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The Framing of Opposition to the War on Iraq*Dieter Rucht and Joris Verhulst*

Wording matters when it comes to influencing people's hearts and minds. Many words and catchphrases are value-loaded. Because they have or evoke positive, negative, or ambivalent connotations and feelings, they are often carefully chosen by actors in a political struggle, thus becoming part in a contest over naming, blaming, and framing (Gamson 1992). It seems that the more morally loaded a conflict is and the higher the stakes, the more the actors engage in a framing contest to win support and discredit their opponents. Just consider the discursive struggles over abortion, in which each side deliberately chooses terms and slogans: "unborn baby" or "fetus," "pro-abortion" or "pro-choice," "anti-abortion" or "pro-life," "abortion is murder" or "my belly belongs to me," and so forth (Ferree et al. 2002). When it comes to the protest against an imminent war in Iraq, we can also expect that the actors on both sides place much emphasis on the words and slogans they want to communicate to both their constituency and the audience at large. In part, they have control over the phrasing of their messages. This applies, for example, to the protesters' banners and speeches during a rally. Another—and politically probably more relevant—part of the communication, however, is beyond the direct control of authors and speakers: their messages, if covered at all, are mediated by the mass media (Bennett and Entman 2001). As has been demonstrated repeatedly, the media are highly selective in what and how they report (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988), whom and what they cite literally or indirectly, whether they explicitly express their own views in commentaries and side remarks. In short: naming, blaming, and framing are crucial in the case we are analyzing. Accordingly, this chapter concentrates on

the communicative dimension of the demonstrations against the imminent war on Iraq. To this aim, we are using three kinds of materials: First, since we are interested in how the “ordinary” participants in the demonstrations expressed their views and motives, we analyze mainly quantitatively their responses to the open-ended survey questions. Second, we investigate qualitatively and illustratively how organizers, representatives of movement groups, and speakers expressed their views and claims during the demonstrations. Third, in addition to the analysis provided in chapter 3 dealing with mass media reports and the governmental positions, we look more specifically at the media coverage of the expected war on Iraq. In methodological terms, depending on the material and the specific question in which are interested, we use both a more conventional, quantitative content analysis and a more qualitatively oriented frame analysis, as has been developed in social movement studies in the 1980s and 1990s (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Gerhards and Rucht 1992).

The Voices of “Ordinary” Protest Participants

In a public protest, mere participation is a message in itself. Therefore, not all participants feel the need to explicitly voice their views during the event. Moreover, there are forms of protest—for example a silent march or a silent prayer—where words are deliberately avoided. However, in the mass demonstrations against the war in Iraq, explicit messages in various forms were abundant. Many people were carrying handmade signs, standardized placards, or large banners. And they were shouting slogans or singing peace songs, giving interviews to journalists, and discussing the issue of war in small groups during the marches and rallies. Whereas a look at the many signs and banners unveils in an extremely condensed form what the most committed people in the crowd wanted to say (e.g., “Bush—Terrorist No. 1”; “No blood for oil,”), analyzing the International Peace Protest Survey questionnaire, as done in several chapters in this volume, can give a more systematic picture of the participants’ views. While the questionnaire mainly included lists of preformulated, that is, “closed” answers, we also asked a key question that had no standardized answer options: “Why did you participate in the demonstrations on February 15, 2003? (Write down your answer in the box below).” The box provided space for about seven lines. Some demonstrators responded by writing down only one single word; most gave one or two short sentences; a clear minority completely filled the space provided. The answers to this open-ended question are, in our view, the most comprehensive and authentic data on the motives of the antiwar protesters on this particular day.

While it was already amazing to see that relatively few protesters refused to accept the questionnaire (see appendix A), we were even more surprised to learn how many of those who had completed their questionnaires had also answered to the open-ended question. After all, this usually takes more time and reflection than to tick a box and is therefore often omitted by respondents in other research contexts. In our case, however, out of the 5,772 questionnaires that we received, a total of 78 percent included answers to this particular question. The response rates ranged from 44 percent in London to 97 percent each in Spain and the United States. This readiness to speak out confirms our general impression based on many conversations held while distributing the questionnaire: people were strongly motivated to express their views.

Exemplary Voices

We will first look at a few examples of how demonstrators have expressed their motives. Quite a number of protesters categorically rejected war (“War is no means to solve problems”; “Because I am convinced that war is always the wrong instrument to solve conflicts, regardless when and where”; “I am a pacifist”; “violence only breeds counterviolence”).

Others rather rejected this particular war under the given circumstances (“I am opposing this war because it serves the hegemonic interest of the USA”; “This war is for the control of oil”; “I don’t want my country, the U.S., to become the bully of the world”; “This war is absurd”; “Think this is about global domination”; “Because war is the last resort, not a first resort. After four years without inspections the inspectors have only been at work for 11 weeks”; “Because a war of pre-emption is immoral and illegal under international law and I’m worried we’re setting a terrible precedent, not only for us, but the world”; “I feel a diplomatic solution is appropriate. I am not a pacifist”; “Because I think U.S. pre-emptive war is morally wrong, illegal, unconstitutional and un-American. Our government is betraying our ideals in a much more flagrant way than ever before”).

