citizens from around the country reacting to the August 17th speech the following day. At times, these ordinary Americans directly echoed the

[547] Nagourney, Adam with Michael R. Kagay. "High Marks Given to the President But Not the Man." *The New York Times* August 22, 1998.
[548] Broder, David S. and Richard Morin. "Americans See 2 Distinct Clintons; They Laud His Work, Not His Character." *The Washington Post* August 23, 1998.
[549] Ibid.
[550] Broder, David S. and Richard Morin. "Americans See 2 Distinct Clintons; They Laud His Work, Not His Character." *The Washington Post* August 23, 1998.
[551] Ibid.

sentiments of both media pundits and the president himself. For instance, a man in Battery Park in New York told his interviewer "I was a little disappointed that he didn't say 'I'm sorry' and ask people to forgive him. Now I think it's between his wife and his daughter and him."[552] A merchant in a Little Rock farmer's market told a reporter, "if he got it right between himself, his wife and God, I feel like it should be over about now."[553] A patron of a sports bar in Houston called it "a lapse in judgment," just as Clinton himself had.[554] In Washington D.C., a tourist declared, "It's time to move on, and get on with the important business of the country."[555] Even months later, in December, a medical assistant from Washington D.C. told the *Post*, "I think the whole independent investigator thing just became like a big witch hunt."[556]

By December, poll numbers contributed to substantial media coverage that reinforced the president's standing. A December 20th poll showed 60% of the American public disapproved of the House voting to impeach President Clinton, and 62% felt "Most Republican members of Congress are out of touch with what most Americans want to happen with the impeachment."[557] After the impeachment vote, a Washington Post-ABC News poll showed that even support for resignation declined significantly. The percentage of the public who said Clinton should resign as opposed to "fight the charges" in the Senate went from 57% on December 15th to 42% by December 20th.[558] This same

[552] Kagan, Daryn, Wolf Blitzer, Bill Hemmer, Roger Cossack, Jonathan Karl, John King, Bob Franken, Greta Van Susteren, and Gary Tuchman. August 18, 1998, 9 am. CNN Morning News. CNN.
[553] Ibid.
[554] Ibid.
[555] Chen, Joie and Wolf Blitzer. August 18, 1998, 8:01 pm. CNN The World Today. CNN.
[556] "Voices From Around the Nation." *The Washington Post* December 17, 1998.
[557] Nagourney, Adam and Michael R. Kagay. "Public Support for the President, and for Closure, Emerges Unshaken." *The New York Times* December 21, 1998.
[558] Morin, Richard. "Public Wants Punishment of President, Not Removal; Sentiment for Resignation Drops After Impeachment Vote, Poll Finds; Job Approval Rating Remains High." *The Washington Post* December 21, 1998.

poll cited a majority of the public as of the belief that the vote to impeach was based on partisan politics and not the facts of the case, just as Clinton contended.

In December, fifteen stories in the *Times*, eleven in the *Post*, and seven in the *Tribune* made reference to a disconnect between the Republican Party and the public on impeachment. An additional ten articles in the *Times*, five in the *Post*, and three in the *Tribune* mentioned a gap between Congress generally and the American people on the issue. Polls illustrating a public against impeachment allowed objective news reports to point to the "remarkable divide"[559] between Republicans and the American people, benefiting the president. Yet despite the public opposition to impeachment, it was still clear most Americans did not accept the president's "no illegal action" frame. Mid-December polls showed 86% of the public thought Clinton had lied under oath and 63% that he had engaged in obstruction of justice.[560]

Some media norms caused public support for Clinton and his frames to seem less substantial in the press than the above polls might have indicated. A media commitment to "balanced" coverage meant that many December news pieces included quotes from citizens that expressed both pro and anti-impeachment views.[561] Additionally, media interest was drawn to the drama-filled stories of House members making a last-minute decision on whether to support impeachment and their typically sharply divided

[559] Berke, Richard L. "Polls Find Most Americans Still Oppose Impeachment and Now Frown on the G.O.P." *The New York Times* December 15, 1998.
[560] Stanley A. Renshon, "'The Polls': The Public's Response to the Clinton Scandals, Part 1: Inconsistent Theories, Contradictory Evidence." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32 (1) (March 2002), 175.
[561] Bragg, Rick. "In the President's Home State, a Sense of Sorrow and Satisfaction." *The New York Times* December 20, 1998.

districts.[562] This kind of coverage offered a counterweight to the stories on nation-wide polls, making the American public appear to be more closely divided than it actually was.

Surviving Scandal in the New Media Era

President Clinton was able to successfully frame the Lewinsky scandal through the use of narratives like "personal mistake" and "persecuted by partisan enemies" that were effective in obtaining favorable news coverage. These frames exploited long-established conventions of press coverage, increasing their likelihood of being echoed as opposed to challenged in the news. A frame like "partisan enemies" could also evolve over time, allowing for new developments that met the news media's demand for novelty and sustained their attention to the narrative. Frames that suffered in the coverage were easy for news organizations committed to objectivity to undermine. Whether or not the president had committed illegal actions fit neatly within the narrative of court proceedings with two opposing sides that journalists were compelled to present equally. In contrast, it was unlikely the media would independently offer praise for Kenneth Starr to balance out the "persecuted" frame.

Though the framing of the scandal as a "personal mistake" was an all-around successful frame in the coverage, different media forms varied in how they treated it. In August it was sometimes undermined in print and on cable news, but never challenged on the nightly news. The greater depth and time/space in the former allowed for journalists and commentators to directly question classifying the affair as solely a private matter, as

[562] For example, see: Wilgoren, Jodi. "For Fence-Sitter, Pressure From Within." *The New York Times* December 16, 1998; Berger, Joseph. "Pressured Republican Makes a Decision." *The New York Times* December 16, 1998; Kemper, Bob. "Porter, a moderate, in no-win situation." *The Chicago Tribune* December 15, 1998; Goldstein, Amy. "2,000 Jam Shays's Meeting; Swing Republican Hears Fiery Debate." *The Washington Post* December 16, 1998.

when a *Post* opinion column charged, "Appeals to privacy can be exploited to cover up wrongdoing just as much as appeals to national security can."[563] As ratings for nightly news programming decline and more Americans get their news from web-based print sources or 24-hour news networks, this suggests that a frame like "personal mistake" might have fared better in an earlier era when the major networks' evening broadcasts were a more popular source of information.

Coverage on cable news presented both challenges and opportunities for Clinton's framing efforts. Overall, it was nowhere near as damaging as might be expected. Certainly, 24-hour news networks provided content harmful to Clinton not seen in the traditional media outlets like nightly news and print, such as abuse of power allegations in August and controversial sexual assault charges in December. However, the cable outlets also explored topics in extensive detail that aided Clinton, such as whether he was being treated "below the law" in August. Further, the personal mistake and persecuted by partisan enemies frames enjoyed similar levels of success on cable news as they did in the other outlets. Jeffrey E. Cohen in The Presidency In the Era of 24-Hour News (2008) identifies Clinton's continued public support in the wake of a deluge of bad news in the Lewinsky scandal as a puzzle. He argues this can be explained by the news media no longer being able to shape public opinion as effectively as they did decades earlier. However, looking at the Lewinsky scandal coverage in the context of presidential framing allows for a more nuanced assessment of how "bad" the news actually was. The substantial presence of key Clinton narratives throughout the media suggests that scandal

[563] Bok, Sissela. "About Last Week…Lies: They Come With Consequences." *The Washington Post* August 23, 1998.

coverage is not always as damaging as it might initially appear, and this may help explain a seemingly incongruous public reaction.

Although press coverage of political strategy and tactics by the primary scandal actors was a part of the Grant and Nixon cases, it was an even more fundamental and prominent part of the Lewinsky scandal coverage. Headlines such as: "Exploiting Clinton Friends' Logic, Foes Plan Drive for Resignation"[564] and "2 strategies emerge in bid to keep office"[565] are evidence that entire stories focused solely on political maneuvering. Additionally, a major portion of the 24-hour news network coverage consisted of commentators discussing the messages emanating from the White House and prominent Republicans, with talking heads always making it clear that these were strategically constructed communications designed to foster each side's political goals. This had positive and negative consequences for the president's rehabilitation project – some of the sincerity is stripped away as strategy is made transparent, and yet at the same time the message is incessantly repeated to the viewing public. Additionally, Clinton's opponents found their alternative framings of the scandal subject to the same assessment, making their claims appear no more genuine.

Clinton's effective framing aided his survival of the Lewinsky scandal and helped allow him to avoid removal or resignation from office. His success in this regard was particularly evident just after his August 17th address, when even his fellow Democrats were reluctant to vocally indicate their support. By December, Clinton had his party repeating key frames like "partisan enemies" throughout the media. Popular interpretations of the Lewinsky scandal typically focus on "personal mistake" as

[564] Edsall, Thomas B. "Exploiting Clinton Friends' Logic, Foes Plan Drive for Resignation." *The Washington Post* December 18, 1998.
[565] Simon, Roger. "2 strategies emerge in bid to keep office." *The Chicago Tribune* December 22, 1998.

explaining why Clinton was able to retain the presidency, but my analysis demonstrates that “partisan enemies” was more likely the linchpin to his survival strategy. In the end Clinton was saved by the same partisan politics he believed got him into the Lewinsky mess in the first place.

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CONFLICTING STORIES: THE PRESIDENCY AND THE MEDIA IN FRAMING CRISES
VOLUME 2

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2011

Chapter 5: President McKinley and the Spanish-American War

When President William McKinley came into office in 1897, he inherited a perplexing foreign policy problem in the long-running conflict between Spain and its colony Cuba. In early 1895, Cuban insurgents rebelled against Spanish rule over the island (an earlier ten-year revolt from 1868 to 1878 had also plagued the island). The insurgents used guerilla warfare tactics of destroying crops and engaging in hit and run attacks against Spanish soldiers. In response, Spain's military in 1896 adopted a "reconcentration" policy, which involved moving the Cuban people away from the countryside and into fortified bases, in order to cut off practical support for the rebels. Conditions in these reconcentration areas were unsanitary and crowded, and many Cubans confined to them died of starvation and disease.[566] Still the rebellion was not quelled, it was not clear that Spain would ever be able to put down the insurgency, and humanitarian and financial concerns about the costs of the conflict were ever-rising in the United States.

The case of President McKinley and the Spanish-American War differs from that of my later examples of presidents making the case for military intervention. Whereas Presidents Johnson and Bush sought to persuade other political actors and the public to support their view that war had become necessary, President McKinley for a significant time sought to prevent war before he himself identified such action as required. McKinley's framing project entailed convincing Congress and the public to pursue military intervention only on the president's own terms and timetable. During McKinley's time in office, there was great pressure for the U.S. to intervene militarily in

[566] Lewis L. Gould, *The Spanish-American War and President McKinley* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1980), 22.

Cuba from a variety of sources, including Cuban exiles living in America, advocates of a stronger military, the Democratic Party as well as many Republicans, and a public belief in Manifest Destiny and that America should assert itself more in international affairs.

This case demonstrates that despite the nature of the 19th century press environment that might lead us to assume that partisan outlets and a national security crisis context would allow the president to successfully define the situation and lay out appropriate responses, President McKinley had a great deal of difficulty getting his version of events into the news. As many of the newspapers of the time and historical accounts indicate, Congress was predisposed to follow the president's course just prior to the delivery of his April 1898 message on Cuba. However, after the document's delivery, much of this willingness dissipated, at least for a time. This indicates a failure of framing; some of the president's narratives were unconvincing to many at whom they were aimed. The constrained, pre-modern presidency presented a number of challenges for McKinley in attempting to have his perspective on foreign policy events accepted by other political actors and the public. For instance, McKinley's was not the only voice prominently featured in newspapers as credible on American foreign affairs, and presidential communications strategies and resources for conveying his views were not as robust as for the modern presidency.

Additionally, the news coverage often did not consistently and coherently reflect his frames. News articles, frequently partisan and recounting events such as congressional debates in a chronological style that included lengthy quotes from detractors, did not necessarily privilege the president's position. Particularly with regard to quickly unfolding events in a crisis scenario, the newspapers often produced

schizophrenic coverage that did not allow any single source to present a dominant interpretation of events. Ultimately, Congress did acquiesce to most of McKinley's wishes on intervention in Cuba in April 1898, but the inadequacy of the president's frames and the nature of 19th century journalism made this a much more difficult task than later presidents encountered. The presidency at the end of the 19th century had less of a free hand to shape coverage of national security crises in the news than the office enjoyed in the early 21st century.

In this chapter, I assess two major statements made by President McKinley on the Cuban question for his framing of the foreign policy issue: his December 6th, 1897 annual address, which devoted over a third of its content to Cuba, and his April 11th, 1898 message to Congress, in which he updated the legislature on the circumstances and requested authorization for the use of force. I then analyzed news articles from five prominent newspapers of the era during particularly noteworthy time periods to see how the president's frames fared at various points in the crisis.

McKinley's Framing of the Conflict with Spain over Cuba

The first frame McKinley employed was defining Cuba as "our" problem, stressing the ways the U.S. was directly affected by the conflict. The president offered numerous reasons American interests were impacted, from the symbolic to the tangible. In April, McKinley began his address by noting that his recommended course of action on Cuba was required of the nation, "if it is to accord with the precepts laid down by the founders of the Republic and religiously observed by succeeding Administrations to the present day." This emphasized a commitment to the cause of freedom and adherence to

the Monroe Doctrine that opposed European intervention in the Western hemisphere. Summing up the practical implications of the Cuban conflict for the U.S., McKinley listed: “Our trade has suffered, the capital invested by our citizens in Cuba has been largely lost, and the temper and forbearance of our people have been so adversely tried as to beget a perilous unrest among our own citizens.” All this, according to the president, had distracted the country from “domestic advancement,” a problem for a “self-contained Commonwealth whose primal maxim has been the avoidance of all foreign entanglements.” In his April address, to counter calls for isolationism, the president contended, “It is no answer to say this is all in another country, belonging to another nation, and is therefore none of our business. It is specially our duty, for it is right at our door.” Toward the conclusion of his message, McKinley discussed the explosion of the U.S. ship the *Maine* in Havana Harbor, noting that though responsibility had not been placed for its destruction, the incident was “impressive proof of a state of things in Cuba that is intolerable.” Though Spain was not directly blamed for the loss, McKinley stressed that “the Spanish government cannot assure safety and security to a vessel of the American Navy in the harbor of Havana, on a mission of peace and rightfully there.”

Second, McKinley applied a humanitarian lens to Spain’s policy in Cuba, portraying the treatment of the Cuban people as “intolerable” and insinuating the colony needed to be saved. Detailing Spain’s policy of reconcentration McKinley asserted, “It was not civilized warfare. It was extermination.” In April, the president declared the policy one of “misery and starvation,” and identified the “aged and helpless” as most adversely affected, including many women and children.

The third frame McKinley utilized emphasized that other options for dealing with the Cuba issue had been exhausted (or nearly so, in his December address). This frame was similar to that propagated by President Bush in 2002 in the lead-up to the Iraq War – military force was identified as a last resort, after other methods have been tried and failed to produce the desired results. In April, McKinley detailed his administration's final effort to try to mediate an immediate peace between Spain and the Cuban insurgents, and noted that with "its disappointing reception by Spain, the Executive was brought to the end of his effort."

The fourth frame McKinley employed was delineating the limits of American support for the Cuban rebels. This narrative in December 1897 encompassed McKinley's view the U.S. should not recognize the belligerency of the Cubans, and in April 1898 that the nation should not formally recognize Cuba's independence, even in the event of military intervention. In his annual message, seeking to enhance the perceived legitimacy of his opposition to recognizing belligerency, McKinley drew heavily from President Ulysses S. Grant's annual message from 1875 where he took the same position, quoting Grant at great length. Both presidents conveyed that recognizing belligerency was neither justified nor in the United States' interests from a strategic standpoint.

In April, McKinley backed up his stance against formally recognizing Cuba's independence with an excerpt from another predecessor, who he described as "the resolute and patriotic" Andrew Jackson. President McKinley recalled Jackson's December 1836 address against recognizing the independence of Texas from Mexico, and drew a parallel to Cuba. A continuing aspect of the perils of recognition relayed in both addresses was that those fighting for Cuba's independence did not constitute a

formal political organization that could take on the required responsibilities of a government for the Cuban people. Additionally, McKinley expressed concerns that "to commit this country now to the recognition of any particular government in Cuba might subject us to embarrassing conditions of international obligation toward the organization so recognized."[567]

Finally, the last frame McKinley stressed was that when and if military action became necessary, the U.S. would not hesitate to act, but that he would identify when that time had come. Initially, in December, the president pointed to a new regime in Spain and changes to the nation's Cuba policy that had made positive progress and would hopefully result in the conflict's speedy conclusion. McKinley declared, "It is honestly due to Spain and to our friendly relations with Spain that she should be given a reasonable chance to realize her expectations and to prove the asserted efficacy of the new order of things to which she stands irrevocably committed." Thus McKinley outlined a frame to "wait" on military action and give Spain a fair chance to change. Yet the president warned that this waiting would not be indefinite. Soon it would become apparent whether a desired state of affairs had emerged, and if it did not, "the exigency of further and other action by the United States will remain to be taken" and "it will be faced without misgiving or hesitancy in the light of the obligation this Government owes to itself, to the people who have confided to it the protection of their interests and honor, and to humanity."

[567] There were numerous practical reasons the White House did not want to recognize Cuban independence, even when military intervention became a reality. Among those concerns were that American soldiers might arrive in Cuba as allies, and potentially subject to the mandates of Cuban insurgent commanders; that it would be easier to hold Cuba responsible for losses to American investments if it was not formally independent; and that the U.S. would be able to hold Cuba in "trust" until peace was established and a government formed, processes the U.S. would have less influence over if they recognized independence first (John L. Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain Over Cuba, 1895 – 1898*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992, 182).

In his April statement, McKinley identified that the time to intervene appeared nigh. This frame reflected McKinley's efforts to define the war on his own terms: the U.S. would only revert to war if absolutely necessary, and the president was informing the nation this time seemed to have come. Yet he rested his position again on the stances taken by presidents before him, of both political parties. President Grant was quoted extensively for a second time, as was President Grover Cleveland, both articulating that if the conflict between Spain and Cuba appeared likely to go on indefinitely, intervention might be required. McKinley strongly emphasized that the U.S. was taking military action at a point where its move would be beyond question. Reiterating sentiments in his December message, the president declared that the nation would only make use of force "without fault on our part, and only because the necessity for such action will be so clear as to command the support and approval of the civilized world." In part, the president was asking for discretion to embark on the course he deemed necessary, asking Congress not for an immediate declaration of war, but to "authorize and empower the President to take measures to secure a full and final termination of hostilities between the government of Spain and the people of Cuba…and to use the military and naval forces of the United States as may be necessary for these purposes." Yet as a 19th century, pre-modern president, McKinley at the end of his address deferred to Congress: "Prepared to execute every obligation imposed upon me by the Constitution and the law," stated McKinley, "I await your action." The president thereby asserted himself by requesting authority for force on his own timetable, while simultaneously positioning himself as subservient to the legislature in formally allowing him that privilege. As the president did not ask for a

formal declaration of war, this also meant negotiations with Spain could continue and possibly avert the need for war.[568]

Media Coverage of the De Lome Letter and the *Maine*'s Destruction: McKinley's Frames Put to the Test

As President McKinley's primary framing objective was to persuade Congress and the public to delay military conflict until such a point as he thought it necessary, coverage of events likely to undercut his narratives will help demonstrate the success or failure of his frames. In early February of 1898, a letter written by Spanish Minister to the United States Enrique Dupuy De Lome to a friend was leaked to the press. This letter personally insulted President McKinley, calling him "weak and catering to the rabble, and besides, a low politician, who desires to leave a door open to me, and to stand well with the jingoes of his party." It also appeared to indicate that some of Spain's negotiations with the U.S. involving Cuba were disingenuous, that an offer of autonomy to the Cubans was insincere and designed to give Spain more time to pacify the island. Then on February 15th the U.S. battleship *Maine,* docked in Havana Harbor, suffered a major explosion, killing over two hundred fifty members of the crew. These two events stood to undermine the president's ability to restrain the country from embarking on military action against Spain before McKinley deemed it prudent and required. Further, the de Lome affair may have had an impact on perception of the *Maine*'s destruction, as

[568] Evans Thomas, *The War Lovers: Roosevelt, Lodge, Hearst, and the Rush to Empire, 1898* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2010), 236.

Americans' concerns about Spanish duplicity and antagonism affected their view of what caused the tragedy.[569]

I analyzed all articles dealing with President McKinley and/or Spain and Cuba from February 9th through the 17th of 1898 in four New York newspapers, *The New York Times*, *The New York Tribune*, *The New York Sun*, and *The New York Herald*, and one Midwestern press representative, *The Chicago Tribune*.[570] Coverage of this time period in the so-called "yellow press" that clamored for war has already been extensively documented in the literature, and publishers like William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer "spoke for only a small part of the journalistic community,"[571] thus this study focuses instead on less sensational mainstream papers. *The Chicago Tribune*, however, published some articles with copyrights attributed to Hearst and *The New York World*, which are included here. This content added to the more negative tone of the coverage of the president's frames in the Chicago paper, though not all of the re-published articles were rabidly pro-war. President McKinley's framings of Cuba as a humanitarian crisis and military action as only a last resort were for the most part not subject to challenge in

[569] Offner, 125.

[570] These newspapers reflect a variety of editorial viewpoints and partisan or nonpartisan identities, as well as substantial circulation numbers. The *New York Sun* controlled by Charles A. Dana had supported McKinley for president in 1896 but was not consistently Republican, instead taking up the mantle of an independent, nonpartisan entity. Its daily circulation from 1895 to 1898 averaged about 150,000. The *New York Tribune* under editor Whitelaw Reid became a conservative and reliably Republican outlet, with a daily circulation in 1898 of roughly 75,000. Adolph S. Ochs ran the *New York Times* with a commitment to a nonpartisan bent, and circulation averaged 25,000. James Gordon Bennett Jr.'s *New York Herald* was particularly favored by the wealthy classes, and in 1895 was for Democratic president Grover Cleveland running for a third term. Overall though the paper was of a more independent perspective and its circulation was near 100,000 in 1898. Additionally, because the *Sun* and the *Herald* had reporters in Cuba, their articles were sold to newspapers throughout the country. The *Chicago Tribune* not only provides a contrast to the East Coast perspectives, but it also carried news services from the "yellow press" that also had correspondents in Cuba, the *New York Journal* and the *New York World*. The papers also differed on their approach to the Cuban question: the *Herald*, for example, strongly opposed intervention, while the *Sun* strongly favored the Cuban cause (Joseph E. Wisan, *The Cuban Crisis As Reflected in the New York Press (1895-1898)*, New York: Octagon Books, 1965).

[571] Gould, 24. This was also apparent in much of the analyzed content, as many of these mainstream papers expressed a critical and sometimes condescending attitude toward the "yellow press." Disapproval of these sensational outlets was registered then by some of their contemporaries in the press.

the papers. As noted above, Spain's poor treatment of the Cuban people was already extremely prevalent in the press. Moreover, since some prominent political figures had been urging military action for years, McKinley was not going to be accused by critics as "rushing to war" as President Bush was in 2002-2003.

Newspaper Coverage of the De Lome Scandal

Overall, the *Times*, *New York Tribune*, and *Herald* covered the scandal in the most favorable light for the administration's frames, noting some problems with Spain that might emerge as a result of the letter's disclosure but generally asserting relations between the two nations would be unchanged. The *Herald* declared that responsibility for the letter lay only with de Lome and that Spain itself had done nothing wrong, and the paper even suggested it would be undignified to beg Spain to disavow the personal insults against McKinley.[572] Self-aggrandizing news content was not limited to the yellow press in this era. The *Herald* published an article quoting an anonymous Spanish official profusely apologizing for the de Lome incident and calling the disgraced diplomat a "fool," and the paper then declared McKinley to be very happy and satisfied with this response, all thanks to the *Herald*'s reporting.[573] The *Herald* was also the only paper to present content overtly pro-Spain, in one editorial feeling sorry for its government for

[572] "The Incident Closed," Editorial, *The New York Herald*, February 12, 1898.
[573] "Spain Makes Apology for De Lome's Act. The Spanish Ministry Through the Council Says the Government Condemns the Letter in the Most Absolute Manner. Late Minister is Severely Censured. Council Members Declare They Are Sound Men, Placed in a False Position by a Fool. Are Ashamed and Grieved. Say That They Feel More Aggrieved Over the Incident Than President McKinley Can Be. De Lome's Successor Named," *The New York Herald*, February 15, 1898 and "Consider De Lome Incident Closed. Spain's Attitude as Given to the Herald Is Highly Gratifying to the Administration. Reply Will Be Published. With the Arrival of the New Minister Active Work on the Treaty Will Begin. To Refute De Lome Letter. Mr. Carlisle's Object in Getting The Document is for Evidence in Prosecution," *The New York Herald*, February 16, 1898.

being harassed by jingoes, hurt by a letter officials did not agree with, and dealing with a misguided anti-American populace.[574]

By contrast, the *Sun* and especially the *Chicago Tribune* tended toward coverage that emphasized the rupture in diplomatic relations and at times indicated the scandal could lead toward military hostilities. Even papers that had levied even more outrageous insults and criticism at the president feigned great anger at de Lome's comments.[575] The *Sun*'s coverage often characterized Spain or Spanish representatives like de Lome as deceptive and duplicitous by nature, using trickery to thwart the United States. The *Chicago Tribune* quoted an anonymous U.S. official asserting that if the letter was authentic, the aftermath of de Lome's dismissal could mean war.[576] This was somewhat problematic for McKinley, effectively discrediting Spain as a credible partner in negotiations, much as President Bush depicted Saddam Hussein as unlikely to faithfully comply with United Nations resolutions in 2002 to bolster the case for war. McKinley and his "wait" frame, by contrast, sought to preserve and increase confidence in diplomatic relations at this juncture. If Congress and the public believed Spain to be disingenuous, it might make the president appear to be wasting his time, or perhaps worse, taken in and fooled by Spain's machinations.

The McKinley administration, operating on the cusp of the modern presidency, did not appear to have communications and press strategies in place to influence most effectively the way the de Lome scandal was covered in the newspapers. McKinley did reestablish the White House as a major source of news and was more open to reporters in

[574] "Frank Disclaimers From Spain," Editorial, *The New York Herald*, February 16, 1898.
[575] Wisan, 382.
[576] "How Washington Takes It," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 9, 1898.

contrast to his immediate predecessor, a closed-off Grover Cleveland.[577] But setting up a system to release presidential communications did not necessarily mean those announcements had been honed and crafted to best disseminate the president's interpretations of events in the news. All of the newspapers analyzed had inconsistent coverage on whether the White House was satisfied or dissatisfied with Spain's response to the scandal, and as to whether the incident was "closed" or not. For instance, a *Times* headline on February 11th read, "The President Now Satisfied. Acceptance of Senor de Lome's Resignation Ends the Incident," but just two days later on February 13th published an article entitled, "Incident Not Closed. De Lome Affair Will Not Be Out of the Way for the Present." The McKinley administration appeared to be providing incomplete information and fluctuating positions on the scandal to the press, seemingly unable to take advantage of the newspapers' inclinations to recount the White House's every move for their readers.

Newspapers' Take on the Destruction of the Maine

The McKinley administration's official view of the disaster, reported in all of the papers, was that the explosion was an accident, and that a full investigation would be launched. This assessment of the event would allow McKinley's framing of the Cuban issue to stand unchallenged, as the tragic accident would not require the U.S. to alter its policy toward Spain. Even reporting on the president's official position could differ in the context of various outlets, however. The *New York Tribune* and the *Herald* declared that McKinley genuinely believed the incident to be an accident, while the *Sun* argued this

[577] Gould, 15.

was "forced conservatism" employed by the president because of the consequences if the *Maine* were declared to be a deliberate act.[578]

Aiding the president's framing efforts was the captain of the *Maine*, who in his initial dispatch reporting the explosion urged that public opinion be reserved until further information came to light as to the cause. Several papers urged the nation to heed the captain's wise words, demonstrating other public figures could rival the president as trusted and influential sources of interpreting crisis events in the press. The *Sun* even identified the captain as the original source of the admonition to consider the explosion an accident until proven otherwise, writing that "the President and Secretary Long recognized the wisdom of this request and seconded it heartily."[579]

The *Times* and the *New York Tribune* pushed the view that there was no possibility the Maine's destruction had been officially orchestrated by Spain. While a paper like the *New York Tribune* clearly privileged the president's "accident" perspective in its front pages, content buried further in the paper expressed another view. Naval experts and officers interviewed by the paper strongly refuted that the explosion was an accident, though no consistent alternative theory emerged as a consensus position. The *Herald*, with the exception of articles reviewing the opinions of Cubans and London newspapers, concurred that Spain did not orchestrate the *Maine*'s destruction. Editorially, the paper maintained that even "the most blatant and foolish jingoes" did not think Spain was involved.[580]

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[578] "Prompt Inquiry Into the Cause. Measures Already Taken by the Government to Find Out Exactly What Sent the Battle Ship to the Bottom. President Believes It Was An Accident. General Opinion Among Officials and Naval Experts That It Was an Internal Explosion. Court of Inquiry Ordered. Divers and Wreckers Will Try to Find Out Whether a Torpedo Was Fired," *The New York Herald*, February 17, 1898 and "Gloom in Washington," *The New York Sun*, February 17, 1898.
[579] "Gloom in Washington," *The New York Sun*, February 17, 1898.
[580] "The Calamity in Havana Harbor," Editorial, *The New York Herald*, February 17, 1898.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the *Chicago Tribune* cited numerous sources that contended Spain was directly responsible.[581] An article citing the vice-president of a steel company involved in the construction of the *Maine* deemed it "absurd" to think it was an accident, and claimed Spain was "laughing at us."[582] Another article profiled an American doctor in Cuba who claimed he heard Spaniards boasting days earlier that they could blow up the *Maine* any time they liked.[583] The paper also fostered the impression the McKinley administration was negligent in an article that claimed secret dispatches had been previously sent from the captain of the *Maine* to the White House expressing his concerns the ship was in grave danger in Havana Harbor.[584]

Depictions of Congress's reaction to the *Maine* disaster also varied from paper to paper. The *New York Tribune* focused on those they deemed the "real leaders" in the legislature and portrayed them as responding cautiously and conservatively. The *Chicago Tribune*'s headline read: "Is Not an Accident. Consensus of Opinion by Members of Congress." The Midwestern paper also contended that while Naval Secretary Long deemed the event an accident, no one else in the Navy Department agreed with him.[585]

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[581] Still, the paper was more restrained than the infamous yellow press. On the 17th, Hearst's *New York Journal*'s headline rang out, "Destruction of the War Ship Maine Was the Work of An Enemy" and vehemently attacked McKinley, declaring, "Mr. McKinley MUST feel that he is responsible for this great calamity. He MUST realize that in shirking his duty as the guardian of the Nation's honor he has indirectly brought about this catastrophe" (John Byrne Cooke, *Reporting the War: Freedom of the Press from the American Revolution to the War on Terrorism*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 66).