A minority of respondents framed their opposition to war as part of a broader political struggle. For instance, a London demonstrator stated the “need for [a] vibrant anti imperialist movement in the metropolis of capital.” Others defined the war as an act of “neo-colonialism,” “imperialist politics,” and the like. Still others expressed their solidarity with the Iraqi people or more generally with those who suffer from war and exploitation (“To prevent the killing of innocent Iraqi civilians”; “To save the life of Iraqis”).

A substantial number of protesters made clear that they equally opposed the United States government and the government of Saddam Hussein (“No

doubt that Saddam & his sons are worse than animals but killing innocent people will not remove them"). Most European protesters who criticized in particular the U.S. position emphasized that they were not against "America," the "USA" or "the American people" in general, but against Bush ("Bush is an asshole"), the U.S. government, the U.S. elites. Contrary to the views of many commentaries to be found mainly in conservative newspapers, very few respondents expressed views that could be interpreted as outright anti-American (see also Table 12.1), such as "USA is shit," "Because I am a confessing opponent of America," "Hatred toward America and war"). Demonstrators were also referring to the particular situation in their home country ("I want to support Chancellor Schröder and Foreign Minister Fischer in their clear 'no' to this war"; "To protest the UK being the USA's lapdog").

A small minority commented on their personal situations to explain their opposition to war: "Because my nine-year old son asked me whether there will be war and what we could do against it"; "I have experienced World War Two and know about the consequences"; "Because I am a mother. Because I am a teacher . . . Because I am a human being . . ."; "I was representing my six small grandchildren"; "To show her [my daughter] an example of how to be an engaged citizen. To show her the beauty of being active in a community effort"; "I fear the draft").

Often along with more specific reasons, many demonstrators stated that they felt a moral obligation to express their dissent, that they didn't want to be counted among those who were indifferent, or that participation in the rally was the only means they had ("I felt a need to express my dissent. It's my right"; "I feel I have a civic duty to express my hope for a peaceful resolution"; "A need to 'stand up and be counted' in the effort to deflect our administration's policy versus Iraq"; "I felt I had to swell the numbers in the hope that PM [Prime Minister] would take notice of public opinion"; "Because it's the only action, within my reach, to try and stop this war"; "I demonstrated in hopes that this would send a message to other countries via news media"). These and many similar statements underscore that people not only protested for instrumental reasons but also wished to express their feelings of anger and frustration—and hope.

Indeed, in some responses hope was articulated that protest could eventually be successful ("We made a difference when we marched against war in Vietnam—we can do it again"; "Because I believe that the pressure of millions of people in the streets can have an impact"; "I felt it was time to put my feet where my mouth is. I feel strongly and truly believe one can make a difference"). Yet a few respondents expressed doubts over whether protest could prevent war but still felt a need at least to try it, or, as one of them

noted, “to be counted as a voice + body against the war and the policies of Bush and his war-mongers.” Another demonstrator wrote: “To forget my desperation because of our powerlessness and to make clear: This war, which cannot be prevented, shall not be fought in my name.”

In addition, a marginal proportion of respondents said they were primarily or only present not to protest against war but for more mundane reasons: “to take pictures,” “to spend time with friends”; “because my boyfriend organized a trip from Boston to take part in the rally,” or on professional grounds (“Freelance journalist, interested in social movements”; “To document this event, I am a photographer”).

While these selected statements give us a taste of the range and kind of individual reasoning behind participation in protest, they do not provide a systematic picture of the relative weight of different reasons and how these are related to certain characteristics of the protesters.

Quantitative Results

To process the total of 4,514 non-standardized answers, we categorized them according to our research interests. Because of different language capacities, we conducted the categorization at three different places. The coding was done the basis of general explanations but without a joint training of the coders, let alone a test of intercoder reliability. Nevertheless, we believe that the data are acceptable, as long as we refer to the big picture and ignore both small numbers and small differences across categories.

In a first step, we inductively developed a classification of the various reasons to take part in the protest, ending up with seventeen categories. The results are displayed in Table 12.1. Because respondents often provided more than one reason to protest, the percentages add up to more than one hundred.

As it can be seen in the far right column of Table 12.1, in the aggregate of all countries, pacifist beliefs were the most frequent reason to protest (24 percent), followed by general criticisms against this war (22.1 percent), and a number of more specific reasons. Almost 14 percent mentioned the desire to express their views in front of the public. Anti-Americanism was entirely marginal, with an average of 0.3 percent across all countries. Substantial cross-national differences exist regarding attitudes toward the protesters’ own countries’ governments. Almost 10 percent of the Belgian demonstrators and almost 8 percent of those in Germany mentioned support of their government as a reason to take to the streets.¹ Yet substantial cross-national differences in the motives of protest also become apparent with regard to some other categories. Pacifism, for example, is rarely mentioned in the United States and the United Kingdom, with only 8.2 and 8.5 percent, respectively, but frequently in Italy,

Table 12.1. Reasons to participate in antiwar protest (percent)

	US	UK	SP	IT	NE	SW	BE	GE	Total
1. Pacifism	8.2	8.5	34.4	50.2	33.9	14.5	30	26.7	24
2. Criticism of reasons for war	23.9	40.2	18.9	8.9	22.9	14.2	23.6	20	22.1
3. Active policy-making or responsibility of civil society	18.9	16.7	8.3	12.3	9.9	26.2	7.2	11.5	14.9
4. Proclaiming own opinion	15.9	7.2	6.9	17.5	5.4	18.8	10.6	16.8	13.6
5. Criticism of Bush government	17.3	4	6.5	3	11.4	17.4	14.5	12.5	10.1
6. War breaks international law	4.4	5.5	26.6	1.7	5.6	2	4.8	6	6.2
7. Criticism of own government supporting Bush	–	12.5	16.9	5	7	–	0.2	0.5	5.1
8. Against political-military hegemony	2.8	3	2.8	2.2	6	5.4	9.5	6.7	4
9. Against capitalistic economic order	1.5	4.5	3.9	6.7	1.4	5.4	6.2	3.3	4
10. Danger for democracy	5.6	8	11.5	0.2	1.2	1.2	1.9	0.5	3.9
11. Support social movements	5	2.1	0.7	1.1	3.7	3.9	7.9	7.2	3.7
12. Personal worries	2.8	3.2	0.5	0.4	3.3	1.9	0.4	8.3	3.1
13. Solidarity with Iraqi people and Muslims	0.6	2.3	10.4	0.4	3.9	4.4	4.6	1.7	2.5
14. Social incentives or curiosity	2.9	1.3	0.5	2.6	2.9	2.5	1	3.5	2.4
15. Support governments against war	0.1	0.2	–	0.2	0.6	2	9.9	7.9	2
16. Anti-Americanism	–	0.2	0.5	0.4	1	0.5	0.6	0.3	0.3
17. Other reasons	11.3	9.1	0.9	9.3	12.2	6.9	6.6	7.9	8.6
Total	121.3	128.4	150.1	122.3	132.2	127.2	139.5	141.2	130.4
N	4,956	4,746	2,600	4,520	1,364	2,259	674	5,295	26,414

with around 50 percent. Considerable differences also become apparent regarding the category “War breaks international law,” brought up frequently in Spain (26.6 percent) but rarely in Italy (1.7 percent) and Switzerland (2 percent). In Italy and Belgium, opposition to war was most often linked with a more general struggle against the capitalist economic order (6.7 percent and 6.2 percent), while in the United States, this was not the case (1.5 percent).

In a second step, we recoded applicable categories listed in Table 12.1 according to one dimension that we found to be of particular interest. We call this “type of reasoning,” based on a “moral-affective” versus “cognitive” dichotomy.² While some items could not be classified according to this criterion, there were also the instances that the same respondents gave two or more reasons, of which one was “moral-affective” and another “cognitive.”

Considering this “type of reasoning” dimension, we find that “cognitive” reasons to protest war have a significantly greater weight (33.5 percent) when compared to “moral-affective” reasons (16.0 percent; see Table 12.2). The gap is particularly big in the United States, with a difference of about 37 percent. Only among the Italian demonstrators did moral-affective reasons outnumber the cognitive ones.

Moreover, we can also study the correlation between the type of reasoning and several other characteristics of the protesters (figures not displayed). The relative weight of cognitive reasons increases with the level of education and age. Also, men mentioned cognitive reasons to a greater proportion than women did. But, contrary to common expectations, religion seems to be unrelated to the kind of reasoning. Also, there appears to be no significant correlation between the kind of reasoning on the one hand, and the position in the working sector, and the satisfaction with democracy on the other hand. Fewer protesters who claimed having taken part (only or also) in disruptive

Table 12.2. Type of reasoning, by country (percent)

	Moral-affective	Rational	Both	None
United States	8.5	45.4	2.7	43.4
United Kingdom / London	4.1	26.5	0.9	68.6
United Kingdom / Glasgow	4.4	30.2	3.4	62.0
Spain	22.1	45.4	18.8	13.7
Italy	20.7	9.0	2.5	67.9
Netherlands	26.4	34.3	11.1	28.2
Switzerland	14.4	33.9	4.2	47.4
Belgium	21.2	42.0	11.6	25.3
Germany	22.5	35.1	10.4	32.0
All countries (average)	16.0	33.5	7.3	43.2

actions in the past, provided cognitive reasons when compared to those protesters who had participated only in moderate actions.

The Voices of Protest Organizers and Speakers in Public

In a second step, we shed some light on how the groups that organized the protest framed the antiwar cause in leaflets, calls for action, brochures, and speeches of group representatives and other individuals during the demonstration. While the above answers to the open-ended question had to be brief due to limited space, the written texts and the speeches were, of course, much longer and more elaborate.