[582] "Carnegie Official Speaks Out. John A. Potter Ridicules the Common Theory and Says Spain Is Laughing at the Disaster," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 17, 1898.

[583] "Talk of Plot Rife. Dr. C.E. Pendleton Hears Strange Things in Havana. Threats By Spaniards. Their Ability to Blow Up the Maine Whenever Desired. Claims Regarded Boastful. Physician Hastens from New York to Washington. Tidings Brought By Sailors," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 17, 1898.

[584] "Had Ample Warning. Disaster to the Maine Predicted by Capt. Sigsbee. Dispatch Is On File. It Is Sent in Secret Cipher but Is Officially Disregarded. Is Attributed to Fear," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 17, 1898.

[585] "Plot or Accident? How Washington Views the Sinking of the Maine. Spain Under Suspicion. Secretary Long Takes the Charitable View. His Opinion is Disputed," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 17, 1898.

The *Sun* identified nine out of ten members present in the House of Representatives as feeling there was "grave cause for suspicion" in the ship's destruction.[586]

Overall, in this case of a very high profile, military-related crisis event, the president was not able to control the dominant interpretation of the cause or consequences of the incident immediately after it occurred. Nor did any one way of framing the event dominate the pages of the five newspapers analyzed. Instead, a litany of possible causes of the explosion was recounted in the coverage, with some papers privileging "accident" and others "treachery" by various actors. The perspective of the President of the United States on the *Maine*'s destruction was not necessarily depicted as significantly more accurate and authoritative than that of, for example, a shipbuilder interviewed at the Brooklyn Navy Yard who claimed the explosion could not have been an accident.

President's Opponents Echo His Frames, Draw Different Conclusions

Coverage of the Senate debate from February 9th through the 17th of 1898 over proposed resolutions to apply a deadline for peace with Spain and recognize the belligerency of the insurgents involved lengthy quotes from senators in several of the papers. This meant that frames also articulated by McKinley, particularly Cuba as "our problem" and the humanitarian concerns that might prompt intervention, were recounted at length in such articles, as senators utilized them to support their resolutions. Undermining the president, however, these senators employed such frames to try to support military action more immediately than McKinley advocated. One of the

[586] "Congress Stirred Up. But No Expression of Feeling Made In Open Session – Opinions of Senators," *The New York Sun*, February 17, 1898.

problematic aspects of McKinley's framing, then, was that in mirroring the narratives of pro-war elements on Cuba, he potentially made his "wait" frame less effective.

More sensational content focusing on humanitarian concerns about Spain's Cuban policy was also found in articles the *Chicago Tribune* carried from Hearst publications, such as "Horror in Fair Cuba," a correspondent's account of his first-hand encounters with countless starving women and children throughout the island. Here the reporter directly contradicted McKinley's "wait" frame, refuting that any progress had been made: "substantially the same things are done now as before," and depicting a starvation and "extinction" policy by Spain as very much a current problem.

Several of the papers covered a petition sent by prominent businessmen to McKinley urging him to take action to secure peace in Cuba now, citing a variation on "our problem" by noting the tremendous financial cost to the U.S. of the on-going conflict. This entreaty on behalf of business was also noteworthy to the press because commercial interests were considered wary of intervention, and McKinley had a long-established reputation of having strong ties to that lobby.[587]

Coverage of the Insurgents and the "Don't Recognize" Frame

The *Sun* referred to the insurgents in Cuba as "patriots" in their headlines and news content, demonstrating a strong sympathy with the rebels in the conflict. The *Chicago Tribune* in an editorial backed recognition of Cuba's independence, directly in contrast to McKinley's position.[588] In contrast, the *Herald*'s coverage of Congress'

[587] Wisan, 282.
[588] "Is It Preparing for Action?" Editorial, *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 16, 1898.

requests for more information from the administration was titled, "State Department's Report Will Show Nothing Warranting the Recognition of the Insurgents."[589]

Congress in this time period emerged in the news content as a source that undermined the frame emphasizing the perils of recognition, as several legislators were pushing for resolutions recognizing belligerency or independence in Cuba. The *Herald* at this juncture departed from the more chronologically-based coverage of the Senate debate seen in a paper like the *Times*, and produced more administration-friendly news content. The *Herald* conveyed the resolutions seeking recognition of Cuban belligerency or imposing a deadline on Spain to end hostilities to readers by emphasizing their futility, with one headline reading, "Senate Jingo Outbreak Vain…Hot Speeches Made in Senate, but They Will Have No Result."[590] The paper's coverage focused far more on the administration's perspective, expressed by Senator Eugene Hale of Maine in debate, and omitted much of the pro-intervention rhetoric of the senators that appeared in the other outlets.

Coverage of the "Wait to Go to War" Frame

The *Times*, *Sun*, and *Chicago Tribune* all depicted the McKinley administration as actively involved in trying to restrain Congress from pushing the nation toward military intervention.[591] A *Times* editorial actually identified this as a role the president typically played: "usually the Executive will find means to head off the hotheads in Congress and

[589] "Congress to Know All About Cuba. Resolutions by Senate and House Call for Information and Consular Correspondence. President Will Accede. State Department's Report Will Show Nothing Warranting the Recognition of the Insurgents. Reports About Lee Denied. Senator Allen's Belligerency Resolution Adversely Reported by a Committee," *The New York Herald*, February 15, 1898.
[590] "Senate Jingo Outbreak Vain. The Cuban Resolutions of Senators Cannon and Mason Are Practically Dead. Are Now in Committee. Hot Speeches Made in the Senate, But They Will Have No Result. Senator Mason Dramatic. Attacked the President Not For What He Has Done, but for What He Has Not Done," *The New York Herald*, February 10, 1898.
[591] "The News in Washington. The Minister Could Not Be Found Easily Last Night," *The New York Times*, February 9, 1898.

follow out its own policy in foreign affairs, and this is necessary to peace, order, and good neighborhood."[592] This subject matter was also linked in some articles and editorials toward more personal, psychologically-oriented coverage of the president. As a *Herald* editorial put it, McKinley was too cool and sensible to allow "jingoes" to push him into some rash action.[593] Even a more hostile paper like the *Chicago Tribune* described McKinley in the face of the de Lome scandal as cool, quiet, and dignified.[594] Consensus on McKinley's traits of being cool and calm in the mainstream media worked to bolster the credibility of his "wait" frame. There were potentially far more negative, alternative characterizations that might have been applied to the president – Hearst's *Journal* frequently published cartoons showing McKinley as weak and hapless and Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt was known to call him spineless and "a jellyfish" in private company.[595]

The *New York Tribune* and the *Herald*, in both straight news content and editorials, were openly derisive of "jingoes" in the country and the Congress, particularly of their efforts to use the de Lome incident to push for war. A *New York Tribune* editorial chastised such groups in the wake of the *Maine*'s destruction, maintaining, "This tragic incident reveals most strikingly the horrors that reside in war, and rebukes far more than any words could do the wickedness of those who would lightly break the peace of nations."[596] De Lome's criticisms of McKinley, according to a *Herald* article, "will be

[592] "The Facts As To Cuba," Editorial, *The New York Times*, February 15, 1898.
[593] "No Occasion for Friction Between Spain and the United States," Editorial, *The New York Herald*, February 11, 1898.
[594] "It May Mean War. De Lome's Letter Causes a Crisis Between the United States and Spain. Apology is Demanded. Recall of the Offending Minister Is Required By This Government. Resignation Not Enough. Woodford May Leave Madrid if Satisfaction for the Insult Is Refused. Patriotic Feeling Is Aroused," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11, 1898.
[595] Thomas, 225.
[596] "A National Calamity," Editorial, *The New York Tribune*, February 17, 1898.

made the most of by the Cuban jingoes in Congress."[597] Attaching immediate calls for war to this particular group strengthened McKinley's call to hold off on military action.

A major problem for the White House and the "wait" frame stemmed from the de Lome letter, however. The diplomat's intimations that autonomy was a scheme to buy more time for Spain to try and forcibly pacify Cuba directly undercut McKinley's assertion the Spanish government should be given a fair chance to prove it was changing its Cuba policy. Several of the papers portrayed the president as having been fooled by Spain into delaying military intervention and that de Lome's letter proved Spanish duplicity. A *Sun* editorial recounted that the president's inclination to delay was dependent on Spain's sincerity and good will, which the de Lome letter had shown to be utterly false.[598] The *Chicago Tribune* echoed this sentiment, and added that forthcoming official reports would show Spain had made absolutely no progress in its Cuban policy.[599] The paper also cited an anonymous administration official arguing the *Maine* incident showed the folly of the White House's Cuba policy, that even as the administration delayed Spain was simply gaining in power and military advantage.[600] The *Times* noted a lack of specificity in McKinley's framing, asking in an editorial, "Is it not time to fix a date?"[601]

Prominent members of Congress also undercut the president's narrative that the Spanish government should be given a fair chance to show progress on improving its Cuban policy by introducing resolutions in mid-February requesting information from the

[597] "Minister De Lome Absolutely Refuses to Discuss the Letter," *The New York Herald*, February 9, 1898.
[598] "De Lome's Service to Cuba," Editorial, *The New York Sun*, February 15, 1898.
[599] "De Lome Must Go. He Admits the Authorship of the Offensive Letter. State Department Acts. Woodford Ordered to Demand His Immediate Recall. Passports May Be Issued. President McKinley is Not Visibly Disturbed. Intense Feeling in Washington," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 10, 1898.
[600] "Danger Results From Delay. High Government Official Criticises the Inactivity of the Administration in Spanish Affairs," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 17, 1898.
[601] "How Much Longer?" Editorial, *The New York Times*, February 12, 1898.

White House with specifics on whether Spain was still pursuing reconcentration tactics. Senator Frank J. Cannon of Utah explicitly challenged the president's "wait" frame, orating on the floor of the Senate, "What is it that stays the hand of McKinley? We have waited long, but our waiting has been in vain and our cup of waiting is now full."[602]

A Second Time Period: Moving Ever Closer To War

By late March 1898, it was becoming more difficult for President McKinley to hold off military intervention. As the official *Maine* investigation report[603] was sent to Congress, many Republicans in the House of Representatives were threatening to buck party leadership and join Democrats in voting for war.[604] McKinley elaborated on his last-resort frame at this juncture, telling legislators he had given Spain an ultimatum, requiring the country to accept an armistice in Cuba, followed by negotiations he volunteered to oversee that would culminate in Cuban independence.[605] Days later, Spain's official response showed that it was not willing to fully comply with McKinley's conditions, specifically not mentioning independence in its communication.[606] Two days before the president was to give his Cuba message to Congress, the Spanish government authorized the suspension of hostilities, but again did not mention leaving the island or

[602] "Cuban Day in the Senate. Cannon of Utah and Mason of Illinois Plead the Cause of the Insurgents. Want Action By This Country," *The New York Times*, February 10, 1898.
[603] The report determined that the explosion had been brought about by an underwater mine, without assigning specific responsibility to Spain or any other actor. Decades later, a Navy investigation contended that it was more probable that a coal fire occurred on the ship causing an internal explosion, in line with McKinley's accident theory (Thomas, 221-222).
[604] Offner, 150.
[605] Gould, 42.
[606] Offner,156-157.

independence. This announcement did not substantially alter the content of the president's address, except to note that Spain had now granted an armistice.[607]

The president's message echoed the frames of his December address, except for the "wait" narrative, which now shifted to a frame asking for congressional authorization for military intervention.[608] However, the president had not submitted a clear war message to Congress: the door was left open to further negotiations with Spain, and McKinley requested a significant amount of discretionary power that might allow for the use of force short of full-scale war.[609] McKinley consistently stressed that it would be unwise for the U.S. to recognize Cuban independence, and this frame stood to encounter the most opposition and generate the most debate in Congress. The House and Senate did pass joint resolutions authorizing military intervention following the message, but the Senate's version initially recognized Cuban independence. This provision was eventually eliminated in conference committee after considerable wrangling amongst pro- and anti-recognition forces.[610] But it represented a weighty countervailing force to the president's perspective on the proper way to embark on a military conflict. After President McKinley ordered a naval blockade of Cuba on April 22nd and requested that Congress declare war, the legislature passed a resolution citing war as having existed between the two nations since April 21st.

While it was a foregone conclusion majorities in Congress would support military action at this juncture, whether the legislative branch would do so on the president's terms was far more unsure. This made McKinley's frames and their treatment in the press

[607] Offner, 177.
[608] Ibid, 181.
[609] Gould, 49.
[610] Offner, 188.

especially significant in this second time period. I analyzed articles from all four New York-based newspapers and the *Chicago Tribune* to see how the president's frames fared over the week of his message to Congress, from April 10th to April 16th of 1898.

General Reaction to the Message: An Unenthusiastic Reception

For a presidential message issued in a moment of foreign policy crisis, the news coverage of the general response to McKinley's words was quite negative. The *Times* called Congress "angry" and "disappointed" with the message,[611] and quoted representatives deeming it "illogical," "anemic," and "weak."[612] The *Herald* also reported the legislature's disappointment and cited even supporters of the president who said he "missed the opportunity of his life." To Congress' "disappointment", the *Sun* added that the legislature was "indignant" at the message.[613] The *Chicago Tribune* identified the message as producing "bitterness" in Congress.[614] Some articles noted praise from various groups or individuals for McKinley's message, and the *New York Tribune* led their story on Congress' reaction with a focus on praise amongst conservative legislators.[615] Overall, however, the dominant characterization of the reaction was highly critical.

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[611] "An Angry Congress. The President's Cuban Message Disappointing to Those Who Want Cuba Freed. Severely Criticised in House and Senate. No Intention Manifest to Stop With the Recommendations It Contains. Likely to be a Declaration for Immediate Armed Intervention and Independence," *The New York Times*, April 12, 1898.

[612] "Comment on the Message. Many Members of the Senate and House Condemn the President's Position Regarding Cuba. Republicans Give Approval. Senator Foraker Has Not Patience with It – Cullom Thinks the Senate May Go Further than the President Recommends," *The New York Times*, April 12, 1898.

[613] "Congress is Stirred Up. Disappointed and Indignant Over the Message," *The New York Sun*, April 12, 1898.

[614] "Feeling is Varied. Members of Congress Discuss McKinley's Message. Plea for More Delay. Bitterness Is Expressed in Many of the Interviews. Called a Weak Document," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 12, 1898.

[615] "Comment in Congress. Conservatives Regard the Message as Admirable. Disappointment Expressed By Those Who Advocate Recognition of Cuba's Independence – Views of Leaders in Senate and House," *The New York Tribune*, April 12, 1898. The paper also tried to temper the criticism of the message by noting in several articles that when the public and members of Congress had taken some time to really

Further, as a communication designed to persuade various audiences of the wisdom of the president's policies, the message actually appeared to have opposite effect, a point seized on by the media outlets. Prior to the receipt of the message, many papers predicted that Congress would move quickly to adopt the president's proposed course of action. But after the message was given, the *New York Tribune* cited Republican senators saying the message actually lost them ground in pursuing the president's goals with their colleagues.[616] The *Sun* reported that McKinley's words created a push for the opposite of what he wanted: immediate intervention and recognition.[617]

Coverage of "Don't Recognize"

Several outlets speculated before the message was delivered that Congress would end up backing the president's view that formal recognition of the Cuban government should not occur. The *Times* speculated "it is not thought now that it will meet with serious opposition in either house of Congress."[618] A *Times* editorial also backed the president, advising against recognition that might subject the U.S. to onerous financial liabilities and as out of step with traditional American policies.[619] The *New York Tribune* identified as a virtue of the message that it was steeped in sound precedent, a note of

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study the message, they came away from it far more satisfied and impressed by its content (See: "Listening to the Message. Great Crowds Present in Both Branches of Congress. The Reading Followed With the Deepest Attention – Referred to Committee in House and Senate – Advocates for Independence of Cuba Disappointed," *The New York Tribune*, April 12, 1898 and "Harmony in the House. Indication That the Republicans Will Act as a Unit. A Report From the Committee on Foreign Affairs Expected To-day – A Resolution Directing Intervention in Cuba Drawn Up," *The New York Tribune*, April 13, 1898).

[616] "Many Plans for Congress. Foreign Affairs Committees Discuss the Message. No Approach to an Agreement in Either House – Senators Waiting to Hear Lee – The President's Policy Apparently Loses Support," *The New York Tribune*, April 12, 1898.

[617] "Congress is Stirred Up. Disappointed and Indignant Over the Message," *The New York Sun*, April 12, 1898.

[618] "The President Firm. His Message on the Question of Cuba to be Transmitted to Congress To-morrow. The Two Houses to Act the Next Day. Spain's Proclamation of an Armistice to Make No Difference in the Action of This Government. The Fact Recognized that Nothing Short of Independence Will Be Accepted by the Cubans," *The New York Times*, April 10, 1898.

[619] "Recognition May Be Deferred," Editorial, *The New York Times*, April 10, 1898.

support for McKinley's citation of past presidents to augment his stance.[620] Meanwhile, the *Chicago Tribune* in an editorial asserted that McKinley's Jackson example on Texas and independence did not, under closer scrutiny, support his claims.[621] A *Sun* editorial argued that neutral intervention on the part of the United States without recognition would be neither possible nor desirable.[622]

Many of the papers covered the views of the insurgents on the question, including a lengthy treatise by their diplomatic representative outlining the structure of the government and emphasizing the extent of its civil authority in Cuba.[623] These contentions contradicted the administration's assertions that the insurgent government was not transparent or robust enough to be recognized. Some sources in the press also contended that McKinley's lack of support for recognition and failure to mention independence while calling for a "stable" government for Cuba in his message were evidence that he actually planned military intervention on behalf of Spain, to help pacify the insurgents and possibly force a policy of autonomy on Cuba.[624] Proponents of this

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[620] "The President's Message," Editorial, *The New York Tribune*, April 12, 1898.
[621] "The Jackson Precedent," Editorial, *The Chicago Tribune*, April 13, 1898.
[622] "Neutral Intervention Impossible," Editorial, *The New York Sun*, April 13, 1898.
[623] "The Cubans' Government. Senor Quesada Says the Insurgents Have a Complete and Well-Organized Republic. Civil Authority Supreme. Governed by Duly Elected Officials Who Exercise Their Authority Under Carefully Prepared Constitution and Statutes," *The New York Times*, April 11, 1898; "The Republic of Cuba. Its Civil Government, Its Laws and Its Officers," *The New York Sun*, April 12, 1898; "Quesada's Plea for Recognition. Asserts that the Cuban Insurgents Have a Regularly Organized and Active Government. Civil Power Paramount. Formed in 1895 and Exercising Its Functions Over Three-Fourths of the Island. Taxes Laid and Collected. Declaration That It Has Established and Maintains Commerce, Post Offices and Public Schools," *The New York Herald*, April 11, 1898; and "Civil Power in Cuba. Quesada Tells of the Government of the Island. Constitution and Law. Regularly Established Authority in All Provinces. Republic Exists in Fact. Two Elections Since the Beginning of the War. Proof in Spanish Dispatches," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 11, 1898.
[624] "Congress Ready to Give the Word. Second Reading of the President's Message Gives New Light to Senators and Though Representatives Are Wrangling Authority to Use the Land and Naval Forces at Once Will Be Given. M'Kinley's Policy is Finding More Favor Now. Men of Peace in the Senate Are Talking of a Long Fight to Ward Off War, but Public Sentiment is Having an Effect and May Force Quick Action. Leaders Are Working Strenuously to Make Harmony," *The New York Herald*, April 13, 1898 and "Bailey's Attack on the Message. Democratic Leader Harshly Criticises President McKinley's Words About Cuba's Government as Making the Meaning a Subject fir Controversy. While Members of His Party Applaud

view included Cuban exiles in the United States and members of Congress. Additionally, whereas in the Bush and Iraq case news outlets were likely to cover the president's harshest critics by simultaneously noting they would probably have little impact on the overall policy and debate, here the papers often gave no indication these might be more marginal, extreme perspectives. Yet this also may indicate framing failures by McKinley, constructing his narrative vaguely enough to allow his opponents to promulgate their alternative and damaging interpretations of his words.[625]

Papers varied in their promotion of the House and Senate resolutions on Cuba following the message, with the former resolution being far closer to McKinley's preferences. The *New York Tribune* in both its news and editorial content backed the House version as more "direct, explicit, and comprehensive."[626] By contrast, the *Sun* advocated the Senate over the House version.[627] The *Chicago Tribune* also favored the Senate version, but was more concerned with the body acting quickly, accusing senators

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Him," *The New York Herald*, April 13, 1898. This was also an opinion propagated by the yellow press – a *New York Journal* editorial relayed to its readers that "the really shocking thing in the message is its scarcely veiled intimation that our intervention in Cuba, when it comes, may be in behalf of the Spaniards, for the suppression of Cuban liberty" ("Editorial Opinions. Views of the President's Message to Congress Expressed by the Herald's Contemporaries in Their Issues This Morning," *The New York Herald*, April 12, 1898).

[625] The message was apparently unclear enough on this point to cause Representative Charles H. Grosvenor, Republican of Ohio, to take to the floor of the House the day after the message was delivered to say that the president did, indeed, support independence and republican government for Cuba. When a Democratic colleague challenged Grosvenor and asked regarding the president's message, "Does he say republican government?" the Ohio congressman retorted, "No, he does not say that but he supposed that you knew something about the history of this country," to Republican applause. Grosvenor was viewed as close to the president and a legitimate source of White House views ("Independence for Cuba. General Grosvenor Says That is What the President Means. The Army and Navy Not to Be Used to Coerce the Cubans – Mr. Lentz's Attack on the President Draws Out Two Scathing Replies," *The New York Tribune*, April 13, 1898).

[626] "Conservatives Gaining. Support for the President. The Senate May Adopt the House Cuban Resolution. Importance of Harmony Between Congress and the Administration Impressed Upon Leading Democratic Senators By President M'Kinley – Prospects of Conservative Action Increased By Delay," *The New York Tribune*, April 15, 1898.

[627] "Two Forms of a Notice to Quit," Editorial, *The New York Sun*, April 14, 1898.

who wanted to continue debating of "contributing to the starvation of thousands of poor Cubans for the sole purpose of exploiting their own views on the subject."[628]

Leaving the Door Open to Peace or Embarking on War?

All of the newspapers had extensive coverage on the war preparations of both the U.S. and Spain over the week, adding to the sense of inevitability of a military conflict. Spain's declaration of an armistice, while viewed by Madrid newspapers as a major step toward peace, was portrayed in most of these U.S. newspapers as either meaningless or a deceptive trick. The latter interpretation followed the assertions of some congressional members that the armistice was a "scheme" designed to merely buy time for Spain to build up its military forces for war.[629] The *Chicago Tribune* took this a step further, asserting that the president and his representative in Spain, General Stewart Woodford, were complicit in the plot, with the aim of getting the Cubans to accept home rule while the administration pretended it was the road to independence.[630] The paper asserted this White House deception was aimed at not just Cuba but also the American people and

[628] "The Two Intervention Resolutions," Editorial, *The Chicago Tribune*, April 15, 1898 and "Expect Vote Today. Friends of Cuba Believe the End of Debate is Within Sight. Delay in the Senate. Dilatory Tactics Likely to Provoke Still More Radical Action. Does Not Look for a Veto," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 15, 1898.

[629] "The Position of Congress. Tendency Shown to Emphasize the Maine Disaster as a Cause of War with Spain," *The New York Times*, April 11, 1898; "Armistice Regarded as Spanish Trick. Members of the Cabinet, Senators and Representatives Generally Consider It as Merely Another Attempt on Spain's Part to Gain Further Time in Dealing With the United States. McKinley's Message Will Go to Congress on Monday. Senator Hanna, After Talking With the President, Asserted He Did Not Believe Spain's Proposition Would Be Satisfactory to the Administration, and Senator Foraker Says Congress Will Authorize Intervention. The Maine Explosion Cannot be Sidetracked," *The New York Herald*, April 10, 1898; and "Spain's New Scheme. Blanco Authorized to Suspend Hostilities. Anything to Gain Time. The Captain-General is to Prepare a Way for Peace. The Powers Advised It. Of Course, Spain May Defend Herself if the Patriots Fight On," *The New York Sun*, April 11, 1898.

[630] "Goes in Sure Today. McKinley to Send His Message to Congress with a Brief Addendum. Wants to Urge Delay. Merely Recites the Fact That Spain Has Granted an Armistice. Plans of Peace Party. Authorize President to Establish Any Government in Cuba He Wishes. Five Hour Session of Cabinet," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 11, 1898.

Congress.[631] The *Herald* continued the less enthusiastic position on war it had assumed in February, through editorials urging McKinley to continue trying to exhaust peaceful options[632] and news articles that covered the congressional debates through an emphasis on peace-advocating conservatives, their strategies, and whether they would have an impact.[633]

Although McKinley had shifted his "wait" frame to one asking for authorization to use force, his previous entreaties became a liability for him. The president was frequently assumed in the coverage to be unlikely to actually use force any time soon even if Congress were to grant him that authority, as he "cannot be expected to break away promptly from the path of diplomacy along which Spain has been leading him."[634] As so much of the content of McKinley's December and April messages remained the same, observers could perhaps be forgiven for assuming the president would continue to delay military action, despite the slight alteration in his narratives. All of the news

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[631] "Armistice is Only a Trick. Spain and General Woodford Are Denounced for Deceiving the People of the United States as to the Cuban Program. Effort to Bring in the European Powers. Madrid Officials Are Working to Have the Monarchical Governments Take Their Stand Against the Monroe Doctrine. Significance of War Minister Correa's Statement. Delay of the American Administration is Only Serving to Make Hostilities More Prolonged and Disastrous When They Finally Come. Purpose of Spaniards to Induce the Insurgents to Surrender," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 13, 1898.

[632] "In the Presence of War," Editorial, *The New York Herald*, April 11, 1898; "An Easter Flush of Peace," Editorial, *The New York Herald*, April 12, 1898; and "Let Us Welcome Debate," Editorial, *The New York Herald*, April 14, 1898.

[633] "Friends of Peace Are Rallying. As the Crises Arrives There are Wise Heads Which Are Counting the Cost and Calling for a Halt. But No Cessation of War Preparations. Cabinet Councils Held By Day and Night, and Anxiety on the Brows of the Leaders. Woman's Pleading Voice. Shall Chivalrous America Take the Throne From the Only Son of a Widowed Queen? What Has America Gained? She Has Made a Jump Toward a Navy and Has Taken Her Place Among the Naval Powers," *The New York Herald*, April 11, 1898; "Delay May Help the Cause of Peace. While the American Congress is Quarrelling About Its Policy, To Be Formulated After the President's Message is Reported, Spain Will Have Ample Time for Negotiating With the Cubans. Ministers of Both Nations at Their Posts," *The New York Herald*, April 12, 1898; and "No Word of Peace in Senators' Talk. Politics, With Bryan Arguing with Democrats and the President's Supporters Working Against Recognition of Cuban Independence, Delays the Declaration of War in the Upper House. Speeches Are Due, But the End is Now in Sight," *The New York Herald*, April 15, 1898.

[634] "Condemning the Message. Disappointment With the President's Recommendations Is Not Allayed," *The New York Times*, April 13, 1898.

content on Spain's military build-up also cast President McKinley's "wait" frame in a retrospectively negative light – as the *Sun* put it, "while the Administration was working for delay," Spain was putting itself in a more advantageous position for war.[635]

The Maine Incident

By April, depictions of the *Maine* incident had changed dramatically from February. All of the outlets portrayed the ship's destruction as the fault of Spain, even those papers that had privileged the accident theory just a few months before. Several credible sources for the papers corroborated and contributed to this view. Consul-General Lee, who left Havana and reported on conditions in Cuba to the president and Congress during this week, said he firmly believed the explosion was the work of Spanish agents, though perhaps unbeknownst to officials at the very top. A Senate Foreign Relations Committee report also contended the explosion was either "an official act or due to criminal negligence" on the part of Spain.[636] Even prior to these perspectives being made public however, the press reported Spain as responsible for the *Maine* as a consensus viewpoint. Scholars recently have identified an "official domination" of the news on foreign policy issues (Bennett 2005), allowing government officials like the president a fairly free hand in constructing their version of events in the press. Yet it does not seem that the McKinley administration was afforded that privilege on the *Maine*. Spanish sources refuting this version of events were reported in the papers, but clearly would not be regarded as authoritative and trustworthy, particularly given the widespread portrayal of Spain's leadership and public as treacherous and deceptive in the press generally.

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[635] "Spain is Not Delaying. She Sends a Large Force of Troops to the Canaries," *The New York Sun*, April 12, 1898.

[636] "Cuban Report in Senate. Arguments of the Foreign Relations Committee in Support of Its Resolutions. Ground for Action Reviewed. Blowing Up of the Maine Linked with a Series of Precedent Transactions Which Cannot Be Disconnected From It," *The New York Times*, April 14, 1898.

Many of the papers reported a quote from a Spanish ambassador saying the *Maine* was lost due to the "ignorance or carelessness" of her crew,[637] certainly diminishing the credibility of Spanish officials on the topic for their readers.