The constituencies of groups and movements participating in the antiwar protest of February 15 were exposed to a flood of written material before and during the event. Among this material were various texts distributed within protest groups such as the “Anti-War Call” launched by the European Social Forum, and the *Platform against War on Iraq* issued at the preparatory meeting in Copenhagen (see chapter 1), public advertisements such as the one initiated by the U.S.-based Artists United to Win without War, the Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities, the Internet-based network MoveOn.org, and the speeches held where ever masses took the streets. Because we only have selective material from these various sources and cannot assume representativeness, we aim neither at a quantitative analysis nor at a comparison across countries. Rather, we present some examples we find interesting and noteworthy (see also Cortright 2004).

Many written signs of protest had straightforward messages. The shortest could be seen on a banner presented at London’s Trafalgar Square: “No!” Flyers and calls for action often were headlined by “No war on Iraq,” “Europe against the war,” and the like. Such brief messages were occasionally accompanied by expressions of urgency as directly stated, for example, in an “URGENT world-wide call to action from CITIZEN to CITIZEN” distributed by the U.S.-based group United for Peace. This sense of importance comes from the perception of being “on the verge of a major disaster” that can only be prevented by “the world public.” Another example was an advertisement entitled “Prime Minister Blair, It Is Two Minutes before Midnight,” published in five UK newspapers: the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *London Times*, the *Telegraph*, and the *Financial Times*. Combined with this dramatic gesture, activists often assured that protest would matter, as indicated in both the first and the final sentence of the “Anti-War Call” by the European Social Forum: “Together we can stop this war” and “We can stop this war.”

A further characteristic of such written documents was signaling to the public that this war is “Not in our name,” a message that could be made

specific by adding a particular addressee, such as “Not in our name, Mr. Blair” (Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) or sender “Not in Iraqis’ names: Exiles thank the worldwide peace movement” (petition).

Besides slogans and catchy headlines, many texts stressed specific reasons for opposing the war in Iraq. The three-column advertisements sponsored by the New York-based Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities presented four arguments in bold letters: “Warning—War Will Wreck Economy”; “Warning—War Will Breed Terrorism”; “Warning—War Will Discredit America”; “Warning—War Will Take a Terrible Toll on Human Life.”

While many texts exclusively focused on the war and its immediate consequences, others related the opposition to war with other kinds of struggles. This is illustrated by a flyer of the ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism) Coalition for the United States. The group announced a Week of Anti-war Resistance, starting on February 13, with “youth and student action, teach-ins and forums” on the twelfth anniversary of the Gulf War bombing of a shelter in Iraq and ending with a “Students and Youth Action on the anniversary of the assassination of Malcolm X, a Coordinated Day of Resistance—including student walk-outs from hundreds of high schools and colleges—and other acts of non-compliance” on February 21.

Quite a number of flyers and other texts emphasized the massiveness and worldwide character of the resistance to war. This is stressed in both the European Social Forum’s “Anti-War Call”—“There is a massive opposition to war in every country in Europe. Hundreds of thousands have already mobilised for peace”—and the December 15, 2002, Copenhagen declaration: “It is clear that there is majority to war in almost every country in Europe and across the world. This is why this war cannot be fought in our name.” In the advent of the February 15 protest, organizers further encouraged potential participants by confronting them with lists of countries or cities in which protest activities had been scheduled. For example, at the bottom of a call for action distributed by the UK Stop the War Coalition, some eighty cities are listed, starting with Adelaide and ending with “Wollongong and many more (total over 600).” Thus, contrary to Mancur Olson’s theory that individuals would be reluctant to participate in mass collective action when their own contributions would not make a difference (Olson 1965), the organizers of the February 15 protests were right in assuming the opposite: the bigger the forthcoming event seemed to become, the more it would attract additional people who otherwise would be reluctant to participate—as theoretically expected in the threshold model proposed by Granovetter (1978). In other words: beyond the substantive arguments to oppose the war, the mere size of the expected protests was also considered a motivator for participation

in protest, as expressed in such answers to the open-ended questionnaire as “I want to be counted” or “To be another body in a mass of bodies.” In a similar vein, organizers not only pointed to the (expected) mass of people but also to the broad variety of different groups and social strata opposed to war, ranging from U.S. veterans of the Vietnam War to the UK “Dog Owners against War Stunt” (as mentioned in a flyer of the Stop the War Coalition) to the Marxist-Leninist Bolshevik Partizan, a group of Kurds aiming at building a Bolshevik Party in Germany.

Furthermore, the various speeches and performances of the February 15 demonstrations were deliberately chosen to exhibit the variety of protest groups and reasons to protest. Consider, for example, the program of the Berlin event, which consisted of two gatherings earlier in the day (in old East and West Berlin) from which marches led to the main site of the rally. The whole event was coordinated by the Netzwerk Friedenskooperative (Network of the German Peace Movement), which was part of a much broader Action Alliance February 15. Besides a variety of music (e.g., drums, Soul and Gospel Choir Berlin, well-known singers), poems, theater, and recitation, the program included speeches by representatives of the East German citizen movements that had toppled the communist regime and from members of trade unions and, among others, peace, Christian, immigrant, youth, and medical groups. Their speeches, whose transcripts were distributed on the Internet in the aftermath of the event, offered a broad range of arguments against the war: moral, social, political, juridical, social, and environmental. Also, they indicated hidden agendas behind the official declarations of politicians ready to engage in warfare; pointed to disastrous consequences; appealed to the demonstrators and the worldwide public to take action; linked this struggle to struggles in other periods, places, and policy areas; emphasized the unique character of this protest as part of a worldwide event; supported—in the German case—the position of their own government; expressed hope that war could be prevented if millions of people said “no”; and all shared the belief that war in principle, or at least this war, under the given circumstances, is immoral and wrong. The declaration from the Netzwerk Friedenskooperative read by one of its speakers at the very end of the main rally concludes by stating: “Peace is not everything, but without peace there is nothing!”

On the eve of the antiwar demonstration in Berlin, several more-or-less prominent critics presenting themselves as the Coalition against Anti-Semitism, in an open letter to the media, had accused the antiwar groups of being “anti-American” and “politically naïve.” Probably in reaction to this, several speakers at the antiwar demonstration expressed their sympathy with “peace-loving Americans” while at the same time opposed not only the Bush

administration but also the repressive regime of Saddam Hussein and his Bath Party. The critique of being “anti-American” is also rejected in a written statement entitled “The Peace Movement Is Anything but Anti-American.” The authors maintain their opposition to the war plans of the Bush government while defining their protest even as pro-American insofar as they endorse “one of the greatest achievements of the United States: The rule of law” (Bundesausschuss Friedensratschlag, 2002).

Reviewing numerous written and oral statements by the antiwar protesters, it is obvious that the lowest common denominator is that this war is morally and politically wrong. However, the various motives of and reasons for this opposition vary considerably, so that we cannot identify a single overarching ideological master frame (for this concept, see Snow and Benford 1992) shared by all participants. Whereas outspoken leftist participants tended to interpret the war as an expression of imperialism, other groups perceived it more as the consequence of misperception of a number of factors, such as Iraq’s weapons arsenal, its contribution to international terrorism, and the chances of establishing a peaceful and democratic order after the war. Clearly, the imminent war offered platforms to a broad variety of issue-specific groups for relating their cause to the opposition to war, thereby providing many examples of frame-bridging and frame-extension, as discussed in the literature (Snow et al. 1986). Also, we found clear examples of the three components of collective action frames that Gamson (1992, 7) has identified, namely injustice, agency and identity.

For the most part, however, mass protest is not an end in itself. As expressed by many participants, it is meant to send a strong signal to a large, possibly worldwide, audience that, ultimately, may have an impact on decision-makers. To this aim, it is necessary to attract media attention and, if all goes well, positive media coverage (Molotch 1979; Walgrave and Manssens 2000; Verhulst and Walgrave 2006).

Media Coverage of the Iraq Crisis and the February 15 Demonstrations

Most of our knowledge of current affairs in the world stems from television, radio and/or newspapers. This news is not an unbiased reflection of reality but is selected according to news values and news routines, framing preferences and political positions. Studies have documented the U.S. media’s agenda-setting, priming, and framing impact on mass opinion during the 1991 Gulf War (Iyengar and Simon 1994). With regard to the 2003 Iraq War, Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis (2004) showed that a large segment of the U.S. public, during and after the war, held misperceptions. These people thought

weapons of mass destruction had actually been found in Iraq, that there was indisputable proof of the link between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, and that the majority of world public opinion supported the U.S intervention. Kull and his colleagues found these misperceptions to be strongly associated with media use. For example, Fox News viewers held more misperceptions than CNN viewers, regardless of their educational or professional backgrounds. Clearly, news sources do matter. And, as seen in chapter 3, they also matter at the national level. In different countries, the Iraq crisis was framed differently, which was likely to have affect mobilization potential and, ultimately, the kind of people that actually took the streets. This brings us to social movements. For them, mass media coverage can be a matter of life and death (Walgrave and Manssens 2000; Verhulst and Walgrave 2005). Media can validate and legitimize social movements' existence (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Smith 1999). Mass media link social movements to their mobilization potential and can help movements recruit new adherents and attract additional financial resources (Barker-Plummer 2002). Positive coverage of movements can enhance their impact on political decision-making. But the relationship between social movements and mass media is fundamentally asymmetrical, with the former much more dependent on the latter (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Verhulst and Walgrave 2005; Rucht 2005). Movements have a tough job in competing with other societal actors and events to gain media attention (selection bias). And once a message or event is in the media, the question remains of how the media report on it (description bias) (Smith et al. 2001; Verhulst and Walgrave 2005; McLeod 1995; Cooper 2002). This is what we want to find out in the remainder of this chapter: Did the antiwar movements manage to get some of their arguments and frames on the Iraq conflict into the press? How were the February 15 protests covered, and how did the nationwide newspapers portray the demonstrators?

Chapter 3 explored the relationships among national governments' positions on the Iraq conflict, public opinion on the eventuality of war, and how the media reported on the Iraq crisis. In summary, in those countries where the governments were trying to engage in war, both national media and public opinion were basically supportive of the government's stance. Where the national governments strongly opposed the war, the media and public opinion tended to share this position. Finally, in countries where the government's position on the eventuality of war was limited to lukewarm and/or merely oral support, the newspapers and (eventually) public opinion tended to not support the government's stance. In all countries, national press coverage and public opinion on the eventuality of war converged.