Additionally, the *Maine* was often referred to as the primary reason to engage in war with Spain. This was entirely out of step with McKinley's interpretation of events – reference to the incident took up a mere eleven sentences of his lengthy April message on Cuba, and he did not lead the message with it. The *Times* declared the *Maine* to be "the gravest point in the controversy."[638] The *New York Tribune* identified the incident as the main justification for war.[639] The *Herald* conveyed to its readers that Washington viewed the Spanish armistice as insignificant because it "utterly disregards the destruction of the *Maine*."[640] Reporting on the state of affairs in Washington the *Sun* contended, "The '*Maine* incident' is surely growing in proportions here, and that is why negotiations about Cuba must at last fail."[641] Correspondents of the papers also sought the views of naval officers and military men, many of who emphatically expressed a desire for war based on gaining revenge and retribution for the *Maine* disaster.[642] The *Chicago Tribune*'s coverage provided indications of umbrage amongst some members of Congress that the president had not made the *Maine* figure more prominently in his statement. According to

[637] "Pope's Effort at Washington. His Influence Being Used to Have President McKInley's Message to Congress Delayed," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 10, 1898.
[638] "The Message Completed. Carefully Examined by the Cabinet and Made Ready for Presentation to Congress To-day," *The New York Times*, April 11, 1898.
[639] "Remember the Maine," Editorial, *The New York Tribune*, April 11, 1898.
[640] "Spain Has Laid Down Her Terms. Will Grant an Armistice, as the Herald Told Exclusively, but Cubans Assert That They Will Not Cease Hostilities. Consul General Lee Has Quit Havana," *The New York Herald*, April 10, 1898.
[641] "The Maine Incident. Senate Foreign Relations Committee to Hear Gen. Lee," *The New York Sun*, April 10, 1898.
[642] "The Navy Impatient. Anxious to Have Revenge for the Destruction of the Maine. Officers and Men Generally Hold Spain Responsible for the Slaughter of Their Comrades – Military and Naval War Preparations," *The New York Tribune*, April 12, 1898 and "Emergency Order to Fleet. Officers and Men Aboard Ship Eagerly Discuss the Probable Influence of the Message," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 12, 1898.

the paper, many war advocates felt that military action was justified based on the *Maine*, "which the president continues to treat as a minor incident."[643] In an editorial, the Chicago outlet also contended "the people would prefer war on account of the *Maine* rather than on account of Cuba."[644]

Personalized Coverage in the National Security Crisis Context

Unlike in the Iraq War case, where the personal qualities of President Bush were rarely linked to his efforts to pursue military action, President McKinley's character traits were frequently cited in the press as driving his strategies. In these cases of crises involving moves toward military intervention, it appears news content was more likely to show a personalization bias in the 19th century than the 21st century, despite modern trends toward more psychologically-oriented coverage noted in the introduction. The *Times* asserted that in the face of Spain's concession of an armistice, McKinley had "not swerved a hairsbreath," which the paper linked to his firm and resolute qualities.[645] A *New York Tribune* editorial identified him as strong, consistent, logical, and steadfast in his dealings with Spain and on the nation's Cuba policy.[646]

President McKinley's personal traits were also linked to criticisms of his positions. Representative Jerry Simpson, Populist of Kansas, declared: "The message is a

[643] "Congress is Left in Doubt. Members of Both Sides of the Capitol Express Their Disappointment at the Lack of Vigor Shown in McKinley's Message. President's Policy Not Yet Made Clear. Many Cannot Understand Why the Chief Executive Asks Authority to Intervene, but Carefully Avoids Reference to Independence. Both Foreign Affairs Committees Hard at Work. Now Seems Likely that by Wednesday Identical Resolutions Will Be Presented to Both the Senate and the House of Representatives," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 12, 1898.
[644] "Declare War for the Maine," Editorial, *The Chicago Tribune*, April 12, 1898.
[645] "The Message Completed. Carefully Examined by the Cabinet and Made Ready for Presentation to Congress To-day," *The New York Times*, April 11, 1898.
[646] "A Consistent Policy," Editorial, *The New York Tribune*, April 10, 1898.

reflection of the man, weak and vacillating."[647] Several of the president's detractors claimed the president had been inconsistent and wavering on Cuba, in a kind of early incarnation of the "flip flopper" charge that would plague more recent politicians. As was the case with Grant and the Whiskey Ring scandal, a common and indirect way to belittle the president was to accuse him of being subject to unsavory influences. References to a "McKinley-Hanna Administration" were made by the president's detractors to mock the president's close relationship with Ohio Senator Mark Hanna, known to be a war opponent.[648] An editorial in the *Sun* depicted McKinley as unfortunately greatly influenced by advisers who were without sympathy for Cuba and saw the *Maine* as "merely a regrettable subject for diplomatic negotiation."[649] Even friendlier papers like the *New York Tribune* excerpted long congressional speeches charging McKinley was susceptible to "very wicked partners" from the business world looking to profit off of Cuba.[650] This chronological-style of journalism, with newspapers recounting and extensively quoting congressional debates, was also apparent in the Grant case, where even in pro-Grant outlets the coverage of his private secretary's trial for involvement in the Whiskey Ring scandal included lengthy statements by the prosecution.

[647] "Comment on the Message. Many Members of the Senate and House Condemn the President's Position Regarding Cuba. Republicans Give Approval. Senator Foraker Has Not Patience with It – Cullom Thinks the Senate May Go Further than the President Recommends," *The New York Times*, April 12, 1898.
[648] "Message Causes Surprise. Feeling in Congress that the President Has Clouded the Situation Rather than Cleared It," *The New York Times*, April 12, 1898.
[649] "The Hour," Editorial, *The New York Sun*, April 12, 1898.
[650] "Senate Agrees to Vote. Cuban Debate Nearly Over. An Agreement for Final Action in the Present Legislative Day. That, However, May Extend Into Sunday – The Cuban Question and War With Spain Discussed for More Than 12 Hours – Eloquent Defence of the President by Senators Wolcott and Spooner," *The New York Tribune*, April 16, 1898.

Partisanship and Presidential Power

As in the Bush case, it is difficult to discount the impact of the actions of the political parties in explaining some of the president's failures and successes in the lead-up to the Spanish-American War. However, where in the instance of the Iraq War there was a significant level of bipartisan backing for the president's frames, the Republican Party was not cohesive on and supportive of some of McKinley's key narratives on the Cuban question. Many of those most harshly critical of the president's desire to delay military intervention and who opposed McKinley on the issue of recognition were deemed by the *Sun* to be Republican "insurgents," in a play on the issues in Cuba. Additionally, the president's stance was sometimes depicted as a departure from his party's position. The *Chicago Tribune*, for instance, quoted Republican congressmen arguing McKinley had lost sight of the platform. Representative William Lorimer of Chicago said, "I shall feel compelled to stand by the Republican platform instead of the President's policy, or rather, lack of policy."[651]

Meanwhile, the Democratic Party in Congress was fairly unified in ridiculing the administration's Cuba policy and several pro-war representatives even refused to vote for an intervention resolution that did not include recognition. However, some newspapers noted that the Democrats' motivations stemmed mostly from wanting to "embarrass and hamper" the White House, perhaps damaging their image with the public.[652] Similarly to

[651] "Feeling is Varied. Members of Congress Discuss McKinley's Message. Plea for More Delay. Bitterness Is Expressed in Many of the Interviews. Called a Weak Document," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 12, 1898. The paper also perhaps sought to remind the president of the Republican platform's call for restoring peace and giving independence to Cuba by publishing this excerpt from the document in every day's edition analyzed here.

[652] "Spain Grasps at Straws. Too Late for an Armistice. Partial Eleventh-Hour Concessions Not Likely to Avert War. Neither the United States Nor the Insurgents Would Consent to a Mere Temporary Truce in Cuba – Harmony Between the President and Congress Practically Assured," *The New York Tribune*, April 10, 1898.

modern media coverage, partisan conflict was a theme in news content, even in the national security context.

This case also falls in what appears to be a transition period for the American presidency. On the one hand, many members of Congress stated that they would not leave it to McKinley's discretion to decide when to use force against Spain as this was properly a power of the legislature and not the executive.[653] Yet this constrained view of the war powers of the president was juxtaposed by content in the press that urged McKinley to take a stronger leadership role on such issues. The *Times*, noting all the uproar in congressional debates, argued it was "certain to invite harsh criticism of the Congress, and the suggestion that it was unfortunate to transfer the direction of the controversy from the President to the legislative branch."[654] The *Sun* more derisively defined his actions as having "resigned his leadership" to Congress.[655] The *New York Tribune* contended that the conflict over recognition was misplaced because this was a fundamental power of the executive and Congress "clearly seeks to invade his constitutional rights and prerogatives."[656] Some outlets, though, expressed praise the president was not trying to be more of a popular leader. The *Herald* lauded the president for resisting the urge to say merely what was popular, and cited supporters who "point

[653] "Comment in Congress. Conservatives Regard the Message as Admirable. Disappointment Expressed By Those Who Advocate Recognition of Cuba's Independence – Views of Leaders in Senate and House," *The New York Tribune*, April 12, 1898.
[654] "House for Intervention. Majority Resolutions Passed After a Fierce Tumult Between Republicans and Democrats. 322 For and 19 Against. Mr. Brumm Gives Mr. Bartlett the Lie and a Personal Encounter on the Floor is Narrowly Averted – Report Coldly Receieved," *The New York Times*, April 14, 1898.
[655] "Congress," Editorial, *The New York Sun*, April 12, 1898.
[656] "Fight Over Recognition. The Contest in the Senate. Indications Now That the Radicals Will Win. Defections From the Republican Camp May Turn the Scale in Favor of Recognizing the Cuban Republic – Rumors That the Powers Will Intervene Unfounded – Significant Orders to the Army," *The New York Tribune*, April 16, 1898.

out that the President was writing for history, and not for the galleries or for temporary applause."[657]

So it appears that should McKinley have sought to exercise a more robust popular rhetorical leadership in this instance, it would have been accepted if not welcomed by some observers of the time. Instead, Congress' significant role in the decision to engage in military intervention, clearly stated by McKinley at the conclusion of his April message, might have made the press more likely to emphasize legislators' views and prevent the president from being more prominent in the news. According to Entman (2004), journalists seek to help their audience predict what will happen in the future, so they focus their coverage on those with the greatest ability to affect events.[658] This also appeared to hold true in the partisan news era.

Conclusion: Framing Challenges, Some Distinctive, Others Common

Some observers argue that the Spanish-American War would not have taken place without the presence of activist, rabidly pro-war press figures like William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, because of the attention they brought to the problems in Cuba and the emotional, sensational public sentiment surrounding the issue they helped to create. Even conservative, anti-"jingo" newspapers were compelled to give a significant amount of coverage to Cuba in the effort to compete for circulation.[659] In the contemporary media landscape, communications scholars have identified a so-called

[657] "Praise and Blame for the Message. Senators and Representatives of Both Parties Think It Should Have Been More Vigorous in Tone While Business Men Here Regard the President's Utterances Favorably. Some Think It Means Peace and Others Look for War. Members of Congress Disposed to Go Slowly, and Republican Leaders Will Make Earnest Efforts to Hold Their Party Lines Intact Behind the Chief Executive. Many Disappointed in the Reference to the Maine," *The New York Herald*, April 12, 1898.
[658] Entman, 88.
[659] Wisan, 458.

"CNN effect" where the instant and continuous broadcasting of graphic and disturbing images (such as starving children) in various parts of the world may cause public outcry and force foreign policymakers to act (Hess and Kalb 2003). The technology of 24-hour news networks may be new but the phenomenon is not – the coverage of the Cuban conflict was not predominantly visual, but it was emotional and demanded the attention of the American people and the U.S. government. President McKinley may have framed the Cuban question as a humanitarian crisis, but he did not have to worry about convincing the public or his fellow politicians that this was an accurate depiction. Sensational tales of abuses and atrocities against the Cuban people were a regular feature of news content of the period.

McKinley faced a difficulty that often plagues presidential communications in national security crises: there are several different audiences for the president's messages, and the chief executive may want to convey contradictory things to different actors (Hallin 1986). To his American audience, many of whom were in favor of military intervention, the president wanted to indicate his willingness to use force. To Spain and interested European nations, he likely desired to leave the door open to diplomacy at least a crack. This would help explain why the president was loath to explicitly support independence for Cuba, knowing this would be a deal breaker for Spain. Unfortunately for McKinley, the result here was a statement in April that really satisfied no one -- for all of the members of Congress who felt McKinley's message was simply not vigorous enough, many European nations actually found it too warlike.[660] The president's

[660] "Berlin Disapproves the Message," *The New York Times*, April 13, 1898; "Congress is Stirred Up. Disappointed and Indignant Over the Message," *The New York Sun*, April 12, 1898; and "Spain Regards Message as Harsh. Bourse Closed Weak, but Various Cabinet Ministers Are Still Optimistic, and Hope That Peace Will Be Maintained," *The New York Herald*, April 14, 1898. This point was also raised in the

opponents in Congress were able to exploit the ambiguities produced by the dilemma of multiple audiences by accusing the president of favoring continued subjugation of Cuba. Though the presidency and media scholarship might lead us to presume President McKinley would have been able to exploit the circumstances of a national security crisis and a partisan press to privilege his frames, this analysis demonstrates significant challenges to this goal, some distinctive to his time period and others that have perpetually plagued the office. Lacking the resources of the modern presidency, McKinley was less well positioned to overcome some of these difficulties in shaping news coverage of the crisis than many of his predecessors would be.

New York Tribune, as the paper noted that people "appeared to forget or not to realize that such a message…was also and necessarily an argument and appeal addressed to the judgment and sentiment of other civilized nations ("Listening to the Message. Great Crowds Present in Both Branches of Congress. The Reading Followed With the Deepest Attention – Referred to Committee in House and Senate – Advocates for Independence of Cuba Disappointed," *The New York Tribune*, April 12, 1898). To a critical paper like the *Chicago Tribune* though, this was no excuse: the paper published the views of an anonymous esteemed diplomat who proclaimed McKinley's message "lacking in statecraft and dignity" ("View of a Diplomat. Message Analyzed as to the Element of Statecraft. What It Seems to Lack. Annexation a Suggested Consequence of Policy. Egyptian History Cited. Responsibilitis of Military Occupation of Cuba. Recognition as Self-Defense," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 12, 1898).

February Articles Analyzed

"Ask to Hear Mason. Many Requests for Senate Gallery Seats Today, McKinley is Annoyed. Will Arrange for a Reply to Cuban Agitators. Calhoun is Not Yet Safe. Dinners for the President and for Ambassador Pauncefote. Lee Did Not Ask for Warships," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 9, 1898.

"Break By De Lome. Spanish Minister at Washington Writes an Indiscreet Letter to Canalejas. Insults for McKinley. Speaks of the President's "Natural and Inevitable Coarseness." Is A 'Low Politician' Too. Characterized as 'Weak' and Is Accused of 'Catering to the Rabble.' De Lome May Get His Passports," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 9, 1898.

Untitled, Editorial, *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 9, 1898.

"Flings Down the Gauntlet," Editorial, *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 9, 1898.

"How Washington Takes It," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 9, 1898.

"Three Senators For Cuba," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 9, 1898.

"De Lome Must Go. He Admits the Authorship of the Offensive Letter. State Department Acts. Woodford Ordered to Demand His Immediate Recall. Passports May Be Issued. President McKinley is Not Visibly Disturbed. Intense Feeling in Washington," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 10, 1898.

"Field Day for Cuba. Island Troubles Absorb the National Attention. Fire in Mason's House. Daugherty Demands the Peoria Collectorship. Export Trade is Growing. Congressman Warner Thinks Germany Justified in Excluding Fruit. Other Gossip From Washington," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 10, 1898.

"Junta May Have Other Letters," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 10, 1898.

"Loss Exceeds That of Spain. Business-Men United in a Memorial to the President Asking for Peace in Cuba," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 10, 1898.

"Makes a Sensation in London. Papers There Print Voluminous Reports Concerning the De Lome Case," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 10, 1898.

"Mason Flays Spain. Pleads the Cause of the Cubans in the Senate. Gallery Cheers Him On. Quotes 'The Tribune' to Prove His Statements. Asks for Intervention. In Graphic Words Pictures Horrors of the War. Senator Cannon Demands Action," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 10, 1898.

"Sails With Arms for Cuba. Another Filibustering Expedition Is Believed to Have Recently Left the Long Island Coast," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 10, 1898.

"Blanco Returns to Havana. Spanish Authorities Are Worried Over the Landing of the American Yacht Buccaneer," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 10, 1898.

"Anger Felt in Spain. De Lome's Act Causes Astonishment and Displeasure. View of the Premier. International Relations May Not Be Disturbed. Agitation of the Queen," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11, 1898.

"Autonomy a Dead Failure. Blanco Completely Fails in His Bribery Efforts and American Intervention the One Remaining Hope," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11, 1898.

"Drop Their Social Functions. De Lome and Wife Cancel Invitations to a Dinner in Honor of the French Ambassador," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11, 1898.

"Facsimile of Offensive Paragraphs in De Lome's Letter," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11, 1898.
"Greater Chance of Trouble. London Opinion That the De Lome Incident May Increase the Unpleasantness With Spain," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11, 1898.
"It May Mean War. De Lome's Letter Causes a Crisis Between the United States and Spain. Apology is Demanded. Recall of the Offending Minister Is Required By This Government. Resignation Not Enough. Woodford May Leave Madrid if Satisfaction for the Insult Is Refused. Patriotic Feeling Is Aroused," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11, 1898.
"Not An Admirer of De Lome. La Lucha's Estimate of the Retiring Minister – Hints at Further Disclosures," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11, 1898.
"Spain in a Hurry for Ships. Clydebank Shipbuilding Company Receives Pressing Orders to Complete Its Spanish Naval Work," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11, 1898.
"Spaniards Seize a Private Yacht," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11, 1898.
"Spain's Mild Action. Two Cabinet Meetings on the De Lome Incident. Allows Him to Resign. Official Statement of the Ministry's Action. Strong Effort at Secrecy," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11, 1898.
"The De Lome Letter," Editorial, *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11, 1898.
"Will Stop Treaty. De Lome's Letter May Prevent Cuban Reciprocity. Mr. Gage Hears Madden. Congressman Hunter Says Democrats Are Hopeful. Stock Men Win a Point. Republicans Are Handicapped by Civil Service. Other Gossip From Washington," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 11, 1898.
"Brewer's View of It. Federal Justice Surprised at De Lome's Brutal Letter. Praise for Mr. M'Kinley. Lyman J. Gage Talks of the Tariff and Finance. Guests of Marquette Club. Ex-President Harrison to Arrive During the Day. Toasts for Auditorium Feast," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1898.
"Come Out for Cuba. Ohio Republicans Declare for Intervention. Fought By Hanna Men. Factional Differences Crop Out Repeatedly. Gov. Bushnell is Indorsed. Good Words for Foraker, Hanna, and McKinley. Bundy is Chosen for President," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1898.
"De Lome's Bad Break," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1898.
"Does Spain Indorse the Insult?" Editorial, *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1898.
"Eyeing Each Other. Spain and Uncle Sam Seek to Avoid Trouble. Neither Wants a Clash. Sagasta Says He Regrets De Lome's Utterances. He Talks of the Letter. Greatly Surprised That It Was Ever Written. New Minister Not Yet Named," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1898.
"Havana Against De Lome. Press Censures Him Strongly and Declares He Was a Failure as Minister," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1898.
"Sagasta Says He Is Sorry. Insists That De Lome Has Always Referred Respectfully to President McKinley," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1898.
"Letter Did Reach Canalejas. Attorney for the Cubans Says It Was Read and Shown to Others in Havana," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1898.
"Work Pushed on Warships. Clydebank Is Working Double Time on the Spanish Torpedo Destroyers," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1898.

"Woodford Gives a Dinner. Spain's Minister of State is Among the Guests Assembled at the Table," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1898.
"Cushing Joins the *Maine*. Torpedo Boat Arrives at Havana with Supplies for the Battleship," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1898.
"Fails to Bribe Cubans. Jose Acosta, Sent to the United States to Buy the Junta, Returns Unsuccessful," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1898.
"Reward for Lee's Letters," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1898.
"Sagasta Discusses the Letter," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1898.
"Tanner Pleads Cuba's Cause. Issues a Proclamation Asking Aid and Urging That the Insurgents Be Recognized," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1898.
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Chapter 6: President Johnson and the Vietnam War

Like President McKinley and Cuba, Lyndon B. Johnson inherited a major foreign policy problem in Vietnam when he assumed the presidency following John F. Kennedy's assassination in November 1963. Southeast Asia had become a focus of the United States' effort to contain the Communist influences of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China in the developing world. The U.S. had backed a noncommunist government in South Vietnam that existed independently of Communist-led North Vietnam. However, South Vietnam was threatened by both unification efforts on the part of the north and a communist-led insurgency, the Viet Cong.[661]

President Johnson faced a difficult rhetorical task in Vietnam as he sought to justify a limited war in the early period of his presidency, because such scenarios are "deprived of the moral imperative of all-encompassing war efforts" and yet still present "all the rhetorical hazards of a wartime situation – a perceived drain on the nation's resources, the loss of young lives, and policies subject to debate."[662] Thus from when he became president into the summer of 1964, Johnson typically sought to downplay Vietnam as an issue and avoid major public statements on the subject.[663] This changed with the Gulf of Tonkin incident, when a perceived attack on American ships off the coast of Vietnam led Johnson to give a live public address on the events, and to ask Congress for authorization for the use of force in Vietnam if required.

Johnson was a modern president, enjoying the substantial resources and authority of the office, but was also confronted with a news media in transition. Whereas in the

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[661] Gary R. Hess, *Presidential Decisions for War: Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 77.
[662] Kathleen J. Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 4.
[663] Ibid, 74.

post-Watergate era journalists often contrasted official proclamations with the "real story" illuminated by anonymous elite sources, in the 1960's public declarations by the government were still typically conveyed as accurate and truthful depictions of events.[664] Technological change, including the increasing influence of televised news content, also altered the media landscape the president sought to influence. Further, the media literature identifies an escalating journalistic focus on scrutinizing the character and underlying motivations of politicians in this period. While President Johnson would have a presumably greater ability to affect national security crisis coverage compared to his 19th century predecessors, questions remain as to how the president would be able to deal with a rapidly transforming media. Potentially, like President Nixon, he could have great difficulty adapting to changing press norms and directing the resources of the office toward securing more favorable coverage for his frames.

I assessed President Johnson's two major public statements on the Gulf of Tonkin incident immediately after it occurred for his framing of the events, and then I analyzed print news coverage in *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *Newsweek*, and *Time* to see how these frames were treated in mainstream American news content.[665] I found that presidential primacy in framing a national security crisis was clear in Johnson's ability to cast the murky Gulf of Tonkin events in the news as unprovoked aggression requiring retaliation in a way that was seldom questioned and predominantly passed on to readers as unassailable truth. The media also provided very favorable coverage for the president's emphasis on unity and bipartisan support for his actions. Yet simultaneously, many news outlets provided information that countered the president's framing goals,

[664] Hallin, 164.
[665] Unfortunately, televised nightly news could not be included in this chapter because the Vanderbilt Television News Archives only recorded and preserved all such broadcasts from 1968 to the present.

particularly Johnson's assurances the American response would be limited and that the administration sought no wider war. However, much of the content contradicting the president's frames originated from sources unlikely to have the same credibility and authority on the situation in Vietnam that the president enjoyed. The case of Johnson and Vietnam thus illustrates both presidential advantages in framing national security crises and the usage of innovative strategies to influence the newly emerging modern media. At the same time, it shows us some of the difficulties encountered by presidents dealing with a changing and increasingly independent press.

The Gulf of Tonkin Incident and Resolution

Throughout the first half of 1964, the Johnson administration pursued a policy of quiet escalation of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, including bringing the total number of American "advisers" in South Vietnam to 22,000. On August 2nd, 1964, three North Vietnamese patrol boats opened fire upon a U.S. destroyer, the *Maddox*, which had been patrolling off the coast of North Vietnam in the Gulf of Tonkin. In response, the *Maddox* and supplemental American aircraft sunk one of the patrol boats and damaged the other two. The White House then warned North Vietnam of the "grave consequences" of any further military actions against the U.S., and increased the American naval presence in the Gulf of Tonkin by sending a second destroyer, the *C. Turner Joy*.

On the night of August 4th, the *Maddox* reported that it was the victim of another attack and that its radar detected unidentified ships and aircraft. Soon after, the *Maddox* announced that the planes were no longer appearing on the ship's radar and the surface vessels were now some distance away. As the president and his advisers made plans for a

retaliatory attack on North Vietnam, the commander of the *Maddox* recommended that a more "complete evaluation" of the circumstances be taken before any response. His assessment of the incident had raised doubts as to whether there was any engagement with North Vietnamese ships and whether torpedoes had been fired at the *Maddox*. Conditions including poor visibility and turbulent seas contributed to uncertainty about what had occurred.[666] Many scholars since have concluded that the second attack probably did not take place.[667] However, the administration, in particular Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, largely disregarded these questions in discussing the events with the National Security Council and congressional leaders.[668] That evening, President Johnson gave a televised speech announcing air strikes against North Vietnamese gunboats and supporting facilities, and the following day issued a bulletin discussing the resolution he was sending to Congress.[669]

Though the State Department advised Johnson he could embark on a direct military endeavor in Vietnam based on his power as commander-in-chief and the nation's membership in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), the administration drafted a congressional resolution that would allow Johnson to use any means required to prevent the fall of South Vietnam to the Communists.[670] This resolution, officially titled the Joint Resolution to Promote the Maintenance of International Peace and Security in Southeast Asia, but known more popularly as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, was sent to Congress the day after the president's speech. It stated that Congress "approves and

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[666] Michael H. Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945-1968* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 84.
[667] Hallin, 16.
[668] This did not mean that there were not doubts within the White House about what had actually occurred in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 4th. President Johnson privately told one of his advisers, just days later, "Hell, those dumb, stupid sailors were just shooting at flying fish" (Hess, 88).
[669] Hess, 86.
[670] Ibid, 84.

supports the determination of the president, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary steps to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression" and authorized him to "take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to protect any [SEATO] member."[671] The resolution passed 416 to 0 in the House and 88 to 2 in the Senate, with little debate amongst the legislators.[672]

President Johnson's Framing of the Gulf of Tonkin Incident: Forced to Act, Requiring Unity

I analyzed President Johnson's framing of the Gulf of Tonkin incident in both his live address on August 4th and the statement issued on August 5th. The first frame employed by the president was defining the problem faced by the United States as escalating aggression by North Vietnam, a crisis that gave the president no choice but to respond accordingly. This reference to "aggression" that must be met would undoubtedly conjure up the specter of Hitler and World War II, a powerful historical allusion that helped justify Johnson's course.[673] The president clearly cast the government's action as reactive, with the U.S. forced to retaliate against the enemy. The incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin, according to Johnson, "have today required me to order the military forces of the United States to take action in reply." Using the language of necessity to justify his actions, the president sought to diminish the ability of critics to question whether he had taken appropriate steps and weighed alternatives.

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[671] Hess, 86-87.
[672] The House debated the resolution for forty minutes, and the Senate for nine hours.
[673] In his statements at Syracuse University the following day President Johnson would make this comparison even more explicit, declaring, "The world remembers, the world must never forget, that aggression unchallenged is aggression unleashed" ("Johnson's Talk on Syracuse Campus." *The New York Times* August 6, 1964).

President Johnson also framed the Communist enemy responsible for that aggression as untrustworthy, and becoming more dangerous all the time. Similarly to Presidents McKinley and Bush, Johnson highlighted the evils of the enemy, responsible for "terror against the peaceful villagers of South Vietnam." Concerns extended far beyond just that country, however, as "the issue is the future of southeast Asia as a whole. A threat to any nation in that region is a threat to all, and a threat to us." As President Bush would emphasize in discussing Saddam Hussein's regime in 2002, Johnson stressed that North Vietnam was clearly violating international regulations like the Geneva Agreements of 1962. This presidential frame serves to discount diplomatic means of dealing with the enemy and to legitimize military force as a more suitable response. President Johnson added a sense of immediacy to his portrayal of the enemy, noting that "the actions of the North Vietnamese regime have become steadily more threatening."

Johnson also articulated his own version of a "this is our problem" frame that President McKinley made use of in the Spanish-American War context. President Johnson emphasized the acts of violence directed at the U.S. were a clear threat to our national security. The attacks against an American ship "aimed directly at our own forces, again brings home to all of us in the United States the importance of the struggle for peace and security in Southeast Asia." Additionally, he identified events in Vietnam as of primary concern to Americans based on the United States' identity and its commitment to values of freedom and peace. Johnson even described the purpose of the proposed congressional resolution as to express "the unity and determination of the United States in supporting freedom and in protecting peace in Southeast Asia." In

accordance with the "domino theory" dominant amongst officials at the time, if South Vietnam were to become controlled by Communists, the result would be a chain reaction of communist power throughout the entire region.[674] To not try to prevent this would be out of step with America's identity and would undermine the nation's credibility: "America keeps her word. Here as elsewhere, we must and shall honor our commitments."

The president also characterized the administration's response as appropriate and fitting given the threat posed, yet at the same time he emphasized its limits. Johnson sought to convey that though the dangers to the U.S. might be increasing, the government's response was not a radical departure from past American policy. The U.S.'s commitment in the region, according to Johnson, was first made by President Eisenhower in 1954 and expanded upon in the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty ratified by the Senate in 1955. The president thereby grounded his position in policies instituted by a predecessor of the opposition political party and as well as congressional action, insinuating these steps were neither unilateral nor a major change. Further, the president told the public this was not the start of a major new commitment in Vietnam: "We still seek no wider war."[675]

Throughout his statements, President Johnson framed his stance as the consensus position on the crisis. Johnson made frequent allusions to bipartisan support for his course of action. He maintained congressional members of both parties assured him that

[674] Hess, 78.
[675] This was part of the Johnson Administration's strategy throughout 1964 – 1965 as it sought to increase American military activity in Vietnam without causing public panic. In July of 1964 a Special National Security Estimate recommended to the president that "in order to mitigate somewhat the crisis atmosphere that would result from this major U.S. action…announcements about it should be made piecemeal with no more high-level emphasis than necessary" (Hallin, 60).

the proposed resolution would be quickly introduced and passed. In an even more dramatic expression of unity, Johnson also related that he had contacted his Republican opponent in the presidential election of 1964, Senator Barry Goldwater, and that the senator had "expressed his support of the statement that I making to you tonight." Goldwater throughout the campaign had been a prominent critic of the president's Vietnam policy, charging Johnson with insufficiently meeting the communist threat. The president even suggested that to accuse the U.S. of having ulterior motives or to question the government's commitment to a limited response was to be un-American, saying, "We Americans know, although others appear to forget, the risks of spreading conflict." Johnson decried accusations the U.S. had questionable aims, stating, "Our purpose is peace. We have no military, political, or territorial ambitions in the area."