Framing of the Iraq Conflict

As we did in Chapter 3, we will use original media data. In each of the eight countries, we analyzed three newspapers: the major left-leaning broadsheet, the major right-leaning broadsheet, and the most popular national (or local) newspaper. All papers were scrutinized for articles on the Iraq conflict, using the neutral search term “Iraq,” between January 21, 2003, that is three weeks preceding the February 15 protests, and March 21, 2003, the day after the invasion in Iraq began. We aimed at obtaining three articles per day and per newspaper. In sum, 3,968 articles were selected and coded. Additional methodological information can be found in appendix A.

An initial question is whether the antiwar sentiments of the February 15 demonstrators were reflected in the different national newspapers and to which degree these papers report on reasons why a war should not (yet) be waged. Out of all articles, 1,521 (38 percent) mentioned at least one reason not to go to war. Similar to the variety of responses of the protesters to the question why they took part in the demonstration, the reasons not to go to war mentioned in the newspapers were quite diverse (see Figure 12.1). The disregarding of the UN procedures, and the work and views of its weapon inspectors, constituted the lion’s share of the reasons mentioned why war should not be waged (yet). When all UN-related reasons are cumulated, the

Reason	Percent
UN inspectors doing a good job; no evidence of weapons of mass destruction	48.6
Lack of UN war mandate; damage to United Nations; illegality of preemptive strike	45.2
Pacifism: no war as a political tool	14.2
Economic interest or oil	10.0
War will fuel (religious) terrorism or be perceived as West-Islam aggression	8.2
Destabilization of Middle East	6.1
Lack of link between Iraq and al-Qaeda	5.3
Double standards (invasion only of Iraq, no other country)	4.8
Iraqi regime no threat to world peace	3.5
Cost of war to tax payers or to country’s resources	3.6
War fought for religious reason	2.8
No hope for democratization	2.5
Lack of after-war strategy	2.4
War as dangerous precedent	2.4
Bush administration or family wanting to finish job of Gulf War	1.7
(Future) casualties among own troops	1.5
War as distraction from bad domestic policy	1.3
N	1,512

Figure 12.1. Reasons for not going war, as mentioned in newspapers

second most important reason is pacifism, in the sense that war can never be accepted as a political tool. Remarkably, this reason is more often mentioned than, e.g., the economic interests in war (control over oil) or the fact that war will raise the chance of religiously based terrorism. This is consistent with the motivations made explicit by the February 15 demonstrators, who mentioned cognitive reasons more frequently than moral-affective reasons, including pure pacifism.

Regarding the newspaper reports, pacifism is the most frequently mentioned reason not to go to war (as it was for the February 15 protesters). In cross-national comparison, pacifism was least mentioned in the United States and the United Kingdom (as was also the pattern for the protesters from those countries) and most frequently stated in Spain. In general, the rank order for pacifism across countries is the same for newspapers and protesters (see Figure 12.2).

When looking from a cross-national perspective at the weight of various topics and issues as reported in the newspapers under study here, the first striking finding is the differential reference to the domestic government in the context of the Iraq conflict (figures are not displayed). By far the most references to the domestic government were found in the U.S. press, followed by the UK and German press. This is understandable for the war-leading countries for which the government plays a crucial role. However, we have no explanation for why Germany and Belgium as war-opposing countries differ so widely in terms of references to the own government. Divisions within the press's own government were most salient in the United Kingdom, and, accordingly, were reported in almost every fifth article. German newspapers mentioned a divided Europe most often; they also covered the

	Percent of articles
United States	6.5
United Kingdom	7.2
Spain	27.2
Italy	16.0
Netherlands	10.0
Switzerland	16.2
Belgium	14.4
Germany	18.2
Total	14.2
N	1,559

Figure 12.2. Mentions of pacifism ("war is no political tool") in newspapers per country

divided opinions within the United Nations (as did U.S. papers). In Switzerland and the United States, overall opposition to war was mentioned least frequently. In sum, the German press was most frequently referring to various kinds of actors opposing the war, while the papers in Spain and the United Kingdom reported most frequently on opposition among the populace. The costs of war were most often referred to in the United States and in the United Kingdom, the two countries that were the most determined to engage in warfare. The idea that war cannot be prevented, however, was not as widespread in the news outlets of these two countries, as it was in the Italian press. The opposite idea, that war could still be prevented, was most frequently found in the Spanish and German presses. In the United States, which can be considered the most crucial player, the press highlights the domestic government's role and aspects of war preparation and war costs but remained relatively silent on dissident voices.

Coverage and Framing of the February 15 Protests

In the two-month period around February 15, protests were mentioned in 270 articles (about 7 percent of all articles), with the Belgian and German press far above average (16.5 and 13 percent, respectively) and all other countries at about 4 percent. The actual protests mentioned in the articles add up to 414 different events, of which most were referred to in Germany and Belgium, followed by the United States and the UK. Hence, protest is of greatest interest to the press in the countries that range at the far ends of the pro-antiwar scale. Nonetheless, the way protests were covered might have been different, more critical on the one end and more supportive on the other.