Coverage in *The New York Times* and *The Chicago Tribune* of the Gulf of Tonkin Incident and Its Repercussions: Presidential Dominance, With Some Exceptions[676]

Table 6.1

Tone of Articles[677]	**NYT** Number of Stories	Percentage	**CT** Number of Stories	Percentage
Positive	43	32.1%	17	38.6%
Negative	18	13.4%	6	13.6%
Neutral	73	54.5%	21	47.7%

Table 6.2

August Frames	NYT Appearances	NYT Undermined	CT Appearances	CT Undermined
Responding to aggression/action is retaliation	329	134	205	56
Our problem/defending freedom and peace	25	3	15	3
Appropriate but limited response	71	58	33	39
Unity/Consensus/Bipartisan support	53	11	36	5
Enemy evil/untrustworthy/an increasing danger	32	9	23	2

[676] I analyzed all articles dealing with President Johnson and Vietnam or just Vietnam in *The New York Times* and *The Chicago Tribune* from August 3rd through August 8th, 1964. "Appearances" of a frame in the print news analysis were counted as the number of sentences that conveyed or supported that particular frame. "Undermined" stands for the number of sentences that contradicted or opposed the substance of Johnson's frames. These two newspapers provide the ability to look at news content from both a nationally influential east coast paper like the *Times* and a Midwestern, often more locally-focused outlet in the *Tribune*. The *Times* editorial board was more left-leaning and the *Tribune*'s more right-leaning, as evidenced by the *Times*'s endorsement of Johnson and the *Tribune*'s endorsement of Goldwater in the 1964 election.

[677] Throughout the media content analysis in this paper, a "positive" article was one that mainly conveyed President Johnson and/or the president's frames in a supportive light, "negative" those that were mostly critical or provided opposition to Johnson, the state of the conflict, and the president's frames, and "neutral" those that did not constitute content supportive or critical of the president and Johnson's frames, or that presented a fairly even representation of both sides/perspectives.

The advantages for presidential framing in a national security crisis were apparent in the August newspaper coverage, as all of Johnson's narratives appeared more times than they were challenged, with the exception of his "fitting but limited response" frame in the *Tribune*. There was a clear, short-lived surge in positive stories immediately following the crisis event – the days featuring the largest number of positive stories in both papers were August 5th and 6th, just after the Tonkin Gulf incident, with the subsequent coverage turning distinctly more neutral. It appears that the most favorable media environment for the president's frames is that in closest proximity to the actual events precipitating the national security crisis, but those conditions can quickly fade.

The president was most successful in August at casting the Gulf of Tonkin incident as unprovoked aggression that forced the U.S. to retaliate. Other newsworthy figures echoed this determination; for instance, an article on NATO's response articulated, "many of the diplomats were reported to have concluded that in the circumstances 'the U.S. had to do it.'"[678] Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara made clear in his post-Tonkin press conferences that the incident was utterly unprovoked by the U.S.[679] United Nations Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, speaking before that body, reiterated several of Johnson's frames, including "retaliation," "fitting but limited response," and casting the enemy as evil and untrustworthy.[680]

While depicting the incident as an unprovoked attack was subject to substantial challenge in the news content, much of the time such charges came from sources that would not be deemed credible by the average American reader. Typically it was North

[678] Middleton, Drew. "France Withholds Support of U.S. Air Attack but Most in NATO Back It." *The New York Times* August 6, 1964.
[679] "Transcript of McNamara's News Conference." *The New York Times* August 6, 1964.
[680] "Stevenson Assails Reds as Aggressors; 'Hear Other Side,' Russian Delegate Asks. Security Council Hears of Tonkin Gulf Crisis." AP. *The Chicago Tribune* August 6, 1964.

Vietnam contradicting Johnson's assertions in the newspapers – Hanoi called the U.S.'s report of a second attack a "fabrication" that America was using to cover up its own aggression in Vietnam.[681] China asserted that North Vietnam had no ships near the site of the incident and that the U.S. claimed it hit vessels, "but it cannot bring forward any evidence."[682] Similar coverage is seen in the case of President Bush and Iraq, where Iraqi officials were quoted in some outlets denying the country had weapons of mass destruction, yet were sources unlikely to be reliable on this point for a U.S. audience.

The American press divided over which critics of the president to emphasize. In the post-Gulf of Tonkin incident coverage in the *Times*, North Vietnam was the most common challenger to Johnson's frames, followed by China, the Soviet Union, and then Republican officials. In the *Tribune*, the president's most frequent critics were Republicans, then the Soviet Union, followed by Democratic officials, and then China. Americans would be unlikely to look to foreign Communist governments as legitimate opinion leaders. Republicans, though, were certainly more credible dissenters in the eyes of the public. The *Tribune*, which had endorsed Goldwater in the 1964 election, gave more attention than the *Times* to the president's Republican critics.

Objective articles in the *Times* and *Tribune* uncritically adopted the president's rhetoric by consistently referring to the incident as an "attack" and discussing aspects of the U.S.'s "retaliatory strikes" and "counterattack." The *Tribune*'s headline on August 4th was particularly dramatic, trumpeting, "Strike Back, Navy Told. Johnson Gives Order to

[681] Lubasch, Arnold H. "Reds Driven Off. Two Torpedo Vessels Believed Sunk in Gulf of Tonkin." *The New York Times* August 5, 1964; "Reds Say Sunday Raid Was in 'Our Waters.'" Reuters. *The New York Times* August 5, 1964; Topping, Seymour. "North Vietnam Says It Downed 5 Planes." *The New York Times* August 6, 1964 and "No. Viet Nam Calls Attack Story a Lie." Reuters. *The Chicago Tribune* August 5, 1964.

[682] "Text of Peking's Response to U.S. Attack in North Vietnam and of Interview With a Top Chinese Leader." *The New York Times* August 7, 1964.

Smash Attackers." By contrast, when China's regime accused the U.S. of "aggression" in the Gulf of Tonkin, the paper put this term in quotes, as in the headline: "Peking Condemns U.S. 'Aggression.'" When the Soviet Union's U.N. representative spoke of the events he referred to the "alleged attack."[683] The full text of his remarks was included alongside Stevenson's in the *Times*, but only recounted briefly secondhand in the *Tribune*, providing the Russian diplomat with greater credence in the former paper.

At the same time, a conspicuous theme in several *Times* articles was the mystery of North Vietnam's motives – the coverage relayed that there was no clear indication why the Communists would attack the powerful U.S. naval fleet. The paper reported that part of the puzzle was that North Vietnam had been quite successful at guerilla warfare tactics, but was relatively weak in air and naval capacity.[684] An editorial confessed, "We still have no real idea of what prompted the North Vietnamese to launch their potentially suicidal adventure."[685] The *Times* was not alone in raising these questions: at one of Secretary McNamara's press conferences, a correspondent asked him, after noting forty-eight hours had passed since the attack, "Have you arrived at any answer to the mystery of why this was done?"[686] Some possible North Vietnamese motivations were floated in a few *Times* stories, such as that the Communists were testing the resolve of the American commitment in Vietnam. However, the lack of clear motivation and strategic advantage for North Vietnam the *Times* identified could inspire doubts as to whether the attack was the calculated and deliberate act Johnson contended. This was not a prevalent theme in

[683] "Texts of Addresses by Stevenson and Morozov Before U.N. Security Council." *The New York Times* August 6, 1964.
[684] Reston, James. "North Vietnam's Motives. Washington Works on the Puzzle As It Prepares for Any Eventuality." *The New York Times* August 6, 1964.
[685] "Wider War." Editorial. *The New York Times* August 6, 1964.
[686] "Transcript of Secretary of Defense McNamara's News Conference Dealing With the Situation in Vietnam." *The New York Times* August 7, 1964.

the *Tribune*'s coverage; one of the few times it was raised was in the context of Stevenson's U.N. remarks, but he went on to assert the attacks in fact did make sense as part of a larger pattern of North Vietnamese aggressive action,[687] as though upon closer analysis there could be no confusion about the enemy's motives.

The initial attack on the *Maddox*, which North Vietnam did acknowledge occurred, was depicted quite differently from Johnson's take in some *Times*' articles based upon the inclusion of statements by Hanoi representatives. North Vietnam and China argued that the United States provoked the military action by intruding into North Vietnam's territorial waters.[688] There was some evidence to support this view that the *Maddox* was not attacked without provocation. The Johnson Administration in 1964 had instituted Operation Plan 34-A, wherein American advisers supervised South Vietnamese attacks on North Vietnam's coastal bases. The Pentagon Papers revealed that two instances of these attacks by South Vietnam occurred on July 30th and August 3rd, and that though the *Maddox*'s patrol was not directly related to those offensive maneuvers, the North Vietnamese likely viewed them as connected and assumed the U.S. Navy was participating in the raid.[689]

Though some have charged that journalists failed to ask administration officials tough questions during the crisis,[690] the *Times* coverage reveals some reporters pursuing a line of inquiry on this subject. At Secretary McNamara's August 5th press conference, a correspondent articulated, "There have been reports that South Vietnamese vessels were showing or taking some sort of action against North Vietnam approximately at this time,"

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[687] "Text of Stevenson's Address to U.N. Council. Calls Attacks Pattern of Aggression." *The Chicago Tribune* August 6, 1964.
[688] Topping, Seymour. "North Vietnam Says It Downed 5 Planes." *The New York Times* August 6, 1964.
[689] Turner, 83-84; Hess, 88; and Hunt, 84.
[690] Turner, 85.

as a follow-up to a query about Hanoi's possible motives.[691] Though McNamara denied there were any such operations, the journalist insinuated that South Vietnam's actions could have been a factor in provoking North Vietnam. During McNamara's August 6th press conference, reporters asked several questions about South Vietnamese naval operations, such as whether they extended into North Vietnam, and whether "our naval vessels afford any cover for these operations."[692] Though the secretary again repudiated any American role in the operations, the questions clearly touched upon a possible connection, and both press conference transcripts were published in their entirety in the *Times*. The issue was raised again on August 7th when the *Times* reported questions posed to McNamara about supposed South Vietnamese attacks on North Vietnamese islands just a day or two before the *Maddox* incident, with the official's rebuttal that the ship was far away and played no part in the offensive.[693]

On more than one occasion, then, content in the *Times* suggested an alternative explanation for the Tonkin Gulf incident that contradicted Johnson's portrayal of unprovoked aggression.[694] Still, this may not have been enough to make a narrative of North Vietnamese retaliation against American military action a viable counter-frame for the American public. As Entman (2004) notes, even when journalists bring up information that opposes presidential frames, alternative credible narratives may not

[691] "Transcript of McNamara's News Conference." *The New York Times* August 6, 1964.
[692] "Transcript of Secretary of Defense McNamara's News Conference Dealing With the Situation in Vietnam." *The New York Times* August 7, 1964.
[693] Raymond, Jack. "M'Namara Sees No Signs of Move for Red Attack. Denies Reports That Peking Is Sending North Vietnam Military Reinforcements." *The New York Times* August 7, 1964.
[694] The fact that many of these challenges to Johnson's retaliation frame were found in full text transcripts of press conferences as opposed to news and news analysis generated by the paper suggests that the more detailed coverage offered by a paper like the *Times* was problematic for the president's framing goals, in contrast, potentially, to a forum like the televised nightly news. Additionally, it indicates that journalists were asking these questions when given the opportunity to interview officials, but seldom then writing entire articles based on this alternative view of events.

emerge if other political elites are "cowed into silence." The media, "on their own…could not spread dissent either upward toward officials or downward to the public."[695] This is also consistent with Zaller's (1992) information flow model.

Johnson's portrayal of the American response as appropriate but limited and merely continuing a long-established course of policy was the second most prominent frame in the *Times*, but it was frequently undercut. China, for example, claimed the Johnson administration "created the myth of the second Tonkin Gulf incident" to create an excuse to bomb the north and extend the war."[696] Domestic critics of the frame were also apparent. Senator Wayne L. Morse, Democrat of Oregon, called the conflict "McNamara's War" and contradicted Johnson's contentions the administration sought no wider conflict, with Morse proclaiming this was exactly what the Pentagon and State Department wanted.[697] Some anonymous members of Congress were cited as concerned the Gulf of Tonkin resolution would be interpreted as support for a change in U.S. policy toward South Vietnam and that expansion of the war into North Vietnam would result.[698] A *Times* editorial also pointed out that while Johnson said the U.S. sought no wider war, the congressional resolution did not say this, and raised concerns about the "blank check" thus issued to the president.[699] But the *Times* did not urge Congress to reject the resolution on this basis, and the massive levels of support amongst legislators perhaps indicates that Johnson's words were considered more important than the specific wording of the resolution. The *Tribune*, reflecting its somewhat more positive cast, cited the action

[695] Entman, 19.
[696] "Peking Condemns U.S. 'Aggression.' Chinese Won't 'Sit Idly By' While Americans Extend War, Statement Warns." *The New York Times* August 6, 1964.
[697] Kenworthy, E.W. "President Requests Support of Congress." *The New York Times* August 6, 1964.
[698] Kenworthy, E.W. "Resolution Wins. Senate Vote is 88 to 2 After House Adopts Measure, 416-0." *The New York Times* August 8, 1964.
[699] "Congress and Vietnam." Editorial. *The New York Times* August 8, 1964.

in its objective content as "a single retaliatory move,"[700] echoing the statements of Stevenson before the U.N.

The frame emphasizing American unity and bipartisan support was a successful one for the president, appearing frequently and seldom undermined. The election year context appeared to aid Johnson in promoting this narrative, as journalists sometimes noted that America's enemies might seek to test the nation's solidarity in a season when it seemed most divided. The *Tribune* made this connection explicit, with the headline: "U.S. Is United, Johnson Warns. No Partisanship During Crisis, He Asserts." Here the president's ability to issue a strong admonition to the enemy depended upon the nation's willingness to rally around him. To express dissent, in that context, would be to threaten national security. In the face of this outside peril, the press and the public were more likely to echo the president's call for unanimity. As media outlets are prone in crisis coverage, the *Tribune* adopted inclusive language such as "Congress to Get Resolution on Our Unity." The main content of the resolution was also, then, identified by the paper as an expression of patriotic solidarity as opposed to authorization of military force. This frame also served to pressure representatives – the *Times* reported that though there was not complete unanimity of opinion in Congress on Vietnam, legislators felt they could not reject the resolution without giving the impression of disunity.[701]

However, the newspapers also reflected changing press norms of its era, including an increasing emphasis on shedding light on the motives behind presidential words and deeds. The national security crisis did not entirely suspend journalistic conventions, as in

[700] Pakenham, Michael. "Johnson Asks Congress O.K. of Retaliation. Sends Formal Request for Resolution." *The Chicago Tribune* August 6, 1964.
[701] Kenworthy, E.W. "Resolution Wins. Senate Vote is 88 to 2 After House Adopts Measure, 416-0." *The New York Times* August 8, 1964.

one article where a *Times* journalist placed Johnson's frame into an electoral context. By stressing bipartisanship, according to the reporter, "the President apparently seeks to fend off one of the opposition campaign's weapons. Republicans have criticized the Johnson administration's foreign policy in general and its Southeast Asian policy in particular."[702] The *Tribune* cited China and European newspapers questioning the president's motives, as these sources accused Johnson of bringing the U.S. to the brink of war in order to enhance his election prospects.[703] The Chicago paper also independently disputed the integrity of the administration, with an editorial maintaining that the White House had created most of its difficulties "by its own failure to deal honestly with the people."[704]

Newsmagazine Coverage of the Gulf of Tonkin Incident: More Narrative, Though Not Necessarily of the President's Choosing

The newsmagazines I analyzed[705] are a different form of news media, typically made up of more news analysis and summing up of events as opposed to straight-forward reporting, as they are published weekly and seldom break new information to readers. That narrative-heavy, interpretive style could potentially prove more damaging to a president's frames. These outlets are less likely merely to quote and report the president's interpretation of events, and more likely to place his frames within a larger storyline

[702] Loftus, Joseph A. "Johnson Tells Communists Not to Expand Hostilities." *The New York Times* August 6, 1964.
[703] "Adlai Tells U.N. of Clash. Will Aid N. Viet Nam, Chinese Warn. Peking Says U.S. Act Goes Over Brink of War." AP. *The Chicago Tribune* August 6, 1964 and "Allies Temper Support With Fear of War. France Renews Plea for Neutrality." *The Chicago Tribune* August 7, 1964.
[704] "Mr. Stevenson Speaks for America." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune* August 6, 1964.
[705] I analyzed the two issues of *Time* and *Newsweek* that were published after the Gulf of Tonkin incident for how they covered those events and how they treated the president's frames. A quantitative accounting of the frames evident and undermined was not included for the newsmagazines as the relatively small number of articles and more narrative-oriented nature of the writing make an interpretive discussion and analysis of the coverage more useful for this particular form of media.

where it may appear either convincing or unconvincing. Overall, both *Time* and *Newsweek* covered the Tonkin Gulf incident in ways that portrayed President Johnson himself favorably and adopted his "attack/retaliation" frame. The president's assurances that this was a limited response and that the U.S. sought no "wider war" did not fare as well in their pages.

The magazines clearly embraced the depiction of the *Maddox*'s encounter with North Vietnamese ships as an attack on the U.S. requiring retaliation. A dramatic retelling of the *Maddox*'s two encounters with North Vietnamese ships was included in both *Newsweek* and *Time*. These articles included details of the two incidents, including the specific weaponry on the North Vietnamese boats and how many yards away the U.S. ships were shot at from, that left little doubt these were accurate and factual depictions of what occurred. *Newsweek*'s article even shifted focus from the initial attacks to U.S. retaliation in the piece by saying, "Now it was time for American might to strike back."[706] Both outlets depicted the *Maddox* and its crew as involved in routine, humdrum patrols of the Gulf of Tonkin that were shockingly interrupted, adding to a sense the American ship could definitely not be seen as a threatening military force to the U.S.'s enemies.

Like the *New York Times, Time* magazine did identify "bafflement about the basic question: Why did Hanoi mount attacks on U.S. might in the first place?" Immediately following this question, however, were a number of possible explanations, all of which were predicated on the assumption North Vietnam had intentionally attacked the American ships.[707] At no point did *Newsweek*'s coverage ever discuss the possibility the

[706] "Sea Action: 'This Is No Drill.'" *Newsweek* August 17, 1964.
[707] "Foreign Relations: A Measured and Fitting Response." *Time* August 14, 1964.

incident could be traced back to American support of South Vietnam's attacks on the north, and China and North Vietnam's protests the second attack was fabricated were never mentioned.[708] This omission helps further illustrate that such perspectives were not viewed in the mainstream media as credible or important, as they were left out entirely of analysis pieces providing an overview of what had gone on. By contrast, *Time* did note that some Washington officials "speculated that Hanoi had somehow connected the Maddox with recent South Vietnamese raids on Hon Me and the neighboring island of Hon Ngu."[709] The magazine's writers went on in this article to independently rebut this opinion, citing that "the Maddox was at least 30 miles from either island at the time of those attacks" and "her presence in the gulf was hardly a new provocation." Though *Newsweek* noted, "[I]ncidents can be – and often have been – used as pretexts for war by nations bent on war," the article went on to stress it was America's enemies, and not the U.S. itself, who were eager for the conflict's expansion.[710]

The president's call for unity in the wake of the crisis was also received very positively in the newsmagazines, and *Newsweek* even attributed this unity to the president's successful management of the difficulties. Though presidents generally tended to be supported when taking strong foreign policy stances, the magazine contended, "Mr. Johnson's calculatedly cool and restrained handling of the naval attacks seemed to bring him even more public confidence than he might have expected."[711] Both magazines told their readers that as the president and his advisers discussed the Tonkin

[708] The Soviet Union's claim that what the U.S. was calling "retaliation" was actually an "open and hostile action" was briefly mentioned in *Time*, and the magazine reported "Hanoi reacted to the U.S. action with contrived indignation," explicitly discrediting North Vietnam's response ("Foreign Relations: A Measured and Fitting Response." *Time* August 14, 1964).
[709] "Nation: Action in Tonkin Gulf." *Time* August 14, 1964.
[710] "Vietnam: 'We Seek No Wider War.'" *Newsweek* August 17, 1964.
[711] Ibid.

Gulf incidents, "there were no doves or hawks," but only an administration of a single mindset about the need for response. Though *Newsweek* briefly mentioned Democratic dissenters in Congress, the magazine said "predictably" Senator Morse opposed the Tonkin Gulf resolution, as though there was nothing surprising or really noteworthy about his disapproval. *Time* told its readers there were "only" two dissenters in the Senate, one being "Oregon's irascible Democrat Wayne Morse."[712]

More problematically for Johnson's frames, the newsmagazine coverage conveyed overt skepticism that the conflict in Vietnam was not, in fact, "widening." *Time* summed up the circumstances in deeming Vietnam "a dirty, ruthless, wandering war, which has neither visible front lines nor visible end and in which the U.S. over the past three years has become increasingly involved."[713] Newsweek's cover on August 17th questioned, "Vietnam: Widening War?" directly contradicting Johnson's contention the U.S.'s response would be limited. (Inside the magazine, though, the main article on the Gulf of Tonkin incident was titled "Vietnam: 'We Seek No Wider War," repeating the president's words. Perhaps this also represents an effort to sell copies on a newsstand through the use of more contentious and controversial covers). In keeping with the cover image, the main article concluded by emphasizing the potential for an expanding, lengthy conflict: "[T]hough the latest crisis was over, the war in Vietnam would continue: and the U.S. now stood ever more firmly committed to prosecute it to some kind of acceptable conclusion no matter how long this may take."[714] The final word of many analysis pieces seemed to veer toward negativity: another article concluded by lamenting "the fuzzy rules of the frustrating war in Southeast Asia – a war for which the U.S. has yet to devise an

[712] "Nation: Action in Tonkin Gulf." *Time* August 14, 1964.
[713] "South Viet Nam: Toward the Showdown?" *Time* August 7, 1964.
[714] "Vietnam: 'We Seek No Wider War.'" *Newsweek* August 17, 1964.

acceptable end."[715] Though *Newsweek* did not cover the Communist governments' contention the Tonkin Gulf incident did not stem from "unprovoked aggression," it did report China and North Vietnam's charges that the U.S. did want to extend the war and possibly invade the north.[716] However, the magazine also recounted not only Johnson's assertion of "limited response" but also Stevenson's words before the U.N. that the military activity was "a single retaliatory action."[717]

Newsweek's also tied Johnson's personal characteristics to his management of the events, only rarely seen in the other cases I analyzed of presidents in national security crises. The magazine's portrayal of President Johnson and his handling of the crisis was quite laudatory, repeatedly telling readers that the president was tired, but calm and cool under the trying circumstances. This depiction of Johnson's calmness might indirectly bolster the "fitting but limited response" frame, assuring readers that the president was unlikely to take extreme actions.

The magazines also focused on underlying strategy, clearly linking some of Johnson's moves in Vietnam to political calculations, making his actions seem as though they were not based solely on national security concerns. Discussing the recent surge in military advisers in South Vietnam, *Newsweek* asserted, "No doubt the troop increase was tied in with President Johnson's desire to counter Barry Goldwater's charges that he is following a 'no-win' policy in Vietnam."[718] Some of the questions about the administration's credibility gap raised in the newspapers were also apparent in *Time*. On several occasions the outlet would note what the White House was saying publicly, and

[715] "Saigon: 'Crucial Hour'?" *Newsweek* August 17, 1964.
[716] "Saigon: 'Crucial Hour'?" *Newsweek* August 17, 1964.
[717] "Vietnam: 'We Seek No Wider War.'" *Newsweek* August 17, 1964.
[718] "Southeast Asia: First-Half Report." *Newsweek* August 10, 1964.

then different sentiments administration officials were expressing behind the scenes. For instance, after noting Johnson's assertion the U.S. sought no wider war, *Time* added that, "American officialdom privately conceded anew that retaliation against the north has not been ruled out."[719]

Second Time Period: A New Attack and New Questions

Several of President Johnson's key frames were put to the test a few months later, on the eve of the 1964 presidential election. On November 1st, an American air base at Bien Hoa (located about twenty miles from Saigon) was attacked by the Viet Cong; four Americans were killed, thirty wounded, and six jet-bombers destroyed.[720] At this juncture, Johnson's emphasis on the U.S. activity in Vietnam as limited was challenged, even by some within the administration who urged the president to order an immediate and strong military response.[721] Having cast the Gulf of Tonkin incident as forcing the U.S. to retaliate, Johnson also opened himself up to questions as to whether the Bien Hoa attack should merit a similar response. Additionally, with Goldwater trailing significantly in the polls in the lead up to Election Day, the Republican candidate was likely to levy more overt challenges to Johnson's policies and interpretations of events that would warrant media coverage.

Newspaper Coverage of U.S. Vietnam Policy and Bien Hoa: Deteriorating Circumstances, Deteriorating Treatment of Presidential Frames

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[719] "South Viet Nam: Toward the Showdown?" *Time* August 7, 1964.
[720] Hammond, William M., Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968, (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1988), 112.
[721] Schandler, Herbert Y., The Unmaking of a President: Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 7-8.

Table 6.3

Tone of Articles	**NYT** Number of Stories	Percentage	**CT** Number of Stories	Percentage
Positive	4	14.8%	0	0%
Negative	6	22.2%	15	79%
Neutral	17	63%	4	21%

Table 6.4

October/November Frames	NYT Appearances	NYT Undermined	CT Appearances	CT Undermined
Responding to aggression/action is retaliation	10	16	3	2
Appropriate but limited response	4	15	4	20
Enemy evil/untrustworthy/an increasing danger	5	3	0	0

In this second time period, [722] accounts of the bombardment of the U.S. military base and analysis pieces in the *Times* that drew the conclusion the situation had deteriorated immensely over the previous year, even with greater American involvement,[723] all added up to a more negative tone to much of the coverage. The *Tribune*'s content on Johnson's Vietnam policy and the attack turned overwhelmingly negative. This tone might be linked to the Goldwater-endorsing paper's desire to see the incumbent Democrat lose the imminent election. Supporting this theory, the *Tribune* featured several articles pointing to Communist and Soviet newspapers backing Johnson

[722] I analyzed all articles dealing with President Johnson and Vietnam or just Vietnam in *The New York Times* and *The Chicago Tribune* from October 31st through November 5th, 1964.
[723] Grose, Peter. "Vietnam Outlook Bleaker A Year After Diem's Fall." *The New York Times* November 2, 1964.

in the election, and occasionally touting the *Tribune*'s own investigative work learning of this support.[724] Overall, though, the Bien Hoa attack was a less prominent event in the newspapers than the Gulf of Tonkin incident, and its close proximity to Election Day meant that articles on the presidential campaign's conclusion took up a much larger amount of space in the outlets' pages.

With some distance from his original statement, Johnson's frames were also less apparent in the coverage, and the frames "retaliation in the face of aggression" and "appropriate but limited response" were challenged more frequently than echoed. Senator Goldwater was a vocal critic of the limited response frame, contending that the U.S. was now "on the cusp of World War III."[725] In an interview excerpted in the *Times*, Goldwater chipped away at Johnson's depiction of an unaltered, limited policy in Vietnam. The Republican presidential candidate asserted, "We are not down there instructing and advising. We are down there at war, and I think it is high time that the president tells the people we are and tells the people what he plans to do."[726] Even a *Times* editorial noted the "tragedies and frustrations of being in a war we are technically not fighting."[727]

Numerous *Tribune* articles stressed the belief that the White House had not done enough to prevent the Bien Hoa attack. This perspective was predominantly generated by prominent Republican sources used by the paper including Goldwater and Richard Nixon. Headlines such as "Viet Peril Ignored" and "Viet Raid Expected for Long Time,

[724] "Soviet Press Going All Out to Stop Barry. Calls Democratic Win Vital to Socialism." *The Chicago Tribune* November 1, 1964; Tagge, George. "G.O.P. Hopes High After Soviets Back Johnson." *The Chicago Tribune* November 2, 1964; and "Commie Paper Aids to Give Johnson Vote. Predict Victory Today for Democrats." *The Chicago Tribune* November 3, 1964.
[725] Pomfret, John D. "Goldwater Fears New War in Asia. Stumping West, He Charges Administration Has Turned Back on Foreign Policy." *The New York Times* October 31, 1964.
[726] "Goldwater Bids Johnson Concede U.S. Is at War." *The New York Times* November 2, 1964.
[727] "Mortar Attack in Vietnam." Editorial. *The New York Times* November 2, 1964.

Barry Says" hammered home the point that the administration had been negligent in its protection of the nation's armed forces. Nixon was quoted in the paper attributing direct responsibility for the attack to the president, declaring the Bien Hoa events resulted from "the worst series of foreign policy failures in this nation's history."[728] An objective news piece informed readers "there had been intelligence reports for several weeks that the Viet Cong might make a major attack on Bien Hoa air base," again emphasizing deficiencies on the part of the government.[729] Finally, a *Tribune* editorial concurred with the assessment the attack reflected "loose security, lax guard, and low vigilance." The attack that brought the "heaviest losses of President Johnson's 'nonwar' in Viet Nam" showed "how badly a war can be mismanaged."[730]

The *Times* reported that the official Hanoi radio station indicated that North Vietnam considered the Bien Hoa attack retaliation against the American offensive following the Tonkin Gulf events.[731] By contrast, this perspective was never presented in any portion of the *Tribune*'s coverage. Overall, the Gulf of Tonkin incident continued to be portrayed amongst credible opinion leaders in the *Times* as an attack inspiring U.S. retaliation.[732] But some news content, even that generated by White House officials, appeared to narrow the usage of the retaliation frame in this new context. The *Times* relayed that while the administration described the Bien Hoa attack as "serious," "they

[728] Freeburg, Russell. "Viet Raid Expected for Long Time, Barry Says." *The Chicago Tribune* November 2, 1964.
[729] "Fear Raids on Other U.S. Viet Nam Bases. Bien Hoa Field Invaders Flee Unhurt." *The Chicago Tribune* November 2, 1964.
[730] "Little Pearl Harbor." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune* November 3, 1964.
[731] Grose, Peter. "Vietcong Who Shelled Base Elude 800 Sent in Search." *The New York Times* November 3, 1964.
[732] "President Summons Officials." *The New York Times* November 1, 1964.

stressed that it did not call for instant retaliation against North Vietnam."[733] The Johnson administration found itself acting inconsistently with the primary frame of the president's August statements. Officials sought to reconcile this conflict by telling journalists that the Gulf of Tonkin incident required retaliation because American ships were on official U.S. business in international waters. In Bien Hoa, according to the White House, North Vietnam acted in the context of a war where the U.S. was supporting South Vietnam. Still, the difference might not appear entirely clear-cut to readers, and the article also noted that extending the war was under discussion in the administration, further subverting the "limited response" frame.[734]

The *Tribune*'s content on the attack also focused on administration strategy in dealing with the public fallout, reporting, "administration officials played down the importance of the bloody and costly raid, referring to it as an unhappy incident."[735] The paper's objective coverage at times questioned how honest and open Johnson was being when it came to his Vietnam policy, echoing one of Goldwater's criticisms of the president. For instance, the paper asserted that meetings amongst major White House officials "have seldom, if ever, produced any new policies – at least any that have been made known to the public."[736]

Johnson's allusions to the dangers and evils of the enemy was the only frame in October/November to be supported more than it was undermined, and this is certainly

[733] Szulc, Tad. "U.S. Rushes Jets to Replace B-57's Hit By Vietcong. Steps Announced as Johnson Confers With Top Aides About Bienhoa Attack. Peking, Hanoi Warned. Goldwater Asserts Country is in Undeclared War – Challenges President." *The New York Times* November 2, 1964.
[734] Szulc, Tad. "U.S. Rushes Jets to Replace B-57's Hit By Vietcong. Steps Announced as Johnson Confers With Top Aides About Bienhoa Attack. Peking, Hanoi Warned. Goldwater Asserts Country is in Undeclared War – Challenges President." *The New York Times* November 2, 1964.
[735] Pakenham, Michael. "Viet Peril Ignored: Nixon. Calls Attack Worst Since Pearl Harbor. Replace Planes Wrecked at Viet Base." *The Chicago Tribune* November 2, 1964.
[736] Ibid.

related to the nature of the Bien Hoa attack itself, and accompanying discussions of North Vietnamese terror tactics against the peasants of South Vietnam.

Newsmagazine Coverage in Late October/Early November: An Attack That Should Have Been Prevented

The newsmagazines also reflected a striking negativity about American policy in Vietnam in the second time period.[737] *Newsweek*'s account of the events at Bien Hoa conveyed that the attack resulted from security lapses and presented major new problems for U.S. policy in Vietnam, both sentiments very problematic for the Johnson administration. The magazine referred to a report issued months ago by its own correspondent that found American jets at the base "plainly exposed on the field," and which had quoted a U.S. pilot saying the Viet Cong could destroy the planes with mortar shells at any time, exactly what then occurred.[738] *Time* also reviewed the concerns held by Air Force officers at the base, such as insufficient perimeter defense around the aircraft.[739] A tale of U.S. government negligence in Bien Hoa was clear in the pages of *Time*: "Fire spread quickly from plane to plane because they stood so close together; sandbags would have saved many from shrapnel, but such protection did not exist because, U.S. officers explained lamely, there was insufficient local labor to fill and stack them."[740]

Newsweek also poked holes in Johnson's continued assurances about the U.S.'s limited role in Vietnam. According to the outlet, "Bien Hoa and similar important bases

[737] I analyzed the three issues of each magazine that were published following the Bien Hoa attacks, as the election caused some delay in the outlets covering the attacks in Vietnam.
[738] "South Vietnam: Anniversary Present." *Newsweek* November 16, 1964.
[739] "South Viet Nam: Down, Down, Down." *Time* November 13, 1964.
[740] Ibid.

in Vietnam could only be secured by whole battalions of U.S. combat troops – and that would finally destroy the U.S. claim that its role in Vietnam is only 'advisory.'"[741] The outlet seemed to be indicating that the president's "limited response" frame was inconsistent with national security goals.

Some of the newsmagazines' coverage hinted that the U.S. was engaging in activities that would inspire the wrath of the North Vietnamese, which could undermine Johnson's "unprovoked aggression" narrative. *Newsweek* related Hanoi's charge that the U.S. was bombing Vietnam and the American government's denial, but went on to add that Washington "discreetly failed to comment on suggestions that the attacks had been combined operations of the Royal Laotian Air Force and the South Vietnamese Navy, both of which have been equipped by the U.S."[742] In a similar vein, *Time* reported, "Bienhoa became all the more tempting to the Communists after the Tonkin Gulf clashes, when more than 30 big B57 jet bombers flew in from Pacific bases as stand-by weapons in case a long-range attack on North Viet Nam or even China-should be called for."[743]

Partisanship and the Tonkin Gulf Crisis

President Johnson enjoyed substantial support for several of his frames and the Gulf of Tonkin resolution in Congress from both parties, as evidenced by the mere two votes in the legislature against the proposed resolution. As the objective media of the mid-20th century emphasized the value of presenting "both sides" of political issues, dissenters from the resolution received more attention than they otherwise might have. Senator Morse's vote against the resolution, his statements declaring the U.S. had been a

[741] "South Vietnam: Anniversary Present." *Newsweek* November 16, 1964.
[742] "South Vietnam: Who's on Top?" *Newsweek* November 9, 1964.
[743] "South Viet Nam: Down, Down, Down." *Time* November 13, 1964.

"provocateur" in Vietnam, and his accusations the Pentagon and State Department were actively seeking to escalate the war made up nine sentences of a prominent *Times* article on Congress' actions to support the president.[744] As in the case of Bush and Iraq, though, a vocal presidential opponent in the news like Morse was unlikely to be seen as an influential figure or the leader of his party. In early November with the presidential election coming to its conclusion, Goldwater was harshly critical of some of Johnson's core narratives about American involvement in Vietnam, and the news media covered these attacks extensively. In the heat of a presidential campaign, traditional partisan politics were not suspended in the face of national security concerns.

The overwhelming vote in Congress for the Gulf of Tonkin resolution did not mean that Johnson had unqualified support. The *Times* noted the apprehensions of numerous members of Congress who had still decided to vote for the legislation. Some were concerned that "the conflict might gradually and inevitably grow, with progressive involvement of U.S. troops" and others expressed "vague unease about the authority given to the President."[745] Senator George McGovern (D-SD) was cited in this same article saying that if the resolution was broad enough to allow President Johnson to commit U.S. troops to fighting on land he would not support it. A *Tribune* article on the Senate debate of the resolution noted that "many questions had been asked about the possibility of 'another Korea.'"[746] According to the *Tribune*, these concerns were held by influential members of Congress, including Senator Richard B. Russell (D-GA), whose

[744] Kenworthy, E.W. "President Requests Support of Congress." *The New York Times* August 6, 1964.
[745] Kenworthy, E.W. "Congress is Expected to Approve Today Johnson's Resolution on Vietnam Action. Committees Hear Rusk's Testimony. McNamara Also Appears – Senate and House Panels Strongly Back Measure." *The New York Times* August 7, 1964.
[746] Edwards, Willard. "Morse Calls Bill 'Declaration of War Predated.'" *The Chicago Tribune* August 7, 1964.

views offered "a hint from an authoritative leader that expansion of the war was entirely possible."[747] This speaks to the success of Johnson's "limited and fitting" response frame, that some members of Congress were ultimately convinced the White House would not use the resolution to seek a wider war. It is also difficult to separate the impact of the bipartisan support Johnson enjoyed in this case from his framing efforts in sustaining authority for his actions on Vietnam. Johnson's "unity" frame both drew attention to and demanded this consensus, perhaps making backing for the president appear more unconditional than it actually was.

It is also noteworthy that in every national security case studied in this dissertation, in every era, concerns were raised by political officials in the press about the potential for excessive and abusive presidential power, even at the height of the crises. Those charges have rarely appeared to diminish the president's ability to frame these national security crises in the media and for the public. The effectiveness of the criticism has declined over time, following the upward trajectory of presidential power. President McKinley was most hurt by accusations of overreaching the office, and President Bush barely touched by them.

Conclusion

Serving as president during an era of media change and modernization, Johnson did appear wise to some means of drawing press attention to his views. After his speech discussing the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the president made some remarks at an event at Syracuse University (even televised on NBC and CBS) where he reiterated that North Vietnam had engaged in unprovoked attacks that had been answered, and that "the Gulf

[747] Ibid.

of Tonkin may be distant, but none can be detached about what has happened there."[748] Though the news cycle was not as fast-paced as it would be for President Bush in the case of the Iraq War, Johnson assured renewed coverage for his frames by rearticulating them in a different setting just days later. At the same time, the president could face criticism for engaging in this active effort to influence the press. Several *Tribune* editorials condemned the Johnson for "news management," insinuating a clear derogatory and dangerous connotation to the term, and casting it as an unusual and unsavory tactic.[749]

President Johnson appeared aided in his framing project by widespread perceptions that he was a reluctant warrior, as well as by criticisms from his opponents (including Goldwater) that he had failed to take a strong enough stance in Vietnam. The president was also aware, perhaps even more keenly in an election year, that the Democratic Party was associated with being "soft on communism" and hesitant to take a strong position against aggression.[750] Unlike President Bush, then, who was subject to some coverage that portrayed him as a reckless warmonger, Johnson's presumed preference for peace meant his military actions were more likely to be depicted as absolutely necessary, with the president forced to take them against his inclinations. In fact, Johnson was actually wielding the "reckless warmonger" charge in 1964, "presenting himself as the candidate of reason and restraint as opposed to the war-like, unpredictable, and irresponsible Barry Goldwater."[751]

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[748] "Johnson's Talk on Syracuse Campus." *The New York Times* August 6, 1964.
[749] "Mr. Stevenson Speaks for America." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune* August 6, 1964 and "Some More Managed News." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune* August 5, 1964.
[750] Turner, 82.
[751] Schandler, 7.

In scandal-crises, as I noted in discussing the Lewinsky scandal, a president like Bill Clinton might be aided in his framing efforts by living up to his previously established public persona and presumed character traits. For Johnson seeking to convince the public he wanted no wider war, he was also aided by his "peace candidate" status in the 1964 election – his assumed reluctance for war made that frame all the more persuasive. If a prominent theme in the press had been Johnson's critics accusing him of not being tough enough in Vietnam, it made it less likely journalists would accuse him of taking too strong a military stance after the Gulf of Tonkin incidents. At a certain point, however, reality no longer seemed to match up with Johnson's narratives. The more logistical support for South Vietnam's military and American "advisers" sent to the region, the less media coverage would reflect Johnson's "limited response" frame.

Hallin (1986) argues that there was a great deal of information available to journalists that contradicted the Johnson Administration's "official" version of the Gulf of Tonkin events that they simply did not use, and by contrast, cites the French paper *Le Monde*'s coverage as taking Hanoi's denials into account.[752] In the outlets I analyzed, however, the views of China and North Vietnam that contradicted the president's frames were frequently included in news articles, though occasionally relayed in such a way as to discredit them. The presence of such perspectives in the coverage (without always being accompanied by negative commentary) suggests that alternative framings to the president's version of events fail to take hold not because the American public is never exposed to them by the media, but because political, social, and cultural norms make it unlikely they will be accepted and adopted by a large segment of the population. To viably challenge the president's frames, the news media could do little other than overtly

[752] Hallin, 20.

champion and support these counter-frames. This would not only be a departure from the tenets of objectivity, but advocacy for a particular interpretation of events, just as the media are accused of providing for the president. At the same time, the media outlets so readily accepted and promoted Johnson's "unprovoked aggression/retaliation" frame that the Communist government sources that were the main purveyors of these alternative narratives were even less reliable to the audience than they would already be.

Remarkably, even in 1964, grave apprehensions and dissatisfaction were being expressed in news outlets about the Vietnam conflict. *Time* concluded, "[A]fter three years of intensive effort and considerable pain, including the expenditure of $3.3 billion in aid, after the loss of 262 Americans killed, 1,196 wounded or injured and 17 missing, the war is still not being discernibly won."[753] Similar sentiments throughout the news content indicate that even in the early stages of a war and in the face of a national security crisis, a president of the mid-20th century could not be assured of entirely deferential, favorable coverage of his frames and actions.

[753] "South Viet Nam: Toward the Showdown?" *Time* August 7, 1964.

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Chapter 7: President Bush and the Iraq War

A president's efforts to make the case for war when the United States has not been directly attacked can take the form of a lengthy process of convincing the public of the need for military action, building support amongst potential allies, and conveying the threat of force to the targeted enemy. The object of this case of presidential framing was a familiar adversary to many Americans, Iraq and the regime of President Saddam Hussein, whom the U.S had fought in the 1991 Gulf War and that President George W. Bush declared part of an "axis of evil" in his 2002 State of the Union address. The Bush administration's endeavors to secure backing for a war with Iraq intensified in the fall of 2002, when the president on September 12th urged the United Nations to compel Hussein to both disarm and end the abuse of his people. The efforts continued in the months that followed: President Bush's State of the Union address in January of 2003 devoted a third of its content to Hussein and Iraq, and in early February Secretary of State Colin Powell presented the administration's evidence of the threat posed by the Iraqi regime to the U.N. The Iraq War officially began on March 19th, 2003.

President Bush's efforts to build support for military intervention in Iraq reveal the complex relationship between the presidency and the media in a 21st century national security crisis. The Bush administration had access to all of the power and resources of the modern presidency, and yet at the same time was facing a daunting new media environment. The modern press, including an unwieldy wide variety of formats and strongly adversarial tendencies, is guided by institutional norms that might make the media less inclined to unquestioningly adopt presidential perspectives on issues of national import. Yet when the president is able to wield the resources of the modern

institution successfully, he can successfully shape media coverage in making the case for war, to an even greater extent than many of his predecessors.

This chapter focuses on Bush's October 7th, 2002 primetime address to the American public on Iraq. First, as I am primarily interested in how presidential framing affects news media content and public opinion, a speech aimed at the American people as its primary audience is a crucial example to examine. The president's statements were important for securing backing amongst citizens and shaping how Americans thought about Hussein and Iraq. Public support for a possible military intervention in Iraq had declined over the summer of 2002 from its high after the September 11th attacks.[754] Activities within the administration, such as the formation of the White House Iraq Group, designed to oversee message coordination and communications strategy, were intensifying at this time and illustrate the importance the president attached to framing efforts.[755] Second, the president's frames and subsequent press coverage were likely to have an impact on Congress' debate and vote just days later on October 10th and 11th to give the president authorization to use force against Iraq if necessary. As the passage of that resolution served to legitimize a possible war and quelled the ability of some members of Congress to criticize the president's Iraq policy in the future, this seems to be a moment where presidential framing would be of greatest consequence in shaping news coverage and the opinions of both political elites and the general public.

President Bush's October 7th, 2002 address in Cincinnati, Ohio included language and framing common to presidential efforts to persuade various actors that military action is necessary. Presidential rhetoric in national security crises typically takes the form of an

[754] Jon Western, *Selling Intervention and War: The Presidency, the Media, and the American Public* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 197.
[755] W. Lance Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005), 122.

"assertion of the president's control over the facts of the situation and an acknowledgement that the New Facts which occasion the speech constitute a New Situation – a crisis for the U.S."[756] Bush's address also met Kiewe's (1994) definition of crisis rhetoric, wherein "decision makers…attempt to communicate to various constituents that a certain development is critical and to suggest a certain course of action to remedy the critical situation."[757]

President Bush's Framing of the Threat Posed by Iraq in his October 7, 2002 Address: Urgent, Evil, and Unique

President Bush most frequently framed Iraq as a unique and immediate threat to the United States. According to Bush, "By its past and present actions, by its technological capabilities, by the merciless nature of its regime, Iraq is unique." Further, the immediacy of the threat was tied to Hussein's assumed willingness to deploy weapons of mass destruction against America at any time. "Facing clear evidence of peril," warned Bush, "we cannot wait for the final proof – the smoking gun – that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud."[758] Much of the speech's content related to chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons the Iraqi regime was either definitively known to have, was suspected of having, or could potentially obtain.[759]

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[756] Theodore Windt, "The Presidency and Speeches on International Crises: Repeating the Rhetorical Past," in *Essays in Presidential Rhetoric*, 2nd edition, eds. Theodore Windt and Beth Ingold (Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1987), 128.
[757] Amos Kiewe, ed., *The Modern Presidency and Crisis Rhetoric* (Connecticut: Praeger, 1994), xvii.
[758] This phrase's salience was likely increased as it had been uttered numerous times by Bush administration representatives in the news in the weeks preceding the speech, including for example by Condoleeza Rice on CNN on September 8, 2002.
[759] Other administration figures had already laid the groundwork on Hussein's possession of WMDs in even more emphatic terms, particularly Vice President Dick Cheney, who in a speech on August 26th, 2002 had said, "Simply stated, there is no doubt Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is

This frame was magnified by the speech's emotional, fear-inducing elements, as when the president identified a "massive stockpile of biological weapons that has never been accounted for, and is capable of killing millions." President Bush presented the need to act immediately as logically extending from our information about Iraq: "If we know Saddam Hussein has dangerous weapons today – and we do – does it make any sense for the world to wait to confront him as he grows even stronger and develops even more dangerous weapons?" This frame served to distinguish Iraq from other threats to American interests abroad, and to explain why the government was justified in taking action imminently.

The second most prominent theme in the speech was portraying Saddam Hussein personally and the Iraqi regime generally as fundamentally evil and untrustworthy.[760] The purpose of this frame was both to validate the use of military force against Iraq, but also to discredit Hussein and his government as legitimate players at the bargaining table. President Bush described Hussein in the speech as "a murderous tyrant" and "a homicidal dictator." The president used the brutality and violence Hussein perpetrated against his own people (as well as against other nations) as primary evidence of the leader's depravity.[761] Additionally, Bush frequently returned to the theme of the Iraqi regime's numerous broken pledges and deceptions in the past to explain why Hussein could not be

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no doubt he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies and against us" (Bob Woodward, *State of Denial: Bush At War, Part III*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006, 92).

[760] This was also a familiar narrative for an American audience. Saddam Hussein was a known enemy for the American public from the first Gulf War in 1991. The "evil" designation had also been memorably articulated by President Bush in his 2002 State of the Union address, where Bush declared that with regard to Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, "states like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world."

[761] Entman (2004) contends that this demonization of a figure the government plans to engage in military action against is an essential part of national security crisis framing, as it makes it less likely other political elites and citizens will place a primary emphasis on fears of "quagmire," or a long costly involvement, themes also very salient in the post-Vietnam War era (97).

relied upon to comply with United Nations programs and requirements. If Hussein could not be a credible participant in diplomatic efforts to address his weapons capabilities, President Bush bolstered the argument that Hussein ultimately needed to be removed from power by military means.

The third most prominent frame in the president's speech addressed potential criticisms that the administration was rushing to war, without first exhausting other options. This narrative highlighted a laundry list of methods that had been employed over the years to remove the sources of danger from Iraq, all of which met with failure. The president detailed the United Nations' weapons inspection program, economic sanctions, limited military strikes, and no-fly zones, finally concluding, "after eleven years…the end result is that Saddam Hussein still has chemical and biological weapons, and is increasing his capabilities to make more."[762] This framed the president's position as a reactive one, with the U.S. forced to take a stand because of Hussein's actions. Bush conveyed the impression he was reluctant to go to war, and that it was not yet inevitable, explaining that if Iraq were to comply with "tough, immediate requirements" imposed by the United Nations Security Council, "the Iraqi regime has an opportunity to avoid conflict."[763] Though he sought to portray war as a last resort, part of the president's framing project still required he prepare the public for the reality of a military conflict in the near future. After indicating how Iraq could avoid war, he added, "America hopes the regime will make that choice. Unfortunately, at least so far, we have little reason to expect it."

[762] President Bush explicitly mentioned in his speech that "America wants the U.N. to be an effective organization that helps to keep the peace," implying that the U.N. was not, then, currently effective at such tasks.

[763] At the end of his speech, President Bush also noted that though he had asked Congress for an authorization of military force, "approving this resolution does not mean that military action is imminent or unavoidable." This too cast the president as a "reluctant warrior," while simultaneously lowering the stakes for members of Congress and the public who went on to support the military authorization bill that became the legal foundation of the Iraq War.

President Bush also clearly framed Iraq as connected to terrorism and terrorist activities. He identified specific terrorists and terrorist organizations that had found "safe haven" in Iraq and discussed the possibility that "Iraq could decide on any given day to provide a biological or chemical weapon to a terrorist group or individual terrorists." For this reason, the president declared, "confronting the threat posed by Iraq is crucial to winning the war on terror."[764] In his speech, Bush accused Hussein's regime of harboring and training members of al-Qaeda and celebrating September 11th, but he did not explicitly connect Iraq to the planning and execution of those terrorist attacks.[765] Iraq would not be a distraction from the broader "war on terror" in this narrative, but a vital component of keeping Americans safe from future attacks.

This related closely to the second least apparent frame in Bush's speech, one that connected September 11th to the current circumstances involving Iraq. Though the president did not directly blame Iraq for 9/11, he used September 11th to focus attention on a new international and foreign policy climate that emerged in the wake of the attacks. Bush validated his strong stance toward Iraq as derived from the lessons learned that day, which "showed our country that vast oceans no longer protect us from danger." The president linked the nation's experiences in 9/11 to the need to meet growing dangers

[764] Lisa Finnegan (2007) argues the "war on terror" is a broad and vague concept that gave the White House free reign to classify a country or government as part of the war, without needing to show it met certain specific guidelines to demonstrate such categorization was correct (Lisa Finnegan, *No Questions Asked: News Coverage Since 9/11*, Connecticut: Praeger, 2007, 16-17).

[765] Others have argued that though President Bush might not have made such explicit accusations, the structure and rhetoric of his speeches did invite his audience to make precisely that connection, that Iraq shared blame for September 11th with al-Qaeda (Amy Gershoff and Shana Kushner, "Shaping Public Opinion: The 9/11-Iraq Connection in the Bush Administration's Rhetoric," *Perspectives on Politics* 3:3 September 2005). As discussed later in this chapter, it was not uncommon for Americans to hold that belief, even much later in the war.

head on, saying "We resolved then, and we are resolved today, to confront every threat, from any source, that could bring sudden terror and suffering to America."[766]

The least prominent frame in the speech responded to concerns about the potential damage and hardship the Iraqi people would face in a military conflict. President Bush, by contrast, framed a possible war as aiding and benefiting Iraqis. In emphasizing the humanitarian crimes Hussein had perpetrated against the people of Iraq, President Bush pointed out that without Hussein, Iraqis would no longer live in fear of repression and violence at the hands of their own government. Further, the president identified a democratic Iraq as undeniably preferable to Iraq's population: "People everywhere prefer freedom to slavery; prosperity to squalor; self-government to the rule of terror and torture." This cast military action against Iraq as not only beneficial to the interests of the United States, but as a benevolent act in the best interests of the Iraqi people.

Nightly News Coverage of President Bush's 10/7/2002 Speech: Conveying the Threat, With Some Questions[767]

[766] This also connected to an existing theme in the president's public statements and policy positions, of Bush's support for a foreign policy doctrine of preemption, and preventive war, to overthrow rogue regimes with force if required, even before the threat from those regimes was fully apparent (Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, "Bush's Foreign Policy Revolution," *The George W. Bush Presidency: An Early Assessment*, ed. Fred I. Greenstein, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003). An earlier, full articulation of that doctrine had been outlined by the president in a June 2002 commencement speech given at West Point (Woodward, 342).

[767] It should be noted that the three major broadcast networks did not carry the president's speech live (though Fox and cable news outlets did) because the White House did not ask them directly to show it. This might make news coverage of the speech all the more important because the speech itself was less publicized. Additionally, White House press secretary Ari Fleischer told reporters that the administration did not ask for time because they did not want to suggest "that military action was imminent," a claim that seemed to foster the "last resort" frame (Rutenberg, Jim. "3 Networks Skip Bush's Talk, Citing Absence of Request." *The New York Times* October 8, 2002). Using the Vanderbilt Television News Archives in

Table 7.1

Tone of Stories[768]	ABC		CBS		NBC	
	Number of Stories	Percentage	Number of Stories	Percentage	Number of Stories	Percentage
Positive	0	0%	3	50%	3	33.3%
Negative	2	28.6%	0	0%	0	0%
Neutral	5	71.4%	3	50%	6	66.6%

Table 7.2

Frames	**Appearances[769]**			**Undermined[770]**		
October Frames	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC
Linked to 9/11	1	1	0	1	0	0
Iraq connected to terrorism	1	1	4	3	0	0
Saddam/Iraq evil/untrustworthy	1	2	1	0	0	0
Iraq unique/immediate threat	3	7	7	5	2	3
Other methods tried/war last resort	1	3	1	1	1	2
Will benefit Iraqis	1	0	1	2	1	1

Nashville, TN, I analyzed the nightly news broadcasts for all three major networks from October 4th – 11th, 2002.

[768] Throughout the media content analysis in this paper, a "positive" article or story was one that mainly conveyed President Bush, a possible war with Iraq, and/or the president's frames in a supportive light, "negative" those that were mostly critical or provided opposition to Bush, a possible war, and the president's frames, and "neutral" those that did not constitute content supportive or critical of the president, the possible war, and Bush's frames, or that presented a fairly even representation of both sides/perspectives.

[769] "Appearances" of a frame in the televised nightly news analysis were counted when one of Bush's frames was mentioned in the broadcast, or a statement with the same general meaning as a frame he articulated. A single news segment was counted as having more than one appearance of a frame if that frame was articulated in different contexts, or by different individuals.

[770] The undermining of a frame was counted any time one of Bush's frames appeared in the televised broadcast, and then was contradicted or criticized, or when sentiments representing the opposite of what Bush sought to argue were found on the program.

I looked at the nightly news coverage on the three major broadcast networks from October 4th through October 11th, 2002. The most apparent frame on the nightly news during this week was casting Iraq as a unique and immediate threat to the United States. However, it was also the frame most likely to be undermined on the broadcasts. Overall, the frame was more successful than these numbers might indicate. Many of the sources of criticism of President Bush's frames or the war on the nightly news were Iraqi officials, Democratic officials who were neither party leaders nor viewed as representing the mainstream of the party, such as Representatives Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) and Pete Stark (D-CA), and the governments of France, China, and Russia. None of these critics were likely to be seen as authoritative or legitimate as the president or prominent congressional members of both parties including Representative Tom DeLay (R-TX), Representative Dick Gephardt (D-MO), and Senator Tom Daschle (D-SD), all featured on the broadcasts supporting the war.[771]

Visual framing further bolstered the case that Iraq presented an immediate danger to the United States. The nightly news frequently showed pictures and maps of Iraq purportedly illustrating the sites of laboratories and plants capable of producing chemical and biological weapons. For a viewer, this might give the impression of hard evidence even without the administration providing detailed supplemental explanations.

ABC News was most critical of the narrative that Iraq was an immediate and unique threat, in part because the network covered the story in ways more comparable to coverage of normal domestic or highly contested political issues. For instance, on

[771] Limitations on available sources are a consistent advantage for a president in a national security crisis trying to shape news coverage. As Western (2005) notes, "because of Iraq's closed society and because Saddam Hussein had expelled weapons inspectors in 1998, liberals and the media were almost entirely beholden to U.S. government officials or Iraqi exiles and dissidents…for information on the nature of the threat and the potential costs of war" (178-9).

October 8th the broadcast put Bush's assertions in the October 7th speech through a "reality check," robustly challenging the president's claims Iraq knowingly harbored terrorists and was on its way to nuclear capabilities. This sort of fact-checking journalism is most commonly seen applied to political messages perceived as of dubious veracity, like campaign commercials, making it even more remarkable the outlet employed it in a national security context. It also demonstrates that sources undercutting the administration's arguments were not in fact difficult to find – ABC News cited government officials and the International Atomic Energy Agency, rather than independently investigating the president's contentions. ABC did have journalists in Iraq, and on October 10th showed reporter David Wright visiting one of the alleged weapons plants, where workers insisted they were engaged in "commercial work only" and encouraged inspectors to come and verify this. Even Wright deemphasized the importance of his own report, however, pointing out that they were only journalists and lacked expertise as weapons inspectors, and that the U.S. and U.N. were unlikely to take the workers' claims at face value.

Connecting Iraq to terrorism was quite effective on the nightly news, garnering the second most mentions on the broadcasts and undercut only on ABC. NBC even broadcast an entire story focusing on Israel's charge Hussein was "bankrolling terror" that included visual images of the families of suicide bombers holding up $25,000 check reportedly from Hussein.[772] Again, such visuals would give the viewing audience the impression of hard evidence supporting the president's frames. The least successful frame articulated by the president on the nightly news was that the Iraqi people would primarily benefit from the United States' actions. The frame rarely appeared on the broadcasts and

[772] *NBC Evening News*, October 9, 2002.

was frequently challenged. However, it was also the narrative Bush emphasized least, potentially explaining its lack of resonance in the coverage.

Print Coverage of President Bush's Frames: Framing Successes, With Few Exceptions

Table 7.3

Tone of Stories	**NYT** Number of Stories	Percentage	**WP** Number of Stories	Percentage	**CT** Number of Stories	Percentage
Positive	20	22.5%	28	35.4%	12	30.8%
Negative	14	15.7%	8	10.1%	9	23.1%
Neutral	55	61.8%	43	54.4%	18	46.2%

Table 7.4

Frames	**Appearances**[773]			**Undermined**[774]		
October Frames	NYT	WP	CT	NYT	WP	CT
Linked to 9/11	39	16	12	10	2	2
Iraq connected to terrorism	78	72	19	69	43	14
Saddam/Iraq evil/untrustworthy	128	90	41	6	3	2
Iraq unique/immediate threat	249	126	83	130	81	51
Other methods tried/war last resort	80	76	71	86	51	28
Will benefit Iraqis	55	56	14	43	40	35

[773] I analyzed all articles dealing with President Bush and Iraq or just Iraq in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Chicago Tribune* from October 4th – 11th, 2002. "Appearances" of a frame in the print news analysis were counted as the number of sentences that conveyed or supported that particular frame.