Because we are especially interested in how the February 15 protests were covered, we will only focus on protests mentioned between February 14 and 22 and only those in the Western countries or that were reported as "worldwide." We counted 130 protests mentioned in the selected period, the most in the United Kingdom (36) and the fewest in Switzerland (2).³ In the protests or public opinion on war were referred to in the titles of most of the articles, especially those in the United States, and in many an antiwar voice was featured: "French See Bush as the Ugly American" (*USA Today*, February 14); "From New York to Melbourne, Cries for Peace" (*New York Times*, February 16); "US Builds War Coalition with Favors—and Money" (*USA Today*, February 15), and "Blair Under Siege Over Stance on Iraq. Opposition Up, Poll Numbers Down" (*Washington Post*, February 19).

In the UK press, the titles were more upfront, with some of them pointing to the dwindling popularity of the country's prime minister: "Blair's Popularity Plummet" (*Guardian*, February 18); "Blair Hasn't Even Won the

Establishment Round to War" (*Times*, February 20), or "This Government no Longer Speaks for Me. Voices of Protest" (*Guardian*, February 17). In other titles, the prime minister is mentioned as holding the line in spite of the loud antiwar voices: "Blair to Defy Anti-War protests: Million-Strong Demonstrations Will not Deflect Iraq Policy as Ministers Rally around Prime Minister" (*Guardian*, February 17); "The Peace Marches: Blair's Warning: 'Weakness Will Be Paid in Blood.' Impassioned Prime Minister States the 'Moral Case' for Ousting Saddam" (*Guardian*, February 16). And finally, some titles directly referred to the expected mass protests. For example, two articles in the *Times* predicted: "Glasgow March May Be Biggest since World War 2" and "Protests Will Reach Every Continent" (both February 14). Similar titles can be found in other papers: "The Peace Marchers: One Million" and "People Power Takes to the World's Streets" (both in *Guardian*, February 16). The *Sun*, the tabloid that openly backed the government's position on war (e.g., "Blair Can See Big Picture" [February 28]; "Selfish Chirac Shows France's True Colors" [March 03]) does not mention any kind of protest in articles we found for this period, providing a stunning example of a selection bias.

For Spain, we only have *El Mundo* reporting on the protests in this period—for example, "The Old Europe Does not Want a War" (February 16). *La Stampa*, in Italy, provides a similar picture: "Five Kilometers of Protest" (February 16). These papers exhibit a positive attitude toward the antiwar voices. As said, in Switzerland, only two protests, both in the *Tages-Anzeiger*, are mentioned in the articles we selected for the period from February 14 to 22. In Belgium, protests mentioned in this period were always reported in a neutral way, for example "Human Chain against War in Iraq" (*Het Laatste Nieuws*, February 19). In Germany, except for "Scholar Does not Believe in Continuation of Protests" (*Frankfurter Rundschau*, February 18) and a negative report, "Who Demonstrated against Saddam" (*Bild*, February 14), all relevant article titles are neutral or supportive of the protest.

Moving beyond the titles, we looked at how the protests were portrayed in the text body. The total of 130 articles in the nine-day period does not really allow for a meaningful quantitative analysis. Yet some quotes and references provide us with an idea of how the February 15 protests and protesters were presented in the press. Demonstrators' characteristics were referred to in one out of five articles in this period. With one or two exceptions, all stressed the participants' amazing diversity: "college students, middle-aged couples, families with small children, older people, environmental, and religious groups, business and civic organizations" (*New York Times*, February 16). In the UK press, with the exception of one reference to "anarchists," the

demonstrators were described as “people with an astonishing variety of backgrounds and political viewpoints” (*Guardian*, February 17); or “nuns, CND, social workers, anarchists, Walthamstow Catholic Church” members (*ibid.*, February 16) or “a mixture of pacifists, nuclear disarmers and hard-leftists. Many of the people were not pacifists or ultra-leftists (though they naively gave credibility to the latter impressions) but part of the United Kingdom’s liberal conscience” (*Times*, February 20). In the Spanish *El Mundo* (February 16), the February 15 demonstrators were portrayed as being a mixture of “Catholics, pacifists, immigrants, members of the Green Party, religious minorities, parliamentarians of all the parties of the left-wing.” Papers in Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany provided similar descriptions. Yet, the German press also disproportionately referred to the presence of ministers and members of parliament “[German politicians] Thierse, Trittin, Wiczorek-Zeul” (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 17), or “[ministers] Wiczorek-Zeul, Künast, Trittin, and [head of parliament] Thierse” (*Frankfurter Rundschau*, February 15). It seems that German politicians were well aware of the popularity of their antiwar stance. In all countries, the media tended to stress the astounding diversity of the February 15 protesters, thereby painting a picture that did not match reality, as the results of our survey have shown (see, in particular, chapter 5).

By and large, the demonstrations received newspaper coverage of which most organizers only can dream of: protests were said not just to be the largest ever seen, but in addition, to have attracted ordinary people from all parts of the country and all layers of society. It seemed that the world had said no to war on February 15.