[774] "Undermined" stands for the number of sentences that contradicted or opposed the substance of Bush's frames.

A portrayal of Saddam Hussein as evil and untrustworthy was far more prominent and successful in print than on televised news. Even steadfast critics of the president and his frames often felt the need to make clear that they understood Hussein was a monstrous and brutal dictator, marking the strategic advantages of this narrative for the White House.[775] In chastising the president, many opponents first reiterated Bush's narrative. The newspapers also sought out Iraqi refugees living in America who testified to the cruelties imposed by Hussein on his own people.[776] Further, even journalists firmly committed to objectivity were unlikely to see a responsibility to present a more "balanced" account of Hussein's character and leadership. As Hallin (1986) argues, the media regard some issues as falling into a "sphere of consensus" where journalists do not feel compelled to provide opposing viewpoints and instead advocate consensus values[777] – in this instance, that Hussein was in fact a very bad man.

Depicting Iraq as an immediate and unique threat was the most prevalent frame in the three newspapers, and many stories related the president's arguments about the danger posed by Hussein and why waiting to act might only worsen the situation. The *Times*' headings for its articles on Iraq read "Threats and Responses," emphasizing the menace posed by Iraq and associating the United States with "responding," as opposed to engaging in aggression. The *Times* was the only paper to feature extensive excerpts from

[775] A consistent problem for those who oppose the president's rhetoric in crisis entails attempting to "lift the issue out of the right/wrong-angel/devil moral context in which the president has placed the problem" (Windt, 132). In the case of Iraq, war critics appeared to make little attempt to lift the issue out of this frame, instead opting to affirm it and then turn their attention to refuting the president's other narratives.
[776] Janofsky, Michael. "Refugees Back Effort to End Hussein's Rule Despite Risk to Relatives." *The New York Times* October 11, 2002; Leiby, Richard. "The Revolutionary." *The Washington Post* October 6, 2002; Leiby, Richard. "The General." *The Washington Post* October 6, 2002; Leiby, Richard. "The Engineer." *The Washington Post* October 6, 2002; Leiby, Richard. "The Translator." *The Washington Post* October 6, 2002; Leiby, Richard. "The Lawyer." *The Washington Post* October 6, 2002.
[777] Daniel C. Hallin, *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 116-117.

the House and Senate debates on the Iraq resolution, and many of Bush's supporters in Congress recounted the evidence the president cited regarding weapons of mass destruction and the danger they represented to the United States.[778]

The fear-inducing elements of this frame were key to its success in the coverage. The *Post*, for instance, linked a program encouraging voluntary smallpox vaccinations in the U.S. to the Iraq situation: "Concerns that Iraq or another hostile nation may have acquired the virus added urgency to the vaccination debate….Vice President Cheney has speculated that the threat from Iraqi President Saddam Hussein may necessitate mass vaccination."[779] While not warning Iraq would likely launch a smallpox attack on America, the association of these two developments strengthened the president's narrative that Hussein presented an urgent and direct threat to Americans.

However, the frame was also undercut more than any other in the three papers' coverage, reflecting the direct charges made by Bush's opponents that the president had insufficiently made the case that Iraq was truly an urgent and immediate threat. The *Post*, in an article focused on the arguments of war critics, quoted Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) asserting, "If there is a clear and present danger to the United States and an immediate threat, obviously the president has the right to act and should act, but that is not what we have here."[780] Those with knowledge and experience on national security were utilized occasionally by journalists to make Bush's frames appear less compelling: one post-speech article noted the address' "effect was to amass evidence – much of it

[778] "Excerpts From Debate on Senate Floor on Use of Force Against Iraq." *The New York Times* October 8, 2002 and "Excerpts From House Debate on the Use of Military Force Against Iraq." *The New York Times* October 9, 2002.
[779] "Voluntary Smallpox Vaccination Urged; Offer to General Population Represents a Shift in Policy." *The Washington Post* October 5, 2002. See also Gregg, Judd. "Letting Citizens Choose Smallpox Vaccination." *The Washington Post* October 6, 2002.
[780] "Senate Debate Heated on Iraq Military Action; Democrats Urge Delay Until Security Council Vote." *The Washington Post* October 5, 2002.

inconclusive in the eyes of security experts – that painted Iraq as a clear and present danger to the United States and a firm ally of al Qaeda."[781] Still, such critiques might be perceived as far weaker in affecting readers than the emotional and dramatic content of the urgent and unique threat frame. For instance, at the conclusion of a *Tribune* article entitled "CIA details Iraqi capabilities: Chemical, germ programs strong," reporter Stephen J. Hedges cited Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin saying "the report does not tell the whole story…some information that could weaken the Bush administration's case against Iraq remains classified."[782] This might undermine the president's case, but was also vague and unspecific, lacking the same rhetorical force of the claims of Iraq's dangers.

The president's opponents also systematically undercut his assertion that action against Iraq was a key component of the war on terror. Senator Kennedy explicitly made the case in congressional debate that going to war with Iraq would actually serve as a distraction and diversion of resources from the war on terror.[783] A *Post* article focusing on Senator Paul Wellstone's opposition to the war cited his view that the Bush strategy could "jeopardize the broader war on terrorism."[784]

Linking the Iraq situation to September 11th and military action as benefiting Iraqis were the least apparent frames, as they were on television. The 9/11 frame was seldom subverted in the coverage – it was exceedingly rare for a source to clearly state, "What is the connection between 9/11 and Iraq and Saddam Hussein? None," as Representative Silvestre Reyes (D-TX) did during the House debate on the Iraq

[781] Milbank, Dana. "With Congress Abroad, Bush Targets a Doubtful Public." *The Washington Post* October 8, 2002.
[782] Hedges, Stephen J. "CIA details Iraqi capabilities." *The Chicago Tribune* October 5, 2002.
[783] "Excerpts From Senate Debate on Authorization to Use Force Against Iraq." *The New York Times* October 5, 2002.
[784] Dewar, Helen. "For Wellstone, Iraq Vote Is Risk But Not a Choice; Principles May Be Costly in November." *The Washington Post* October 9, 2002.

resolution as transcribed in the *Times*[785] or Bush's "repeated attempts to connect Iraq to 9/11 through innuendo and implication erode the administration's credibility" as Representative Kucinich was quoted as saying in the *Post*.[786] Journalists did not independently challenge the president's assertion that September 11th helped inform the current conflict with the Iraqi regime.

The perspective that the Iraqi people would benefit from a war appeared more times than it was undermined in the *Times* and the *Post*, and was sometimes echoed in extremely supportive tones: the *Post* quoted Arab scholar Fouad Ajami of Johns Hopkins University predicting, "We shall be greeted, I think, in Baghdad and Basra with kites and boom boxes."[787] Such an assertion was balanced, however, by a more pessimistic view in some opinion pieces focused on how war with Iraq was unlikely to produce democracy and improve the lives of Iraqis as the president had claimed.[788] The frame met with failure in the *Tribune*, subverted in the coverage more often than it appeared. Entire articles both objective, such as "Experts foresee an Iraq in chaos" and "In Baghdad, a call to arms," and opinion-based, like "After Hussein, Thomas Jefferson?" brought to bear the perspectives of Middle East experts that a peaceful, democratic outcome in Iraq was highly unlikely.[789] Often appearing alongside these views were arguments that the Bush

[785] "Excerpts From House Debate on the Use of Military Force Against Iraq." *The New York Times* October 10, 2002.
[786] DeYoung, Karen. "Bush Cites Urgent Iraqi Threat; Seeking Support for Resolution, President Urges U.S. to Act With 'One Voice.'" *The Washington Post* October 8, 2002.
[787] Von Drehle, David. "Debate Over Iraq Focuses on Outcome; Multiple Scenarios Drive Questions About War." *The Washington Post* October 7, 2002.
[788] Telhami, Shibley. "A Hidden Cost of War on Iraq." *The New York Times* October 7, 2002; Kristof, Nicholas D. "The Stones of Baghdad." *The New York Times* October 4, 2002; LaFeber, Walter. "Contradiction: Alliance With the Option to Act Alone." *The Washington Post* October 6, 2002; Gerges, Fawaz A. "Illusions of Iraqi Democracy," *The Washington Post* October 8, 2002.
[789] Hundley, Tom and Bob Kemper. "Experts foresee an Iraq in chaos." *The Chicago Tribune* October 6, 2002; Torriero, E.A. "In Baghdad, a call to arms." *The Chicago Tribune* October 8, 2002; and Moseley, Ray. "After Hussein, Thomas Jefferson?" *The Chicago Tribune* October 6, 2002.

administration had insufficiently planned for a post-war Iraq, making a positive transformation even less likely.[790]

The *Tribune* gave more attention to the "other methods failed/last resort" frame compared to the other papers – it was the second most likely frame to appear, compared to the third for the *Post* and *Times*. This frame was also treated far more favorably in the pages of the *Tribune* than the east coast papers. As the *Tribune* covered the reactions of the international community to Bush's speech, reporters noted that it was the president's contention that war would only be a last resort and was not inevitable that drew the most praise from foreign leaders.[791] Additionally, the newspaper editorially praised the war resolution as an encouragement to President Bush to pursue diplomacy even more aggressively and effectively, making an actual military conflict appear less likely.[792]

In the *Times*, the president's characterization of war as a last resort was undermined more often than it appeared, reflecting prominent challenges by Bush critics like Senator Robert Byrd who asked in debate, "Why is war being dealt with not as a last resort but as a first resort?"[793] Representatives of fellow U.N. Security Council nations like France echoed such sentiments. French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin was quoted in the *Post* expressing "We are against unilateral preventative action…because we believe that using force can only be the last resort," implying this was not the White House's position.[794] Overall though, in the *Times* and the *Post*, the frame was the third most likely to appear. After Congress passed the authorization of the use of force, the

[790] For examples, see Ignatius, David. "Possibilities of a New Iraq." *The Washington Post* October 6, 2002.
[791] Marshall, Tyler. "World gives Bush mixed reaction to Iraq speech." *The Chicago Tribune* October 9, 2002.
[792] "What the war resolution means." Editorial. *The Chicago Tribune* October 11, 2002.
[793] "Excerpts of Speeches Made on Senate Floor Regarding Resolution on Iraq." *The New York Times* October 4, 2002.
[794] Lynch, Colum. "U.N. Official May Delay Iraq Search; Arms Inspector Cites Debate on U.S. Plan." *The Washington Post* October 4, 2002.

Post noted that the Bush administration had quelled some of the criticisms in the legislature by making clear war was not inevitable or imminent. If the White House had successfully convinced Congress of this, it seemed that it had also convinced the media. A *Post* news analysis piece encouraged the perception that war could be avoided through the journalist independently contrasting the current circumstances with the first Gulf War, asserting, "unlike 1991, passage of the resolution does not mean a war is imminent."[795]

In print over this week in October, Democratic members of Congress were the most common critics of the president's policy. In the *Times*, extensive quotes appeared from opponents of the Iraq resolution including Senator Kennedy, Representative Stark, and Senator Jim Jeffords (I-VT).[796] Still, the Democratic Party was portrayed as divided and at odds over the issue, because several party leaders were so vocal in their support for the president. One article described Senator Daschle's prediction that the resolution would "win with broad bipartisan support and that he would probably vote for it even without restrictions that he personally favors."[797] Even though the *Times* frequently relayed the arguments of war opponents, they also published stories that matter-of-factly discussed how unlikely it was that these critics would ultimately be able to derail the administration's plans. Additionally, balanced coverage norms sometimes meant that journalists covered both the pro-war/pro-Iraq congressional resolution position and the views of those critical of the content of the resolution or the president's tactics. These might include those supportive of military action, but who wanted to push for more

[795] Kessler, Glenn. "A Muscular First Step; Bush Gains Freedom, Negotiating Power." *The Washington Post* October 11, 2002.
[796] Marquis, Christopher. "Missile Crisis Cited to Make Opposite Points." *The New York Times* October 8, 2002; "Excerpts From House Debate on the Use of Military Force Against Iraq." *The New York Times* October 10, 2002; and "Excerpts From the Debate in the Senate on Using Force Against Iraq." *The New York Times* October 9, 2002.
[797] Cushman, Jr., John H. "Daschle Predicts Broad Support For Military Action Against Iraq." *The New York Times* October 7, 2002.

international cooperation and alliances before it began. This form of objective coverage bypassed articulation of anti-war viewpoints altogether.

As Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston (2007) argue, modern journalists confuse objectivity with power, which means "policies lacking opposition from opponents deemed capable of actually influencing or defeating them are seldom given sustained public attention by the press."[798] What I found here is that those perspectives were routinely covered, but often in such a way as to diminish their importance. For example, the *Times* on October 4th described "an outnumbered but determined group of Democrats and some Republicans" trying to "buck the bipartisan sentiment" for passing the authorization of the use of force. In the same article, the journalist reported that once Representative Gephardt appeared in a Rose Garden ceremony supporting Bush's position, "dissenters were pushed to the margins." Further along, Senator Byrd was described as "thundering in a nearly empty chamber,"[799] a portrayal that made the senator appear ineffectual and his criticism futile. The *Tribune* on October 9th had a different take, with a front-page headline describing "scores" in Congress opposing the war, making the opposition seem substantial and varied.[800] Yet on the following day, a *Tribune* article entitled "Anti-war rallies fail to draw crowds" downplayed the size and intensity of the war's opponents.[801]

Psychological/Personal/Character Focus

[798] W. Lance Bennett, Regina G. Lawrence, and Steven Livingston, *When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 179.
[799] Mitchell, Alison. "Lawmakers Begin Push to Give Bush Authority on Iraq." *The New York Times* October 4, 2002.
[800] Zuckman, Jill. "Scores in Congress dissent over Iraq." *The Chicago Tribune* October 9, 2002.
[801] Schodolski, Vincent J. "Anti-war rallies fail to draw crowds." *The Chicago Tribune* October 10, 2002.

Some conventions of typical political news coverage did not hold up in the national security crisis context. Though the media tend to personalize issues (Bennett 2005) and engage in episodic framing that focuses on specific individuals rather than larger political forces (Iyengar 1994), the conflict between the United States and Iraq was seldom conveyed in print in October as primarily between individuals George W. Bush and Saddam Hussein. Members of the public sometimes injected this personalized angle into the coverage: for instance, many citizens interviewed by the *Times* along Interstate 80 speculated that because Hussein had sought to have George Bush Sr. killed, "personal vengeance…is almost certainly on the mind of the second President Bush."[802] Personalization was occasionally apparent on the nightly news as well: *CBS Evening News* used the heading "Showdown With Saddam" to introduce its stories about the president's push for military authorization in October. In totality though, the October coverage was less likely to focus on personal conflict between Hussein and Bush than was evident in the scandal coverage faced by President Clinton during the Lewinsky affair. The coverage rarely linked the president's psychological or character traits to Iraq policymaking, except for the occasional reference by critics to a "cowboy" mentality in the White House.

Making White House Strategy Transparent and Political Conflict

Other norms of coverage were more apparent. It was not uncommon for the newspapers to focus on administration tactics and strategy in covering the Iraq developments, as they might have for any domestic political news story. The *Times* noted, "Mr. Bush's speech caps a week-long effort to sell his case against Saddam

[802] Harden, Blaine and Peter Kilborn. "Nation's Memory of 9/11 Colors the Debate on Iraq." *The New York Times* October 6, 2002. The author of a letter to *The Chicago Tribune* on October 6th referred to "this crazy little personal war of his [Bush's]" ("Voices of the People." *The Chicago Tribune* October 6, 2002).

Hussein," conveying that Bush's stance on Iraq was similar to any other policy that needed to be "sold" to Congress and the public.[803] Dana Milbank of the *Post* wrote, "The divergence in views between ordinary Americans and their elected representatives indicates the administration has done an uneven sales job – and one that Bush aides said last night's address was meant to remedy."[804] The nature of the effort to "sell" the war was also addressed. The *Tribune* analyzed the timing, setting, and content of the speech according to how it fostered the administration's political strategies in an article entitled "Bush invokes past conflicts to make case."[805] A piece by Mike Allen in the *Post* detailing the role of the president's speechwriter Michael Gerson noted that the object of the October 7th address was to "scare people and reassure them at the same time."[806]

Further, even high-stakes national security issues were still covered by the media in terms of winning and losing political battles and partisan conflict.[807] When Congress passed the Iraq resolution, the *Times* described this as a "hard-won victory for Mr. Bush"[808] and noted "the size of the Democratic opposition was a major embarrassment for Richard A. Gephardt, the party's leader in the House."[809] Several articles also covered the Iraq issue in the context of the political problems it presented for the Democratic

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[803] Sanger, David. "He Cites Threat Posed to U.S. and Allies." *The New York Times* October 8, 2002.
[804] Milbank, Dana. "With Congress Abroad, Bush Targets a Doubtful Public." *The Washington Post* October 8, 2002.
[805] Tackett, Michael. "Bush invokes past conflicts to make case." *The Chicago Tribune* October 8, 2002.
[806] Allen, Mike. "For Bush's Speechwriter, Job Grows Beyond Words; 'Scribe' Helps Shape, Set Tone for Evolving Foreign Policy." *The Washington Post* October 11, 2002.
[807] Jacobs and Shapiro (2000) describe these news norms as such: "First, the polarization of Washington political elites and their strategies to manipulate the media and gain public support have prompted the press to increasingly emphasize or frame its coverage in terms of political conflict and strategy at the expense of the substance of policy issues and problems. Although news reports largely represent the general contours of American politics, the media's organizational, financial, and professional incentives prompt them to exaggerate the degree of conflict in order to produce simple, captivating stories for their audiences" (8).
[808] Mitchell, Alison and Carl Hulse. "A Lopsided Victory; G.O.P. Backing Is Solid – Democrats' Votes Are Sharply Split." *The New York Times* October 11, 2002.
[809] Firestone, David. "Democratic Foes of Resolution Are Pleased by Totals." *The New York Times* October 11, 2002.

Party. Reporters discussed how the possible war was hurting Democrats in the coming midterm elections, by shifting attention to national security issues on which they were perceived as weak and, for lawmakers supporting the president, engendering a backlash amongst the party's liberal base.[810] As presidents often use timing to pressure members of Congress to pass war resolutions by asking for authorization of force, for instance, just prior to an election as Bush did in October 2002 (Polsky 2009), the media magnify that pressure by publicizing the need for legislators to acquiesce.

More Detailed Coverage

The more detailed and extensive coverage in print meant that some critiques of Bush's frames were made more robust than they had appeared to be on the nightly news.[811] For example, when Senator Robert Byrd appeared on the broadcast networks, reporters tended to quickly convey solely his argument that Congress was abdicating its constitutional war powers and giving a "blank check" to the president. By contrast, the *Times* published an editorial piece by the senator himself in which he placed far greater emphasis on the president's lack of evidence: "I remain unconvinced. The president's case for an unprovoked attack is circumstantial at best" and "Bush has not made the case for attacking Iraq."[812] These arguments were far more damaging to Bush's framing efforts than concerns about insufficient checks on presidential power because they directly undercut his narrative that Iraq represented an immediate and urgent threat. Even amongst the newspapers, the level of detailed coverage varied. Unlike the *Times*, the *Post*

[810] Edsall, Thomas B. "Focus on War Talk Hampers Democrats; Fears Grow Over Money, Turnout." *The Washington Post* October 10, 2002.
[811] Less often, the more detailed coverage supported the president's frames. For instance, a lengthy excerpt from Senator Jim Bunning's statements during debate recounted all of Bush's frames more than once, with the exception of military action as benefiting Iraqis ("Excerpts From Senate Debate on Authorization to Use Force Against Iraq." *The New York Times* October 5, 2002).
[812] Byrd, Robert C. "Congress Must Resist the Rush to War." *The New York Times* October 10, 2002.

did not provide lengthy transcripts of the congressional debates on the Iraq resolution, and thus did not provide as much space in its pages for war opponents to directly contradict the president's narratives. The lack of such excerpts from the debates contributed to the more positive tone to the *Post*'s coverage in comparison to the *Times*.

The *Times* also focused on a letter to Congress from the CIA that the paper noted did "not support the White House's view that Iraq presents an immediate threat to the American homeland and may use Al Qaeda to carry out attacks at any moment."[813] This letter was only mentioned on the nightly news during a ten second-long story on *ABC Evening News* that gave little indication of the document's content.[814] The *Post* publicized the CIA's contention that Hussein was far more likely to attack the U.S. (or aid terrorists in doing so) if the U.S. launched a military campaign against Iraq. The article claimed this appeared "to suggest that an attack on Iraq could provoke the very thing the president has said he is trying to forestall," directly disputing Bush's frame.[815] The same piece also notified readers that "an increasing number of intelligence officials…are concerned the agency is tailoring its public stance to fit the administration's views," raising doubts about the White House's corroborating evidence. An article in the *Post* discussed the accusations Hussein was sending checks to the families of suicide bombers, as was covered in an aforementioned *NBC Nightly News* story, but in print, space was allocated to Palestinian leaders' rebuttals that, along with other Arab nations, Iraq was merely "offering money for all the people who suffered

[813] Gordon, Michael R. "U.S. Aides Split on Assessment of Iraq's Plans." *The New York Times* October 10, 2002.
[814] *ABC Evening News*, October 9, 2002.
[815] Priest, Dana. "Analysts Discount Attack By Iraq; Counterattack Is Called Possible." *The Washington Post* October 9, 2002. The letter's content was also covered in VandeHei, Jim and Juliet Eilperin. "Congress Passes Iraq Resolution; Overwhelming Approval Gives Bush Authority to Attack Unilaterally." *The Washington Post* October 11, 2002 and Kinsley, Michael. "War for Dummies." *The Washington Post* October 11, 2002.

from the Israeli occupation."[816] This view was not given as much attention as the charges against Iraqi authorities, but more questions were raised about the story than on television. Further, the report placed the controversy in the context of the contentious Middle East conflict, where many Americans might find it harder to discern clear allies and enemies.

The print coverage of Iraqi exiles that supported the president and war was schizophrenic. At times, exiles and members of the Iraqi National Congress were called "nation-builders" and depicted as eagerly "planning for the future."[817] At other points, doubts were expressed about the ability of such individuals to be future leaders: "A number of State Department officials, particularly skeptical about [Ahmed] Chalabi, question whether Iraqis who have spent decades in exile can connect with Iraqis who stayed behind."[818] The *Tribune* noted that the Iraqi National Congress was a group "plagued by infighting, incompetence and suspicions of corruption."[819] Such content may have contributed to skepticism that the administration had adequately planned for a post-Hussein Iraq.

24 Hour News Network Coverage, Post-Speech Through October 8, 2002: "Balanced" Coverage, Of A Sort

[816] Moore, Molly. "Israel Ties Iraq to Palestinian Payments; Alleged Intermediary Arrested; Papers Released Purported to Prove Transactions." *The Washington Post* October 11, 2002.
[817] "The Day After Saddam; Five Iraqis Who Are Preparing to Rebuild Their Homeland." *The Washington Post* October 6, 2002 and Ignatius, David. "Possibilities of a New Iraq." *The Washington Post* October 6, 2002.
[818] "Iraqi Groups Push for Interim Government; Leaders Say U.S. Lags in Postwar Planning." *The Washington Post* October 4, 2002.
[819] Hundley, Tom and Bob Kemper. "Experts foresee an Iraq in chaos." *The Chicago Tribune* October 6, 2002.

Table 7.5

Frames	**Appearances**[820]		**Undermined**[821]	
October Frames	CNN	Fox News	CNN	Fox News
Linked to 9/11	14	15	4	7
Iraq connected to terrorism	26	30	18	10
Saddam/Iraq evil/untrustworthy	55	45	2	0
Iraq unique/immediate threat	131	151	65	61
Other methods tried/war last resort	68	51	35	20
Will benefit Iraqis	11	2	20	6

President Bush's assertion that Iraq was a unique and immediate threat to the nation was the most prominent frame on the cable news networks, as it was in the other forms of media. It was also less likely to be disputed on cable news than in print, although Fox News treated the frame more favorably than CNN. Furthermore, CNN was far more critical than Fox News of the president's linking Iraq to terrorist activities. Fox News also was less prone to challenging Bush's assertions that other methods had failed and war would be a last resort. Overall, the last resort frame fared better on 24-hour news networks than in print, particularly in contrast to the *New York Times*. The more supportive coverage of some key Bush frames in cable news transcripts might in part be related to the shorter time period analyzed – with more distance from the speech,

[820] I analyzed the transcripts for all available CNN and Fox News programming from immediately after Bush's speech concluded through the entire following day of October 8th. "Appearances" of a frame in the 24-hour news networks analysis were counted as the number of sentences that conveyed or supported that particular frame, as these programs were analyzed from written transcripts of their content.

[821] "Undermined" stands for the number of sentences that contradicted or opposed the substance of Bush's frames.

newspapers were likely to explore various avenues of criticism and include the analysis of opponents.

Cable news networks and their broadcast style of juxtaposing the views of left- and right-leaning hosts and/or guests on programs illustrated the constrained parameters of the debate on President Bush's Iraq narratives. A strong conservative supporter of the president and his frames would often appear alongside a Democratic elected official with some criticisms of Bush's strategies (such as a failure to build a broad international coalition, asking for too expansive a resolution from Congress, etc.) but not a fundamentally antiwar stance. Examples of such Democratic Party guests on Fox News included Senator Debbie Stabenow (MI), Senator Jon Corzine (NJ), and Representative Brad Sherman (CA).[822]

Outright war opponents were more prominent on CNN, which featured interviews with Representative Kucinich, Atlanta Journal-Constitution editor Cynthia Tucker, Representative Mike Thompson (D-CA), and Senator Byrd. As in print, Byrd's opposition to the war was fleshed out far more fully in his appearance on Larry King Live on October 7th than on nightly news broadcasts that only presented his presidential power run amuck argument. However, clear antiwar politicians were at times discredited, particularly on Fox News. Brit Hume on October 8th declared on-air: "Reaction to President Bush's speech on Iraq last night might be summed up this way. The Iraqi

[822] As evidence of the narrow spectrum the debate was presented on, Stabenow was presented alongside Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas on Greta Van Susteren's October 8th program, Corzine was paired with Senator Conrad Burns of Montana on her October 7th show, Sherman appeared on Hannity and Colmes with Rep. J.D. Hayworth of Arizona, all Republicans who were very strong supporters of the president's frames. There were some antiwar voices on Fox News however, such as Ohio Senator Marcy Kaptur, Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown, and protester leader Nathan Britton of California Peace Action. Alan Colmes raised some questions and criticisms of the war, but admitted on October 7th, "But I struggle with under what conditions, then, could I support a war?" Paul Begala, representative of the left on CNN's Crossfire also did not provide a strong antiwar position on the show's October 8th installment.

government didn't like it and neither did Democratic Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia."[823] CNN's Paula Zahn cited 75% of Americans as supporting war if the president decided to take military action, and then asked Representative Kucinich, "Do these statistics make you feel out of step with the American public?"[824] This demonstrates that 24-hour news networks are prone to what Bennett (2005) terms "official domination," the tendency for much of the news to be extremely reliant on the statements and information provided by government officials. Cable news outlets are more likely to confine themselves to the parameters of political debate going on amongst political elites, in contrast to partisan blogs, which are more willing to stake out a less mainstream position.

The day after the speech, CNN presented content from numerous reporters stationed around the globe, providing responses to the president's address from Jerusalem, Moscow, Egypt, London, and Baghdad. The president's frames were frequently undermined in assessing the reactions from these locations, though as previously noted, some challenges, such as those from the Iraqi regime itself, might not be considered entirely sound. Where international leaders and publics were cited supporting the president's frames, it was typically voicing relief and backing for Bush's depiction of war as a last resort and not inevitable. However, this frame might also then subvert the president's efforts to build support for military action, by making it appear improbable.

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[823] Hume, Brit, Wendell Goler, Major Garrett, Bret Baier, Claudia Cowan, Adam Housley. October 8, 2002, 6:00 pm. Fox Special Report with Brit Hume: Political Headlines. Fox News Network.
[824] Zahn, Paula. October 8, 2002, 7:00 am. CNN American Morning with Paula Zahn: Interview with Dennis Kucinich. CNN.

As in the Lewinsky scandal case, 24-hour news networks were home to more extreme rhetoric and views on the potential war than print or the nightly news. Two Fox News program hosts, John Gibson and Greta Van Susteren, referred to Saddam Hussein as "the butcher of Baghdad." Sean Hannity's persistent means of questioning antiwar guests was to ask, "what if you're wrong" and Hussein "gets that weapon and he uses it?"[825] On both the October 7th and 8th editions of Hannity and Colmes, commentators raised the possibility the major broadcast networks had not shown the president's speech due to liberal media bias, although host Alan Colmes countered it seemed to be a conscious White House strategy to hide the speech from the public, lest people recognize it contained nothing new.[826] Bill O'Reilly proclaimed Hussein to be "an extremely dangerous man, much more so than even Osama bin Laden, who is either dead or incapacitated,"[827] a charge that was not found elsewhere in the coverage. On the same program, O'Reilly also declared Hussein was "training terrorists to blow up Jewish babies in Israel."

Hosts and commentators on CNN who might be perceived as objective journalists were also prone to use strong rhetoric backing the president's frames. Analyst Jeff Greenfield on CNN reacted to the speech by saying, "What I was thinking about – and this is how the White House would like to think about it, I'm sure – is suppose someone were trying to give a speech urging the international community to stop Hitler in 1935 or

[825] Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. October 8, 2002, 9:20 pm. Hannity & Colmes: Interview with Marcy Kaptur. Fox News Network. On October 7th, Hannity explicitly used this "what if you're wrong?" question six times during his interview with antiwar protest leader Nathan Britton.
[826] Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. October 8, 2002, 9:31 pm. Hannity & Colmes: Interview with Bruce Shapiro, Brent Bozell. Fox News Network and Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. October 7, 2002, 10:00 pm. Hannity and Colmes: Interview with Dick Morris. Fox News Network.
[827] O'Reilly, Bill. October 7, 2002, 8:37 pm. The O'Reilly Factor: Interview with Linda Chavez, Robert Reich. Fox News Network.

1936…that was the tone of this."[828] Connie Chung told war critic Representative Mike Thompson during his appearance on her program, "it sounds almost as if you're asking the American public, believe Saddam Hussein, don't believe President Bush."[829] Content echoing Bush's frames in impassioned, vigorous terms, then, enjoyed an established presence on both news networks.

Blog Coverage of September & October 2002: Reliable Defenders and Defamers

Table 7.6

Frames	**Appearances[830]**		**Undermined[831]**	
October Frames	Daily Kos	Instapundit	Daily Kos	Instapundit
Linked to 9/11	0	2	0	1
Iraq connected to terrorism	11	18	19	10
Saddam/Iraq evil/untrustworthy	1	39	1	5
Iraq unique/immediate threat	5	42	38	8
Other methods tried/war last resort	8	38	45	9
Will benefit Iraqis	0	38	1	8

[828] Brown, Aaron, Deborah Feyerick, Kelli Arena, Candy Crowley. October 7, 2002, 10:00 pm. NewsNight Aaron Brown: Bush Declares Saddam a Tyrant in Speech to American Public; Senate Argues Along Party Lines Over Iraq Resolution. CNN.

[829] Chung, Connie, William Schneider, Bob Franken, Jane Arraf, Robin Oakley, Jim Bitterman. October 7, 2002, 8:00 pm. Connie Chung Tonight: Bush Addresses Nation. CNN.

[830] For this time period, I analyzed thirty-six posts that were part of the Daily Kos's "War Archive" (featured on their site at http://www.dailykos.net/archives/cat_war.html). The blog's comprehensive archive only goes back to posts from 2004. I looked at all of the included posts about President Bush and the Iraq War or simply the war itself from the months of September and October 2002. On the Instapundit blog (Instapundit.com), a full archive was available and so I was able to analyze all posts dealing with the president and/or the war from September and October of 2002, which came to a total of 186 posts. The analysis included only the content of the posts as it appeared on the blogs, and not any content or sites that would result from following links embedded in the posts. However, these blogs at times presented portions and quotes of others' work on the web and so the analysis might be perceived as including more than merely the perspectives of the two primary blog authors. "Appearances" of a frame in the blog analysis were counted as the number of sentences that conveyed or supported that particular frame.

[831] "Undermined" stands for the number of sentences that contradicted or opposed the substance of Bush's frames.

Unsurprisingly, the blogs, as representatives of partisan new media outlets, privileged or subverted the president's frames depending on their ideological leaning. Instapundit.com, written by libertarian law professor Glenn Reynolds, whose writings are popular in the conservative community, was a consistent and outspoken source of support for a possible war with Iraq in this time period.[832] DailyKos.com's "War Archives" posts, written primarily by site founder Markos Moulitsas Zuniga, nearly all dispelled the president's narratives and expressed an unwavering antiwar position.[833]

Though the opinion-oriented blogs might be reliable supporters or opponents of the war, the presentation or emphasis of certain frames did not always mirror that of the White House. For instance, although the president and most of the other media outlets I looked at gave the "urgent, unique threat" frame the most attention, Daily Kos did not. The left-leaning blog was most likely to discuss the connections the administration had sought to make between Iraq and terrorism, in part because the site appeared to find this the easiest Bush frame to dismantle. "Immediate, unique threat" was the frame most likely to appear on Instapundit, but the blog also gave outsized attention to the "benefit Iraqis" frame compared to both the president's October 7th address and the other coverage examined in this chapter. While partisan blogs could be expected to present an overall perspective that echoed or undercut the president's position, their means of doing so was less likely to be dictated by the administration's public statements than was the case for print and televised news.[834]

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[832] Of the 186 Instapundit.com posts analyzed, 123 could be categorized as presenting President Bush and/or his frames positively, two negatively, and sixty-one in a neutral manner.
[833] Of the thirty-six posts in the DailyKos.com War Archive, thirty-four presented President Bush and/or his frames negatively, two in a neutral manner, and zero positively.
[834] Part of this difference could be attributed to the longer time period analyzed for the blog content, as time went on, more attention might be given by the blogger to post-war issues as to whether democracy would take hold and Iraqis would truly benefit from an American military effort, etc.

Whereas a major component of the 24-hour news networks' coverage involved presenting guests and/or hosts with opposing perspectives on a potential Iraq War, the blogs only introduced the opposition's claims to immediately tear them down. On cable news, the presence of an actual representative of a contrasting view made it more likely that individual would be able to clearly articulate or dismiss the president's frames, and adapt to arguments being presented. However, in the blog format the opposing perspectives were disembodied and unable to defend their positions,[835] allowing bloggers to selectively present their opponents, usually in an unflattering light.

The blogs were less likely to reflect the views of political elites, in contrast to conventional media coverage.[836] Reading Daily Kos, the prevailing position of the left appeared to be clearly antiwar, but on television and in print, the coverage was much more emblematic of the official Democratic Party, where the mainstream stance was support for war with some reservations and criticisms of the president. Daily Kos asserted the president was deliberately lying to the public. An October 15th post read: "For the record, there are no known ties between Iraq and Al Qaeda, and all evidence suggests the two entities are fundamentally opposed (Al Qaeda is a fundamentalist organization, Hussein is vehemently secular)…So Bush will keep making stuff up, throwing his b.s. justifications out and hoping one of them, someday, sticks."

To an even greater extent than cable news networks, blogs were able to float theories and link to or excerpt other web-based content that might be viewed as

[835] Conceivably, the blog format allows opponents to refute these arguments in the comments section or on their own blogs or websites, but those were not analyzed here, nor might they attract a comparable level of interest or attention for a regular reader of the site.
[836] Such mainstream media tendencies include Bennett's (2005) aforementioned identification of "official domination of the news," and Zaller's (1993) one and two sided information flow theories, in which the media closely reflect political elite consensus or debate in coverage.

controversial or lacking substantiating evidence. At times, this directly aided the president's framing project. For example, on several occasions Instapundit asserted that many terrorists both foreign and domestic might be linked to Iraq: "home-grown terrorists might well be working hand-in-glove with Saddam Hussein and/or Al Qaeda; they tend to agree on a lot of things, like hating the Jews;"[837] "MAJOR BOMBING IN THE PHILLIPINES, which looks to be more of the same terrorist stuff. It seems to me that the fact that this stuff is accelerating as we get closer to an attack on Saddam suggests that there's a connection between him and Al Qaeda;"[838] and "ANOTHER TERROR BLAST, this time in Indonesia. And the tanker attack is now confirmed as terrorism. Saddam's calling in all his chits -- not that it'll do any good."[839] Like the partisan newspapers of the 19th century then, the president could expect conservative blogs to take some of his frames a step further, into more contentious and uncorroborated territory. In this instance, President Bush's narrative of Iraq supporting terrorism was fostered, but with claims the president himself would have difficulty promoting without engendering a good deal of controversy and pushback from opponents.

Instapundit also focused far more content on the flaws and extremes of the antiwar movement, on a par with no other content I examined with the exception of Fox News' *Hannity and Colmes*. On September 27th, the blog reported: "50,000 PEOPLE ARE DEMONSTRATING IN LONDON AGAINST WAR: Though the press accounts probably won't make a lot of this point, that's less than 1/8 as many as demonstrated against a ban on fox-hunting last weekend…I think that means the antiwar protests deserve less than 1/8 the attention."

[837] Instapundit, October 4th, 2002.
[838] Instapundit, October 17th, 2002.
[839] Instapundit, October 12th, 2002.

New media scholars have identified an "echo chamber" effect, where the Internet's popularity amongst the public for obtaining information and learning about politics may contribute to citizens largely interacting with only those who have similar political views.[840] For the readership of these two blogs, an audience associated with the same partisan leanings as the primary blogger of the site could be predisposed to reject or accept content promoting or challenging the president's frames. This would mean that on a site like DailyKos, many of the president's primary frames would not be articulated at all, and if they were, it would be to a largely unreceptive audience.

Daily Kos was also much more likely to employ a personalization lens to war coverage compared to print and televised news. The site frequently portrayed President Bush as a reckless warmonger driven by personal animosities, contending, "He wants war, dammit, and he won't let no lousy inspections get in the way."[841] Moulitsas argued Iraq was Bush's target rather than Kim Jong Ill's regime because "North Korea doesn't have oil, and it didn't try to kill Bush's daddy."[842] The blog was far more likely to attribute policy problems to fundamental character flaws, in a similar way to how mainstream media coverage focused on personal and psychological traits of presidents to help explain political scandals in the Grant, Nixon, and Clinton cases. Daily Kos routinely used the term "chickenhawk" to criticize administration members who had not served in the military or war but who relentlessly pushed for a military conflict with Iraq. But such connections between the personal and policy were virtually non-existent in the other outlets in October.

[840] Jeremy D. Mayer, *American Media Politics in Transition* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008).
[841] *Daily Kos*, October 12th, 2002.
[842] *Daily Kos*, October 19th, 2002.

Finally, the blogs embraced the role of traditional or "old" media critics, depicting themselves as watchdogs on conventional news outlets. Instapundit often referred to a perceived liberal bias at *The New York Times* ("*Wanting* war is one thing. Seeing it as necessary is another. People who can't tell the difference -- well, they belong on the editorial page of *The New York Times*, apparently"[843]), and argued that the media in general were giving an undeservedly large amount of attention to antiwar protests and not enough attention, for instance, to an October gathering of pro-war Iraqis in the nation's capital.[844]

Bush's Frames in February 2003: Protests and Inspections

I analyzed a second time period, in mid-February of 2003, to explore how President Bush's frames fared when the voices and views of antiwar figures were more prominent and some time had passed since his initial framing of the Iraq situation. The first source of criticisms at this time of the president's effort to go to war with Iraq came from the international community. On February 15th, the United Nations' chief weapons inspectors Hans Blix and Mohamed ElBaradei reported that progress had been made in their inspection efforts in Iraq, including surveillance flights and greater access to Iraqi

[843] Instapundit, October 1st, 2002.

[844] Sometimes a post would encompass both of these critiques, as in an Instapundit post from October 30th, 2002: "PASSIVE VOICE SAID TO BE KEY WEAPON IN JOURNALISTIC SUPPORT FOR ANTIWAR MOVEMENT: Well, that's my explanation for the headline over this puff piece in the *New York Times*, headlined 'Rally in Washington Is Said to Invigorate the Antiwar Movement.' As is typical for these pieces in the *Times*, the quotes are all from demonstrators who say their demonstration was a success. A more accurate headline would be 'Rally in Washington is Said by Ralliers to be Success.' Coming soon: 'Enron Accounting Said to Be Legitimate, Even Noble,' in a story interviewing only Enron accountants. *Of course* these people think their rally was a success. And of course the *Times* swallows it whole, because it *wants* the rally to look successful…can you imagine the *Times* giving this treatment to, say, a rally by the Second Amendment Sisters? Of course not. They'd have lots of quotes from people with impressive-sounding credentials saying that the demonstration was a terrible thing for America. Here, they might at least have quoted one of the pro-war Iraqi-Americans."

scientists, though Hussein's government had still fallen short of full compliance. Blix left room for varying interpretations of the headway, noting that "Iraqi concessions on substantive issues were 'less good' than he expected."[845] Opponents to military action like France and Germany seized on this report as further evidence that weapons inspections should be given more time, as opposed to pursuing military conflict. The second source of criticism came from citizens, both at home and abroad. On February 16th, 2003, global antiwar demonstrations took place in major cities across the world. Though military preparations were underway, major combat operations had not yet begun, and the possibility existed that widespread opposition might at least slow down the move to go to war.

Support from the international community was important for the administration in this period; these criticisms could not be entirely ignored or discounted. Public support for military action was higher if the American people believed the White House was working with allies and through institutions like the U.N. In the summer of 2002, even prominent Republicans leaders like Senators Richard Lugar and Chuck Hagel had urged Bush not to go ahead on Iraq without strong alliances.[846] In February, the administration was also still considering whether to introduce a second resolution to the U.N. Security Council to set a clear deadline for Iraq's disarmament with the threat of force if the regime did not comply. This indicated that the president and his team were not uninterested in or unaffected by the perspectives and actions of other nations and the public.

[845] "Last Week in the Iraq Crisis." *The Washington Post* February 16, 2003.
[846] Western, 198.

Nightly News Coverage February 2003: A Shift to War as Last Resort[847]

Table 7.7

Frames	**Appearances**			**Undermined**		
February Frames	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC
Linked to 9/11	0	0	0	0	0	0
Iraq connected to terrorism	0	0	0	0	2	0
Saddam/Iraq evil/untrustworthy	1	0	1	0	0	0
Iraq unique/immediate threat	1	2	0	0	2	2
Other methods tried/war last resort	5	4	5	7	7	10
Will benefit Iraqis	0	0	1	0	1	0

In February, there was a distinct shift on the nightly news away from emphasizing urgent, unique threat and toward discussing other methods failed/last resort. This transition was damaging for the administration on the major networks – all three presented more content undermining the president's assertions war was a last resort than supporting it.

The nightly news broadcasts all noted the very large numbers of protesters demonstrating at home and internationally. However, these programs did not portray the protesters as mainstream and diverse to the same extent as the newspapers. As such, the nightly news was more likely to cover protesters through a conventional lens applied to political demonstrations, where news portrayals are perceived to frequently run counter to protesters' goals and interests, particularly if their message threatens political or

[847] Using the Vanderbilt Television News Archives, I analyzed nightly news content from the three broadcast networks for February 15th – 18th, 2003.

economic elites.[848] Nightly news correspondents did note that the demonstrations included some who had never marched before, and ABC, for instance, interviewed a teacher and pediatrician attending the rallies, as a kind of testament to the ordinariness of participants.[849] However, particularly in covering protests in Europe, demonstrators were depicted as motivated by antipathy for the United States. Terry Moran opened ABC's February 15th broadcast by noting the European protests were "an enormous display of antiwar and, in some cases, anti-American sentiment." CBS reported protesters in Moscow burned an American flag outside of the U.S. embassy.[850] NBC communicated, "Some of the largest demonstrations were in Europe, where anti-American sentiment and opposition to war appears to be growing."[851]

In a story at the end of its February 15th program, CBS News chose to focus on a particular group active in the antiwar protests, Code Pink. Reporter Russ Mitchell introduced the group as "a coalition of women who acknowledge they are radicals" who "are serious about their cause, but not afraid to mix their politics with white wine and Brie at a poster-making get-together in a posh Manhattan apartment on the eve of the demonstration." This segment associated the demonstrations as a whole with both extreme and elitist elements, in direct contrast to coverage in print. ABC, NBC, and CBS also all reported that Iraqi media and officials were covering the antiwar protests non-stop as a major blow and rebuke to the U.S. (NBC's Tom Brokaw described Iraq as

[848] Jackie Smith, John D. McCarthy, Clark McPhail and Boguslaw Augustyn, "From Protest to Agenda Building: Description Bias in Media Coverage of Protest Events in Washington, D.C.," Social Forces Vol. 79, No. 4 June 2001. As cited in Entman (2004), before the Iraq War began, coverage of demonstrations took the form of "framing protesters to accentuate their marginality and irrelevance to policy, undercounting their numbers, underplaying their substantive arguments, and focusing on the antics of the most outlandishly attired participants" (118). In much of the February coverage analyzed, the first and last of these points held true, but their numbers and arguments were not typically deemphasized.
[849] *ABC Nightly News*, February 15, 2003.
[850] *CBS Evening News*, February 15, 2003.
[851] *NBC Evening News*, February 15, 2003.

"gloating" over the protests).[852] This conveyed to the viewer that the protests were adverse to the national interest and only aiding Saddam Hussein.

February Print Coverage of President Bush's Frames: More Negative, More Personal

Table 7.8

Tone of Stories	**NYT** Number of Stories	Percentage	**WP** Number of Stories	Percentage	**CT** Number of Stories	Percentage
Positive	4	8.3%	4	11.1%	5	18.5%
Negative	18	37.5%	10	27.8%	6	22.2%
Neutral	26	54.2%	22	61.1%	16	59.3%

Table 7.9

Frames	**Appearances**			**Undermined**		
February Frames	NYT	WP	CT	NYT	WP	CT
Linked to 9/11	2	4	0	1	4	0
Iraq connected to terrorism	18	15	1	20	22	7
Saddam/Iraq evil/untrustworthy	22	23	40	4	1	0
Iraq unique/immediate threat	10	8	22	23	26	17
Other methods tried/war last resort	53	78	39	52	84	41
Will benefit Iraqis	17	7	9	30	7	15

[852] *ABC Evening News*, February 16, 2003; *CBS Evening News*, February 17, 2003; *NBC Evening News*, February 16, 2003.

In comparison to October, coverage in all three newspapers featured significantly less positive content for the president and his frames in February.[853] The *Times* and the *Post* also included more negative articles than three months prior, although the *Tribune*'s percentage of negative articles stayed roughly the same. All three newspapers provided support in editorials for the position of the United States in the United Nations that Iraq was in "material breach" of disarmament requirements and serious consequences including military intervention should result if compliance was not reached by a specific date.[854] The *Tribune*'s somewhat more positive cast was exemplified by its decision to publish an opinion piece by deputy national security adviser Stephen Hadley that read as a lengthy mouthpiece for the administration's last resort, Hussein as evil, and urgent threat frames.[855]

Where in October Bush's assertion that Iraq was an immediate and unique threat enjoyed by far the most coverage in the news, by February the print outlets no longer emphasized this frame. Instead, due to a confluence of factors, including the mass peace protests and negotiations within the United Nations, the newspapers focused on the perspective that other methods had failed and military action was being considered as a last resort. Not content to allow opponents to set the terms of debate, Bush surrogates also took to the press to push the president's themes in February. National Security

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[853] For all three newspapers, I analyzed all articles dealing with President Bush and Iraq, or just Iraq, from February 16th – 18th, 2003.

[854] "Reuniting the Security Council." Editorial. *The New York Times* February 18, 2003; "Sound and Fury." Editorial. *The Washington Post* February 16, 2003. This did not necessarily entail that the newspapers supported an immediate move to go to war with Iraq, but instead that Hussein would only be moved to comply if the threat of force was real and clear.

[855] Hadley, Stephen. "2 potent Iraqi weapons: denial and deception." *The Chicago Tribune* February 16, 2003. It should be noted that the *Post* and the *Times* were not immune from publishing similar pieces, directly from administration officials, at other points in the run-up to war. See for example Colin Powell's November 10, 2002 op-ed in the *Post*, "Baghdad's Moment of Truth" and Condoleeza Rice's piece in the January 23, 2003 edition of the *Times*, "Why We Know Iraq is Lying."

Adviser Condoleeza Rice, having appeared on two Sunday morning news shows, was also quoted in the papers taking the "other methods failed" frame a step further. She claimed the reluctance of some Security Council allies to back war was "playing into the hands" of Saddam Hussein, and U.N. policy was beginning to resemble that of appeasement of Hitler in the 1930's.[856] This analogy to World War II and its lesson that democracies could not appease dictators would be a familiar touchstone to the media and public; it had also been employed during the lead up to the 1991Gulf War.[857] By implication, failing to use force would be both perilous and immoral.

One of the difficulties for the president's assertions that Iraq was a unique and urgent threat by February was that there had been no real developments demonstrating the alleged threat level, limiting the media's ability to write and publish stories with this narrative as a central focus. The other methods failed/last resort frame, meanwhile, was one continually unfolding in early 2003, as Hussein's regime fell short of the administration's expectations on disarming. Casting Iraq as an immediate threat to the U.S. was also hurt by the passage of time in general, as questions emerged about how great a menace Hussein might be as months went by and military action would not occur prior to March.

Nor was President Bush the only political player able to shape news content on Iraq in the U.S. media. British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Bush's primary ally on Iraq, seemed to be shifting the framing focus in February away from urgent threat to Hussein as evil and untrustworthy. In response to the mass peace protests, Blair was quoted in the

[856] Bernstein, Richard and Steven R. Weisman. "NATO Settles Rift Over Aid to Turks in Case of a War." *The New York Times* February 17, 2003; DeYoung, Karen. "Rice Calls Security Council's Actions 'Appeasement.'" *The Washington Post* February 17, 2003.
[857] Entman, 76 and Kiewe, 211.

newspapers as stating that even if a million people marched against the war, "that is still less than the number of people who died in the wars he [Hussein] started."[858] Blair also added: "Ridding the world of Saddam would be an act of humanity. It is leaving him there that is inhumane."[859] A lack of support for war amongst the British people perhaps pushed Blair to highlight the frame with the most accord behind it. In an increasingly globalized media, the president may be forced to compete in shaping news coverage with other prominent and powerful world leaders who have their own agendas and priorities.

The portrayal of the president's frame that military action would benefit Iraqis and spread freedom and democracy varied greatly from newspaper to newspaper. All of these venerable print institutions had journalists traveling to Iraq to speak with people there, but resulting articles spanned a wide spectrum, depending on Iraqis' responses to questions and the journalists' own input. The mostly anecdotal evidence emerging from these Iraqi/reporter encounters meant the White House's predictions Iraqis would welcome the U.S. and regime change received inconsistent support in February. It is noteworthy that the print outlets had the resources and motivations to send correspondents to Iraq to interview citizens directly, in contrast to several other outlets analyzed that instead relied on outside experts or conjecture to venture at Iraqi public opinion.

In all three papers, the most frequent sources of war criticism to appear were peace protesters and the leaders and peoples of nations abroad, two groups often deeply critical of the last resort frame. By contending that the U.N. weapons inspections were

[858] Weisman, Steven R. "U.S. to Seek Tests to Show that Iraq Resists Disarming." *The New York Times* February 16, 2003.
[859] Cowell, Alan. "Blair, Increasingly Alone, Clings to Stance." *The New York Times* February 17, 2003; Witt, Howard. "U.S. nearing end of waiting game with UN." *The Chicago Tribune* February 16, 2003.

making progress and should be allotted more time, these Bush opponents co-opted the president's narrative, often using the exact wording, "war should be a last resort." This insinuated the administration's position was not, in fact, that war should only be entered when absolutely necessary, but that an impatient White House refused to give alternative, peaceful means a chance to rectify the problem. Yet as Lakoff (2004) argues in his work on cognitive science and framing, using the president's language might only serve to activate that original frame in a person's mind, thereby reinforcing it. The implications of this frame co-optation for the president's effort to make the case for war are therefore unclear.

Democratic critics of the president and the possible war all but disappeared from the newspapers on these February dates.[860] As most of the condemnation of Bush's frames came from the leaders of France, Germany, and other antiwar nations, and peace protesters throughout Europe and the United States, the president's framing project might not be perceived as quite so damaged as the undermining of his frames in print seems to illustrate. European leaders and antiwar protesters (at home and abroad) would be unlikely to garner the same standing with the American people as the president during a national security crisis.[861] However, the mass protests of mid-February were portrayed in

[860] This could be at least in part attributed to the lack of strong vocal criticism from the Democratic Party's leaders at this point in the lead-up to the war. The *Post* alone devoted an entire article to future presidential candidate Howard Dean's speech to Drake University where he directly contradicted nearly every one of the president's Iraq frames (Balz, Dan. "Dean Speech to Critique Plans for War on Iraq." *The Washington Post* February 17, 2003) and a forum for Democratic presidential candidates in Iowa where similar themes were stressed by Dean and Kucinich (Balz, Dan. "Democratic Hopefuls Spar Over Iraq War; Iowa Forum Highlights Divide in Party." *The Washington Post* February 18, 2003).

[861] In particular, an anti-France tenor was apparent during this time period in the news media. A *Tribune* column made reference to a *New York Post* headline that read, "How dare the French forget" accompanied by a photo of a Normandy military cemetery (Vaisse, Justin. "Dissecting the French connection to war." *The Chicago Tribune* February 18, 2003). White House officials actively encouraged this discrediting, as when Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld termed the antiwar nations part of "Old Europe," insinuating they were countries of declining relevance and power (Longworth, R.C. "When Rumsfeld speaks, Europe bristles." *The Chicago Tribune* February 16, 2003).

all three newspapers with a very strong emphasis on how diverse and mainstream those who flooded the streets to oppose war actually were. At times, the outlets took pains to point out these were atypical protesters. The *Times* reported, "Unlike the stereotypically scruffy, pot-smoking, flag-burning anarchists of the Vietnam era, yesterday's protesters came from a wide range of the political spectrum."[862] The same article also credited the protesters with making "nuanced arguments about the conflict," a far cry from customary press coverage of protests focused on the most outrageous behavior and casting them as a hodge-podge of incoherent interests and activists. The *Post* described New York protesters as "a generational and ethnic rainbow,"[863] and those in London as "a cross-section of modern British society."[864] The *Tribune* quoted one former Chicagoan teacher attending the Manhattan protest saying, "I'm not a lunatic fringe. I'm a registered voter. And that's who most of us here are."[865] Furthermore, the size and magnitude of the protests was often stressed. The *Tribune* noted that in Europe, the protests "may turn out to be some of the largest demonstrations in the continent's history."[866]

Psychological/ Personal/Character Focus & Making White House Strategy Transparent

President Bush's character and psychological traits became a much larger feature of the print coverage than was the case in October. President Bush was described as a bully with a personal obsession with war numerous times in February, largely due to quotes in the coverage from protesters. Again, personalized coverage stemmed

[862] McFadden, Robert D. "From New York to Melbourne, Cries for Peace." *The New York Times* February 16, 2003.
[863] Powell, Michael. "In New York, Thousands Protest a War Against Iraq." *The Washington Post* February 16, 2003.
[864] Frankel, Glenn. "Millions Worldwide Protest Iraq War; Coordinated Effort Yields Huge Turnout in Europe." *The Washington Post* February 16, 2003.
[865] Anderson, Lisa. "Peace cries ring out in many cities." *The Chicago Tribune* February 16, 2003.
[866] Hundley, Tom. "From London to Rome, crowds take to the streets." *The Chicago Tribune* February 16, 2003.

predominantly from the quotes and views of citizens, as opposed to being generated by journalists independently. A twelve-year-old protester in New York told the *Times*, "Bush is just a big bully and he's power hungry."[867] London's mayor declared the president to be "a stooge for oil interests," and cowardly for getting "his daddy to get him out of national service" yet sending soldiers to die in war.[868] A *Tribune* columnist writing on public opinion of Bush abroad contended, "Many French people consider military strikes to be a personal obsession of Bush's and the hawks in his administration."[869]

Another prominent element of the February coverage was articles making the White House's strategies and tactics to gain support for war transparent for readers. The *Tribune* labeled one subsection of a straight news piece about the wrangling in the U.N. "Push of Cabinet hawks," noting Vice President Cheney and Secretary Rumsfeld were not reluctant warriors, and that they would actually be happy to be freed from U.N. constraints. Fifteen articles in the three newspapers made reference to the accusation that the Bush administration was really motivated to go to war for oil, always originating from outside sources, including protesters, citizens abroad, Iraqis, and letters to the editor.

February 24-Hour News Network Coverage: Protesters Weigh In But President Still Looms Large

[867] Jacobs, Andrew. "Reminiscent of the 60's; Mainstream to the Core." *The New York Times* February 16, 2003.
[868] Frankel, Glenn. "Millions Worldwide Protest Iraq War; Coordinated Effort Yields Huge Turnout in Europe." *The Washington Post* February 16, 2003.
[869] McQueen, Anna. "Eat cheese, surrender monkeys!" *The Chicago Tribune* February 16, 2003.

Table 7.10

Frames	**Appearances**		**Undermined**	
February Frames	CNN	Fox News	CNN	Fox News
Linked to 9/11	0	3	0	1
Iraq connected to terrorism	15	13	28	13
Saddam/Iraq evil/untrustworthy	21	39	1	3
Iraq unique/immediate threat	25	49	51	42
Other methods tried/war last resort	89	133	120	51
Will benefit Iraqis	24	19	32	4

I analyzed transcripts from February 15th for CNN programming, and February 14th and 15th for Fox News programming.[870] The last resort frame became the most prominent frame on cable news in February, as in the other forms of media. However, Iraq as an urgent, unique threat was more apparent in comparison to the other narratives on the 24-hour news networks than in print. CNN's coverage did turn far more negative toward the president and his frames in February, largely due to the focus on protesters and their arguments against the impending war. As in print, several participants in the antiwar demonstrators decried a "rush to war" and called for war to only be a "last

[870] CNN makes all of its news content available on Lexis-Nexis via transcripts, so there were 169 pages of transcripts available for February 15th, the day of the major antiwar protests. Fox News only makes transcripts available on Lexis-Nexis for certain programs, and thus only 9 pages of transcripts were available for the 15th. I added to the Fox News analysis all available transcripts dealing with President Bush and Iraq or Iraq itself for February 14th as well, to add to the analyzed content. February 14th was selected because it included coverage of dissension in the U.N. over continuing inspections, and major antiwar protests were planned for the following day. Additionally, Fox News transcripts for weekdays are far more complete as most of the archived programs did not broadcast on weekends. However, the difference in dates does make it difficult to directly compare the content of CNN and Fox News here – CNN featured many more perspectives from protesters attending the demonstrations and content focusing on the protests generally than the Fox News transcripts did.

resort," appropriating the rhetoric of the president's frame. In response, the president did not abandon his usage of the last resort frame. A Bush spokeswoman on CNN offered an administration response to the protests, contending, "The president views force as a last resort. He still hopes for a peaceful resolution and that is up to Saddam Hussein."[871] The administration clearly counted on its authority and credibility as trumping its opponents' efforts at reframing its position in the debate.

Fox News' coverage of several key frames was more positive than on CNN and the newspapers analyzed, as evidenced by the relatively few times urgent threat, last resort, and benefits Iraqis were challenged.[872] Two generals appearing on Fox News programs as "military analysts" referred to an impending war as a "liberation" multiple times.[873] Fox News' transcripts did not include the same amount of space devoted to the views of protesters as CNN, but its February 14th coverage did recount the hostile remarks made by some international leaders in the U.N. toward the last resort frame.