Our final question concerns the ultimate challenge for protest organizers: In addition to positively framing the demonstrations, did they also succeed in getting their substantive message across? The answer, again, is mostly positive. Slogans such as “the world says no to war,” “no blood for oil,” “we can stop the war,” “don’t attack Iraq” and “not in my name” were mentioned in almost all countries. In Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands, these general catchphrases were complemented by those targeting the leaders of both war-initiating and war-opposing countries. In Spain, for example, one could read “USA Stay Home” (*El Mundo*, February 17); “Schröder Be Strong. Don’t go to War” and “The old Europe doesn’t want a new war” (both in *El Mundo*, February 16). Italian and Dutch papers echoed such messages. In Belgium, the demonstrators were described as applauding their minister of foreign affairs: “Thanks Michel—Merci Michel” (*Het Laatste Nieuws*, February 17) for his efforts to block a war-favoring NATO decision (see chapter 1). Yet in Germany, apart from more general statements for peace, only one cited

slogan indirectly addressed the UK government: “Make Tea, Not War!” (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 17).

To summarize, the newspaper coverage of the Iraq crisis was far from uniform. Again, this proves that national context matters. The UK and especially the U.S. press regarded the war as a national issue, with much attention paid to its “practical” side, in terms of preparation, tactics, and costs, and with relatively little emphasis on pacifism as a reason not to go to war. In the UK press, considerable attention was given to the antiwar opposition within Prime Minister Blair’s Labour ranks. German press, however, reported on the Iraq crisis as an international issue in which many countries were involved and where many war-disapproving voices could be heard. A reflection of this attitude is the importance given the concept of pacifism in German newspaper articles. In all other countries’ presses, too, the crisis was portrayed as an internationalist issue, with Italian and Spanish newspapers paying much attention to opinions that disapproved the war and to pacifism as a reason not to go to war. Yet, regarding the coverage of the February 15 protests in particular, differences are much smaller. In all countries, the protests tended to be portrayed as positive events that brought onto the streets masses of diverse people that could not be ignored. And, finally, the protesters also got their messages and main slogans across.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have used three kinds of sources—the voices of the “ordinary” demonstrators, the organizers and speakers of the protests, and the newspapers—to see how opposition to the (then imminent) war against Iraq was communicated and framed. We highlight three general findings. First, opposition to war was based not on a one-dimensional view but on a broad variety of arguments, ranging from principal opposition anchored in unconditional pacifism to very specific reasons. Pacifism was the reason against war most frequently mentioned by both the protesters and the newspapers. Although all protesters agreed that the war was unjust and unfounded, we were unable to identify an overarching interpretative ideological master frame for this opposition to. Rather, we found a broad array of reasons to protest, among which, contrary to the views of some observers, anti-Americanism was extremely marginal.

Second, the various arguments and frames regarding the war were not evenly distributed across countries. Context mattered even in cases where countries seemed similarly affected by the (potential) war. The single factor with the biggest impact on the pattern of communication was whether governments were actively willing to, or would eventually, engage in warfare

(the United States and the United Kingdom) or reject it outright (Germany and Belgium). Countries somewhere in between these extreme positions tended to exhibit a more inconsistent pattern.

Third, while there seems much congruence in the views of the “ordinary” protesters and the protest organizers and speakers, the media, not surprisingly, were more selective in what exactly they reported about reasons for objecting to the war. Again, variation across countries is significant, reflecting not only the position of the governments and public opinion toward war and protest, but also specific political constellations, for example, a divided government in the United Kingdom. By the same token, the newspapers in the United States, the country bearing the brunt of the costs of war, tended to downplay the scope of opposition in other countries and international institutions as well as in their own country. Overall, however, the protesters were taken seriously by most newspapers and covered in a neutral or even positive manner. Also, unlike in many other instances of protest, where media tend to focus on side aspects rather than the protesters’ views and motivations, the protesters were able to get their basic messages across. In part, this might be explained by media and public opinion that sympathized with their cause. To some extent, however, this relatively favorable way of reporting may also be a function of the protest’s sheer size and perceived—but actually much more limited—social heterogeneity. While relatively small groups of protesters, even when covered by the mass media, can be easily presented in a disrespectful and distorted way, such a characterization is hardly advisable when millions of supposedly ordinary citizens (and media consumers!) take to the streets. By and large, through media, the public in the eight countries under study could get a clear idea of the scope and reasons of opposition to war, though some analyzed newspapers tended to ignore or misrepresent the protest altogether.

Notes

1. Note that in the German case, for example, protesters even criticized their own war-opposing government, because this government tended to tolerate logistic support to the war by allowing U.S. troops on German soil.
2. Items 1, 12, and 13 were classified as “moral-affective.” Items 2 and 5 to 10 were classified as “cognitive.”
3. Note that this is not a protest event analysis. We did not systematically gather press articles reporting on protests. Rather, when any protest was mentioned in an article we had found using search word “Iraq,” our encoders filled out a separate encoding form for it.

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