Protest Coverage on CNN

CNN's coverage of the protests in cities around the world on the 15th placed a great deal of emphasis on the size of the demonstrations. Of all the descriptive terms used to describe the protests, the most common were those referencing the large turnout. The second most likely term to appear describing the protesters was that a number were first time protesters, or "not the usual suspects," as one correspondent noted. This was a

[871] Lin, Carol, Suzanne Malveaux. February 15, 2003, 12:00 pm. CNN Saturday: What Is White House's Reaction to Anti-War Protesters? CNN.
[872] Though Fox News' coverage of unique, urgent threat was comparable to that frame's treatment in *The Chicago Tribune*.
[873] O'Reilly, Bill. February 14, 2003, 8:13 pm. The O'Reilly Factor: Impact: Interview with Major General Paul Vallely. Fox News Network and Gibson, John, Tom McInerney, and Andrew Napolitano. February 14, 2003, 5:20 pm. The Big Story With John Gibson: Analysis With Gen. McInerney. Fox News Network.

common point of interest amongst reporters on the scene interviewing participants: time after time, protesters were asked whether they often protested or if the current circumstances brought them out to demonstrate for the first time. CNN's content insinuated that these "first-timers" were a far more notable and important source of dissent than citizens who regularly rallied against wars or other government policies. Matthew Chance, reporting from Berlin, noted, "[T]he people who are coming out today aren't the kind of, you know, generally the kind of radicals you might normally expect to see at antiwar marches…they're just normal people."[874] The cable network's personalities also frequently referred to the crowds as notably diverse, calling them a cross-spectrum of the population. This too would portray protesters in a more beneficial and credible light for viewers. CNN correspondents took special care to point to protesters with children in the military and those who lost family members on September 11th, to note how "unusual" some of these participants were.

However, particularly in covering the antiwar protests in Europe, CNN's content created an uneven picture of the attitude protesters held toward the U.S. On five occasions the demonstrations were cited as "anti-American" in character, and on six occasions not anti-American (though they might be then deemed anti-George Bush, etc.). For example, the same London protests were described alternately by one reporter as having "a very heavy anti-American tinge"[875] and by another as stating that protesters' "message is clear…it's not…anti-American."[876]

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[874] Lin, Carol, Whitney Casey, Hugh Williams, Matthew Chance, David Grange. February 15, 2003, 10:00 pm. CNN Saturday Night: Voices of Dissent. CNN.
[875] O'Brien, Miles. February 15, 2003, 7:00 am. CNN Saturday Morning: Half-Million Protesters Expected in London's Hyde Park. CNN.
[876] Whitfield, Fredericka, Maria Hinojosa, Suzanne Malveaux, Nic Robertson, Matthew Chance, Jim Bitterman, Richard Quest, Jerrold Kessel, Walter Rodgers, Mike Brooks, Alessio Vinci, Mike Boettcher. February 15, 2003, 11:00 am. CNN Live Event/Special: Pleas for Peace: Voices of Dissent. CNN.

Personalized coverage that focused on President Bush's character traits and how they informed his war policy was quite prominent, comparable to print, and largely stemmed from the protesters' assessments of the commander-in-chief. Bush was described on numerous occasions as a bullying figure lusting after war and world domination. Assertions that the administration's Iraq policy was really about oil appeared ten times on CNN, most frequently in interviews with protesters.

Controversial Content

As in October, cable news networks were the purveyors of more controversial content that could not be found in print or on the broadcast networks. Commentators on Fox News openly discussed the possibilities that both NATO and the U.N. might quickly become useless, ineffectual organizations that the U.S. would be better off leaving. While the nightly news and print pointed out that Blix's report about progress made in inspections in Iraq contradicted the arguments of Colin Powell and the Bush administration, Fox News was the only outlet to openly discredit Blix. Sean Hannity submitted to guest Lawrence Eagleburger, "You know, one of the most absurd things that Hans Blix said today, sir, he actually believed that the decree of Saddam Hussein that, well, Saddam has said that he has decreed that it is illegal now in Iraq to import weapons of mass destruction," which Eagleburger agreed was "laughable" and "ridiculous."[877] Nile Gardiner of the Heritage Foundation, interviewed by John Gibson, deemed it "yet another Neville Chamberlain moment from Blix" and called the report "spineless."[878] Commentator Fred Barnes called Blix "a wolf in sheep's clothing" and assessed his

[877] Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. February 14, 2003, 9:00 pm. Hannity & Colmes: Interview with Lawrence Eagleburger. Fox News Network.
[878] Gibson, John. February 14, 2003, 5:12 pm. The Big Story With John Gibson: Interview with the Heritage Foundation's Nile Gardiner. Fox News Network.

report to the U.N. as "insidious."[879] With such content across several different programs, Fox News coverage de-legitimized Blix as a source of criticism of the president's assertions that other methods to deal with Iraq had been tried and failed.

February Blog Content: Working the Fringes

Table 7.11

Frames **Appearances[880]** **Undermined**

February Frames	Daily Kos	Instapundit	Daily Kos	Instapundit
Linked to 9/11	0	2	0	0
Iraq connected to terrorism	7	14	26	3
Saddam/Iraq evil/untrustworthy	1	41	1	1
Iraq unique/immediate threat	9	25	20	1
Other methods tried/war last resort	9	80	31	10
Will benefit Iraqis	2	68	6	3

True to form, the February blogs provided no posts that contradicted their established pro or antiwar bent. President Bush's frames met with consistently negative treatment on Daily Kos but were seldom undermined on Instapundit. Where the two blogs did present neutral posts, the content typically focused on the practicalities of military strategy and how a possible war might unfold. Instapundit's support for the president's framing project was evident in its development of an even more robust

[879] Hume, Brit, Mort Kondracke, Fred Barnes. October 8, 2002, 6:41 pm. Fox Special Report with Brit Hume: Special Report Roundtable. Fox News Network.

[880] For this time period, I analyzed thirty-one posts that were part of the Daily Kos's "War Archive" featured on their site – the blog's comprehensive archive only goes back to posts from 2004. I looked at all of the included posts about President Bush and the Iraq War or simply the war itself from the month of February 2003. On the Instapundit blog, a full archive was available and so I was able to analyze all posts dealing with the president and/or the war from February 2003, which came to a total of 157 posts.

version of the Bush administration's urgent threat/"we cannot wait for the final proof – the smoking gun – that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud" frame. Reynolds titled several posts "Another smoking gun?" followed by evidence of the dangers posed by Iraq, concluding one such piece with: "How many of these do we need, anyway?"[881]

Daily Kos challenged the connections between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein, observing after the appearance of a bin Laden video where the terrorist leader deemed the Iraqi government full of "infidels" that "this statement backs everyone (including me) who has argued that OBL and SH HATE each other."[882] Whereas most mainstream media coverage conveyed that the antiwar protests, significant though they might be, were unlikely to actually halt the march to war, Daily Kos held out the possibility that war might be averted. The site did recognize that this was a long shot, but pointed to a scenario wherein Tony Blair was "probably the only person in this world that can still stop an Iraq invasion." "British protesters are probably our last hope to avert immediate war," according to the blog, because if Britain were to withdraw its support for military action, the U.S. could be compelled to pull back and potentially consider another course.[883] Instapundit, meanwhile, seemingly adopting Tony Blair's stance of emphasizing the moral arguments for war, placed a greater emphasis than any other outlet on the benefits Iraqis frame. News sources were cited which quoted Iraqi people expressing their support for the U.S. mission to "liberate" them from Hussein.[884]

The blogs continued to depict war-related issues from the fringes of public opinion. Daily Kos was most hostile of any media outlet toward the last resort frame, and

[881] Instapundit, February 6, 2003.
[882] Daily Kos, February 11, 2003.
[883] Daily Kos, February 17, 2003.
[884] Instapundit, February 26, 2003.

Instapundit was the most positive toward this narrative. Instapundit parodied the antiwar movement's claims by declaring, "this is the slowest rush to war we've ever seen."[885] As a means of deriding France's and Germany's critique of the other methods failed frame, Instapundit consistently discredited these countries and their position that inspections were working and needed more time. Not only were the governments wrong to oppose war, according to Reynolds, they were in part responsible for how urgent a threat Iraq had become. The blog cited reports that "German firms made up the bulk of suppliers for Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs" and often promoted the theory that "German and French governments are desperate to avoid war because they know that once a war is over we'll find out just how thoroughly in bed with Saddam they were."[886] France was linked to standing against a war because of their lucrative oil contracts with the Iraqi government.[887] This depiction of France and Germany culminated in discussions between blogger and blog readers in the comments section (then promoted by Reynolds to the main posts) about boycotting French and German products.[888] This reflects one of the distinctive features of the blog format, that readers help shape the content of the site and could enable collaborative efforts to take action, in this instance punishing nations for failing to support the administration's Iraq policy.

Protest Coverage

With the exception of noting numerous times how large they were, Daily Kos' War Archives did not discuss the mid-February protests around the world at great length. Instapundit's coverage of the protesters was consistently uncomplimentary to those who

[885] Instapundit, February 1, 2003.
[886] Instapundit, February 6, 2003.
[887] Instapundit, February 14 & 15, 2003.
[888] Instapundit, February 10, 19, & 24, 2003.

demonstrated, and the blog's depiction of the participants stood in stark contrast to that of television and print. In contrast to the portrayals of diverse protesters representing a cross-section of society, Instapundit's posts referred to them as "the usual people" and mocked the "theater types" who wore stilts, brought papier-mache puppets, and carried clichéd signs.[889] Even the size of the protests was disputed on the blog: responding to a reader question as to why he had not addressed the massive numbers of people at the demonstrations, Reynolds responded, "because I don't believe them. The issue of estimating protest numbers was done to death in the blogosphere last time around, and I don't see any reason to revisit it."[890] Those who received their information about the protests predominantly from Instapundit would come away with an entirely different perception of their make-up and magnitude than the conventional news consumer.

Personal/Psychological Coverage

On both blogs, content focused on President Bush's personal traits was relentlessly negative. The president was referred to as dishonest, unconcerned with what the public thought about the war, and desperate for the military conflict to occur. Even on Instapundit, Bush faced these depictions, although the blog would then typically go on to denounce or satirize such characterizations. It is further evidence, however, that even in media outlets friendly to the White House's position, war-related crises in the contemporary era do not produce coverage focused on psychology and character extolling the virtues of the president and his leadership.

[889] Instapundit, February 15 & 22, 2003.
[890] Instapundit, February 17, 2003.

Presidential Framing Successes, With Failures Varying By Outlet

In October, the prominence of the president's frames in the coverage indicates a degree of sameness and homogeneity in the coverage of a potential war with Iraq. Casting Iraq as an urgent and unique threat was the most common frame found across all forms of news media, except for Daily Kos. However, coverage subverting Bush's frames revealed substantial variations between different outlets. *The New York Times* and Daily Kos dismantled the president's narratives that Iraq had connections to terrorism and that war would be a last resort to a far greater extent than their fellow media organizations analyzed here. By contrast, when compared to other outlets, Fox News and Instapundit were far less likely to undercut the same two frames as well as Iraq as an immediate threat. All the media I examined, however, were highly unlikely to challenge the president's contentions that Hussein was an evil and untrustworthy leader. This was in keeping with the tendency of even the president's opponents to echo this narrative. Altheide and Grimes (2005) argue there was little coverage in major news outlets undercutting the administration's claims about the threat posed by Hussein and the regime's connections to terrorism, and contend that the press gave scant attention to voices that argued the inspections were working or that the aftermath of a war would be costly and difficult. However, in the time periods looked at here, although Bush's frames were certainly quite dominant, opponents did garner a significant amount of attention, especially in February.[891]

In totality, there was no single frame that all media outlets appeared to cover predominantly negatively in October, which might allow for a consistent point of

[891] David L. Altheide and Jennifer N. Grimes, "War Programming: The Propaganda Project and the Iraq War," The Sociological Quarterly Vol. 46, No. 4 (Autumn, 2005), 617-643

opposition to the war to emerge and gain greater political traction. The "benefit Iraqis" frame came close, but still appeared more times than it was undermined in the *Times* and the *Post*. It was also a frame of lesser emphasis in both the president's speech and in the subsequent media coverage, diminishing the significance of the challenges to it. A wider, more diverse media environment might make it less likely for opposition views to achieve a conspicuous, constant presence across many different outlets on par with that of the president. When war opponents are high-profile and vocal enough that they attract attention across many different news media platforms, as some foreign leaders and protesters were in mid-February, they come closest to challenging the president's framing advantages.

But sources of dissent in the news were also hampered by a lack of authority (especially comparable to that of the president) and the perception that they would be unlikely to actually stop the war. As one example, the cable news networks in February both covered Iraq Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz telling journalists that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction and the U.S. did not want to allow inspections to go on long enough to reveal that fact. Though the lack of weapons of mass destruction would prove problematic for the Bush administration later in the Iraq War, at this time Iraqi regime officials were in no way credible sources for the American news media in challenging the president's frames. And though international leaders expressed strong reservations about the White House's narratives, "the eventual failure to win support from the UN was insufficient to introduce serious challenges into the story, because the UN did not have, or was not perceived to have, the power to stop the administration from attacking

Iraq."[892] According to Entman (2004), journalists seek to help their audience predict what will happen in the future, so they focus their coverage on those with the greatest ability to affect events.[893] News norms then privileged presidential frames and challenges to those narratives were evident, but not presented in a coherent manner that accorded them similar import.

Some news organizations later expressed concerns that their coverage prior to the war might have been overly deferential to the White House's version of events. The *Times*, for example, published a May 26th, 2004 editorial in which the paper lamented that coverage "was not as rigorous as it should have been. In some cases, information that was controversial then, and seems questionable now, was insufficiently qualified or allowed to stand unchallenged."[894] However, for news organizations that did cover the case for war more negatively at the time, the White House was able to wield access to key policymakers in a punitive manner. Knight Ridder was producing much more critical coverage of the case against Hussein in the lead up to war than other mainstream media outlets, particularly pieces written by Washington bureau reporters Warren Strobel and Jonathan Landay. The Bush administration then sought to block Knight Ridder from attending official briefings, a move that Landay contended intimidated other journalists.[895]

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[892] W. Lance Bennett, Regina G. Lawrence, and Steven Livingston, When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media From Iraq to Katrina, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 21.
[893] Entman, 88.
[894] "The Times and Iraq." *The New York Times* May 26, 2004. The editorial singled out in particular articles written based on information provided to journalists by Iraqi exiles that often lacked corroborating evidence aside from their accounts, and that views contradicting or clarifying these versions of events were given far less prominence in the coverage.
[895] Finnegan, 42.

Public Opinion

Public opinion polls demonstrate that the foundation the president and his team had laid for making the case for the Iraq War was successful in shaping the views of Americans, even prior to the October 7th speech. A Newsweek poll in September 2002 found that 75% of the public believed Hussein was harboring al Qaeda terrorists and aiding them in developing chemical weapons.[896] Just days before the president's address, 79% of the public thought Hussein already had nuclear weapons or was close to obtaining them.[897] This same poll showed that 66% of the public thought Hussein played a part in the September 11th attacks. Several of the major arguments Bush made or insinuated were already established truths in the minds of a majority of citizens.

However, after the president's speech, the substantial presence of news content that treated his frames negatively identified here may have contributed to diminished public support for some narratives in mid to late October. For instance, a Pew Research Center survey on October 17th – 27th found that 40% of Americans worried "a great deal" about possible large numbers of Iraqi casualties and 30% said they worried "a fair amount." A majority of 51% said they worried "a great deal" about increased terrorist attacks in the U.S. resulting from a potential war. President Bush's assertions that military action would benefit Iraqis and help combat terrorism invited the counterarguments of opponents in the media who were persuasive in calling these frames into question. By late October 2002, the percentage of the public supporting military

[896] Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis, "Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War" Political Science Quarterly Vol. 118, No. 4, pg. 570.
[897] "Americans Thinking About Iraq, But Focused on the Economy: Midterm Election Preview," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, October 10, 2002, at http://people-press.org/report/162/americans-thinking-about-iraq-but-focused-on-the-economy, accessed February 23, 2011.

action had fallen 5% over the previous two months, to 55%, and there were increases in those opposed to military action, now 34% of the public.[898] Overall, though, the president maintained a solid majority in support of a possible war.

War critics in early 2003 also may have had an impact on public opinion. A February 24th - 25th CBS News poll showed that only 31% agreed that "Iraq presents such a clear danger to American interests that the United States needs to act now;" 62% felt that "the United States should wait and give the United Nations inspectors more time."[899] Polls conducted before and after Blix's mid-February report on inspections showed a decline in the percentage of Americans who believed Iraq was attempting to hide weapons of mass destruction, from 66% to 57%.[900] Still, that a clear majority backed this assertion illustrates the persistent success of the urgent threat frame. The percentage of Americans who believed the U.S. should go ahead with military action even without support from allies also went up to 38% from 26% in January 2003.

Months after the war had begun, the American public's persistent belief in information that had been revealed as false demonstrated the strength and tenacity of the Bush administration's framing of Iraq and the public's desire to cling to those initial interpretations. By mid-2003, 57% of the public continued to believe that Hussein was involved in September 11th, and 24% thought that weapons of mass destruction had already been found in Iraq.[901] Viewers of Fox News were the most likely to hold misperceptions about the war (including that there were links between Iraq and al Qaeda

[898] "Support for Potential Military Action Slips to 55%," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, October 30, 2002, at http://people-press.org/report/163/support-for-potential-military-action-slips-to-55, accessed February 23, 2011.
[899] Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis, 570.
[900] "U.S. Needs More International Backing," Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, February 20, 2003, at http://people-press.org/report/173/us-needs-more-international-backing, accessed February 24, 2011.
[901] Bennett, 2.

and that weapons of mass destruction had been found in Iraq) in comparison to other news sources, and a greater level of attentiveness for Fox viewers also resulted in a greater likelihood of holding such beliefs. Those who cited NPR/PBS as their primary news source were the least likely to hold such misconceptions.[902] Americans who obtained their information from print news were less likely to hold the misperceptions than those who relied on televised news sources. The disparity here also speaks to the more difficult task the president has before him in seeking to make the case for war: in a vast, fragmented media universe, some outlets will be far friendlier than others.

The Difficulties of Framing the National Security Crisis in the Contemporary Era

Though President Bush's framing successes in the Iraq case were substantial, it is also clear that the daunting media environment makes it more difficult than ever for presidents to achieve their framing goals in the national security crisis. Some of Bush's most favorable coverage came on the nightly news broadcasts, where simplistic storylines and visuals that gave the appearance of supporting evidence bolstered his frames. But is anyone watching those broadcasts? Ratings for the nightly news have precipitously declined over the past few decades, and even as more Americans turn to the web for information, blog content, for instance, could just as easily oppose as favor the president's narratives. Even blogs supportive of the administration's policy may still be unlikely to directly reflect the content of presidential frames and the president's framing priorities.

Where national security crises are covered via the conventional biases and lenses of the press, it may be to the detriment of the president's framing project. In this case,

[902] Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis, 583.

personal and psychological-oriented coverage, when it did appear, was nearly always an unfavorable portrayal of Bush's characteristics. Objective journalists may be unwilling to offer laudatory accounts of a president's poise, wisdom, and leadership when a president is making the case for war, but they are certainly willing to quote citizens detailing the president's flaws. Additionally, when the media exposes the political strategies and tactics the administration utilizes to build support for military action, they make the White House appear less motivated by genuine threats and dangers, and thus may make public support more tenuous. As Edwards (2009) maintains, "When politics is portrayed by the media as a game played by deceptive politicians, it is less attractive for a person to be influenced by the president's arguments."[903]

A key factor in achieving success in this hostile media landscape may be in the preparations. The Bush administration did not control the shift in news focus to criticisms of the last resort frame in February 2003, but it did not have to respond by suddenly crafting a narrative that inspections had failed -- in fact, this was a key component of the last resort frame that the White House had been pushing for months. As was the case with Clinton and the Lewinsky scandal, some of the most effective frames for President Bush were those that had been previously established. Just as Clinton was aided by the perception the scandal revolved around a personal mistake he was identified as susceptible to, Bush benefited from Hussein's public persona as a known and evil enemy. A key difference arises in that President Bush was able to lay a substantial groundwork for many of his narratives on Iraq well in advance. Linking Iraq to terrorism, a new post-9/11 foreign policy climate, and an unscrupulous regime that could not be contained were

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[903] George C. Edwards III. *The Strategic President: Persuasion and Opportunity in Presidential Leadership*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009, 73.

themes the president (and in some cases, even his predecessors) had been emphasizing for a significant period of time. In the scandal-crisis, the president may draw successfully upon preexisting frames, but may not have had control over the prior shaping and dissemination of those narratives.

Further, surrogates for the president, particularly those viewed as respected and credible on national security issues, can be enormously helpful to the president's effort to make the case for war, as Secretary of State Powell was for President Bush. In a scandal, the president must speak for himself and often engages in a unilateral framing project – were he to place that burden on his representatives, it could appear as though he were deflecting blame or hiding from responsibility. Though presidents involved in making the case for war may give the impression the foreign policy crisis has suddenly burst onto the scene, successful presidential framing in this context is the result of assembling a team of credible sources and a long-term, carefully calibrated message strategy.

24 Hour News Network Transcripts Analyzed

Chung, Connie, William Schneider, Bob Franken, Jane Arraf, Robin Oakley, Jim Bitterman. October 7, 2002, 8:00 pm. Connie Chung Tonight: Bush Addresses Nation. CNN.

Chung, Connie, William Schneider, Arron Brown, John King. October 7, 2002, 7:58 pm. CNN Live Event/Special. CNN.

King, Larry. October 7, 2002, 9:00 pm. Larry King Live: The View From the Hill: Reaction to President's Speech. CNN.

Brown, Aaron, Deborah Feyerick, Kelli Arena, Candy Crowley. October 7, 2002, 10:00 pm. NewsNight Aaron Brown: Bush Declares Saddam a Tyrant in Speech to American Public; Senate Argues Along Party Lines Over Iraq Resolution. CNN.

Costello, Carol and Rula Amin. October 8, 2002, 5:00 am. CNN Daybreak: Reaction From Baghdad to Bush's Speech. CNN.

Zahn, Paula. October 8, 2002, 7:00 am. CNN American Morning with Paula Zahn: Bush Promises to Lead Coalition to Disarm Iraq. CNN.

Harris, Leon and Jane Arraf. October 8, 2002, 10:00 am. CNN Live Today: Iraq Blasts Bush's Speech. CNN.

Phillips, Kyra and Jane Arraf. October 8, 2002, 1:00 pm. CNN Live on Location: Baghdad Reacts to Last Night's Bush Speech. CNN.

Blitzer, Wolf. October 8, 2002, 12:18 pm. CNN Live Event/Special: Interview with Mohamed Elbaradei. CNN.

Costello, Carol and Christiane Amanpour. October 8, 2002, 5:00 am. CNN Daybreak: Egypt Reacts to Bush's Speech. CNN.

Kagan, Daryn and Kelly Wallace. October 8, 2002, 10:00 am. CNN Live Today: Will Americans Respond to Bush Message? CNN.

Zahn, Paula. October 8, 2002, 7:00 am. CNN American Morning with Paula Zahn: Interview with Dennis Kucinich. CNN.

Phillips, Kyra, John King, and Frank Newport. October 8, 2002, 1:00 pm. CNN Live on Location: President, People Mull Iraq, Port Lockout. CNN.

Hemmer, Bill and Kate Snow. October 8, 2002, 7:00 am. CNN American Morning with Paula Zahn: Interview with Sen. Carl Levin. CNN.

Harris, Leon. October 8, 2002, 10:00 am. CNN Live Today:Will Inspectors be Allowed Access to Presidential Sites? CNN.

Blitzer, Wolf and Kate Snow. October 8, 2002, 12:28 pm. CNN Live Event/Special: Congressional Opinions Largely Unchanged After Bush Speech. CNN.

Blitzer, Wolf. October 8, 2002, 12:40 pm. CNN Live Event/Special: Interview with Cynthia Tucker, Mike Segal. CNN.

Blitzer, Wolf and Colin Powell. October 8, 2002, 12:54 pm. CNN Live Event/Special: Powell, Members of Congress Address Press. CNN.

Woodruff, Judy, Jen Rogers, Kate Snow, Rhonda Schaffler, Candy Crowley, Jeff Greenfield, John King. October 8, 2002, 4:00 pm. Inside Politics. CNN.

Begala, Paul and Robert Novak. October 8, 2002, 7:00 pm. Crossfire. CNN.

Costello, Carol and Robin Oakley. October 8, 2002, 5:00 am. CNN Daybreak: Reaction on Streets of London to Bush's Speech. CNN.

Phillips, Kyra, Kelly Wallace, and Jane Arraf. October 8, 2002, 1:00 pm. CNN Live on Location: World Contemplating Bush Speech. CNN.
Harris, Leon and William Schneider. October 8, 2002, 10:00 am. CNN Live Today: Bush's Iraq Speech Elicits Criticism, Support. CNN.
Hemmer, Bill and John King. October 8, 2002, 7:00 am. CNN American Morning with Paula Zahn: Mixed Reaction from Lawmakers to Bush Speech. CNN.

Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. October 7, 2002, 9:30 pm. Hannity and Colmes: Interview with J.D. Hayworth, Brad Sherman. Fox News Network.
Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. October 7, 2002, 9:41 pm. Hannity and Colmes: Interview with J.D. Hayworth, Brad Sherman. Fox News Network.
Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. October 7, 2002, 9:49 pm. Hannity and Colmes: Interview with Nathan Britton. Fox News Network.
Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. October 7, 2002, 10:00 pm. Hannity and Colmes: Interview with Dick Morris. Fox News Network.
Hume, Brit and Jim Angle. October 7, 2002, 8:00 pm. The O'Reilly Factor: Presidential Address. Fox News Network.
O'Reilly, Bill. October 7, 2002, 8:52 pm. The O'Reilly Factor: Impact. Fox News Network.
O'Reilly, Bill. October 7, 2002, 8:37 pm. The O'Reilly Factor: Interview with Linda Chavez, Robert Reich. Fox News Network.
Van Susteren, Greta. October 7, 2002, 10:30 pm. On the Record With Greta Van Susteren: Interview with Conrad Burns, Jon Corzine. Fox News Network.
Van Susteren, Greta. October 7, 2002, 10:41 pm. On the Record With Greta Van Susteren: Interview with David Gergen, Bill Kristol. Fox News Network.
Cavuto, Neil. October 8, 2002, 4:00 pm. Your World With Neil Cavuto. Fox News Network.
Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. October 8, 2002, 9:00 pm. Hannity & Colmes: Interview with Bill Bennett. Fox News Network.
Hume, Brit, Wendell Goler, Major Garrett, Bret Baier, Claudia Cowan, Adam Housley. October 8, 2002, 6:00 pm. Fox Special Report with Brit Hume: Political Headlines. Fox News Network.
Van Susteren, Greta. October 8, 2002, 10:00 pm. Fox on the Record With Greta Van Susteren: Interview With Debbie Stabenow, Sam Brownback. Fox News Network.
Gibson, John, Major Garrett, Brian Wilson, Heather Nauert, Andrew Napolitano. October 8, 2002, 5:00 pm. The Big Story With John Gibson: Political Headlines; Interview with Thad Cochran. Fox News Network.
Hannity, Sean and Alan Colmes. October 8, 2002, 9:20 pm. Hannity & Colmes: Interview with Marcy Kaptur. Fox News Network.
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Chapter 8: Conclusion

Presidential Framing and the News Media in Crises: Conflict and Cooperation

At the beginning of this study, I emphasized the importance of presidential framing in allowing the president to sustain authority in crises, moments when presidential power is of greatest consequence. Over a lengthy historical period, my cases demonstrate the central role that framing has played in allowing presidents to survive major scandals and make the case for military intervention. Framing is how presidents seek to disseminate their interpretations of events, how the news media convey information to readers and viewers, and how the public makes sense of political issues. Though presidents and observers have not always termed it as such, the construction of frames and the process of framing have been a continual part of American politics over time.

These cases also illustrate trajectories of presidential power and authority in American politics. The cases of Grant and McKinley show the difficulties of presidential framing in the "chief clerk" era of the presidency, contributing another means of understanding why the power of the presidency was more circumscribed in that period. The experiences of Johnson and Nixon illustrate the challenges of mastering the news media of the mid-20th century and the opportunities and difficulties of using the resources of the modern presidency toward this end. The cases of Clinton and Bush, meanwhile, demonstrate presidential framing and influence over news content as yet another source of immense presidential power over the past few decades.

My findings not only speak to the development of the presidency over time, but also to media consistency and change. Some of what we take for granted about the news

media in American politics is undermined by research analyzing news content in connection with presidential framing. Many features of media coverage commonly described as new and modern were evident in my 19th century cases, including an emphasis on presidential character and underlying psychological motivations and a focus on making the administration's political strategies transparent to the public. Blogs and cable news outlets today often appear more overtly partisan than some of the "partisan press" newspapers of the late 1800's. Though we might presume presidents in the partisan press era did not have to work very hard to shape the coverage of friendly partisan outlets, the cases of Grant and McKinley demonstrate just the opposite. Assumptions that scandals produce non-stop barrages of negative news stories are challenged when media coverage is analyzed through the lens of presidential frames. Further, even negative coverage of a president's personality or past might prove useful in a scandal context if it makes the chief executive's transgressions appear less shocking or significant.

I analyzed five different forms of news media in this dissertation: newspapers, newsmagazines, televised nightly news, cable news, and blogs. Each of these types of outlets had their own distinctive norms of covering the president and his frames, and many of these journalistic conventions altered over time. As the media landscape continually hurtles toward greater technological changes and development of new norms of news construction and consumption, fresh avenues of inquiry will be needed to assess the ability of modern presidents to frame crises for the public and the press. My analysis of blog content in the case of Bush and Iraq illustrated that even while ideological, web-based outlets may be reliable supporters or opponents of the president, they also may be

less likely to adopt presidential points of emphasis or echo presidential frames precisely as he intended. This independence from political elites in Internet-based political content raises important questions about the future of presidential framing in crises. Additionally, the web is such an expansive, fragmented medium it requires analysis of many different platforms and forums to truly give a sense of how presidential frames fare online. Finally, as this study only focuses on presidential framing and news coverage in crisis, it would also be useful to compare and contrast these findings with cases of more ordinary politics, such as presidents using framing to build support for a new domestic program or policy reform.

Despite all of the ways the cases here illustrate change over time, it is also important to note some universal truths about the presidential framing playbook in a time of crisis. Regardless of the time period, presidents embroiled in scandal are likely to blame partisanship and the opposing political party for their travails, and frequently the media themselves will become the subject of presidential scorn and derision. Presidents seeking to make the case for war in every era emphasize that the use of force is a last resort, and military intervention a move they have been pushed into rather than an end they eagerly sought. Even as the institution of the presidency and the nature of the news media dramatically alter with the passage of time, scholars can count on some framing approaches and strategies to remain the same.

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