

Media Metrics How Arab and Western Media Construct Success and Failure in the 'Global War on Terror'

Author(s): Sarah V. Marsden

Source: *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 7, No. 6 (December 2013), pp. 10-26

Published by: Terrorism Research Institute

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26297063>

Accessed: 03-07-2018 14:26 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



This article is licensed under a Attribution 3.0 Unported (CC BY 3.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>.



Terrorism Research Institute is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Perspectives on Terrorism*

I. Articles

Media Metrics: How Arab and Western Media Construct Success and Failure in the 'Global War on Terror'

by Sarah V. Marsden

Abstract

The media has played an important role in the 'Global War on Terror' (GWOT), and has received significant scholarly attention as a result. However, the way in which different media represent and construct notions of success and failure has been less well examined. In addressing this gap, this article offers a comparative analysis of several hundred media sources drawn from Western and English language Arab press outlets, published up until the turn of the decade. Through this analysis, the paper examines the way in which different sources understand progress and regress in the conflict. The themes that emerge from this corpus suggest, not only that the two sets of sources demonstrate different conceptualisations of success and failure, but more interestingly, that through construction of specific metrics, they betray very different understandings about the nature of the conflict itself. In turn this constructs quite different interpretations of what 'winning' the 'GWOT' might mean for the protagonists. In a largely consistent interpretation of the GWOT, Arab media interpret the conflict through the lens of American efforts to assert power and influence on a global stage. Western media metrics, on the other hand, evolve from a largely militaristic confrontation, to an ideological conflict, and finally constructing the GWOT as a global effort to bring down a movement. Notably, according to both Arab and Western measures, the media sources examined here suggest America is losing.

Keywords: *media, influence, counterterrorism, perception*

Introduction

The 24-hour news cycle played a key role in defining and constructing the 'Global War on Terror' (GWOT).[1] Efforts to influence the media agenda have seen governments set up substantial public relation machines to 'spin' the news to best effect, and make the case for their policies.[2] Similarly, al-Qaeda has long recognised the need to fight a media battle alongside its violent campaign, setting the propaganda battle at the heart of its strategy.[3] Unsurprisingly therefore, substantial scholarly attention has been paid to the role of the media in the GWOT.[4] However, there has been comparatively less attention paid to the way in which different types of media have understood and represented success and failure in the conflict. What follows addresses this gap, and in doing so takes a comparative approach to understanding how English language Arab and Western media outlets have constructed metrics of success and failure in the GWOT.

The analysis presented below suggests that Arab and Western media outlets interpret progress and regress in the conflict in different ways. Moreover, the way these differing sources construct measures of success and failure betray divergent ideas about the very nature of the conflict itself. Both sets of media construct specific notions of the GWOT which impute the reasons for the conflict, the motivations of the protagonists and concomitantly, what success 'looks like'. The metrics used by Western media evolve through the first decade of the conflict, from a militaristic 'body-count' approach, shifting to an ideological war and then to a global effort to bring down a movement. Arab media interpret the conflict in more geopolitical terms, through the lens of American hegemony and its efforts to spread power, control vital oil resources, and support the Israeli state. Through these constructs, they prescribe particular solutions - one largely military, the other socio-political. Importantly, analysis suggests that according to both sets of measures, America is losing the GWOT. What follows seeks to explore how this media output represents success and failure, and how through this, they construct different interpretative frameworks by which the GWOT is understood. Following a brief exposition of the methodology employed in the study, a series of measures of progress and regress are described. The discussion then turns to explore ways in which these measures construct highly divergent conceptualisations of 'victory' in the GWOT.

Methodology

This analysis is based on 192 articles drawn from English language Arab media sources, and 200 drawn from Western media that cover the first 10 years of the conflict. See Tables 1 and 2 for a breakdown of the number of articles drawn from each source over the nine years of analysis. Because of the focus on English language sources, the specific media outlets were selected on the basis of somewhat different criteria. Arab sources were largely predetermined by the availability of English language publications, 'Western' sources on the other hand, were selected to offer insight into primarily American interpretations of success and failure. Hence, those outlets considered most influential in the major American centres of New York, Washington and Los Angeles were selected, along with CNN, which has broader reach across the country. These were supplemented with BBC output, to draw insights from the way these issues were reported more widely.

Table 1: Arab Media Data Sources

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	TOTAL
Al Hayat		18	17	13	4	9	6	7	9	83
BBC Monitoring	7					2				9
Arab News	3	4	4	3						14
Al Jazeera			4	8	6	3	4	5	4	34
Asharq Alawsat					8	7	6	5	7	33
Al Arabiya					2	2	5	6	4	19
TOTAL	10	22	25	24	20	23	21	23	24	192

Table 2: Western Media Data Sources

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	TOTAL
CNN	2	3	5	4	3	5	4	2	6	34
BBC	8	8	8	6	8	6	5	9	4	62
Washington Post	3	5	4	4	3	4	4	3	5	35
LA Times	4	3	4	4	3	5	4	3	5	35
NY Times	2	3	4	4	4	3	6	4	4	34
TOTAL	19	22	25	22	21	23	23	21	24	200

Articles were selected through a search of the various sources’ online repositories using the terms: War on Terror and al-Qaeda. This identified nearly 10,000 individual news articles, reduced through a series of filters. First, articles were assessed against two criteria: that they contained sufficient editorial comment, i.e. that they were not solely descriptive news articles, and second that they were of sufficient length to provide a reasonable amount of data. The dataset was further refined according to whether the articles made reference to success and/or failure in the GWOT. A coding frame generated for the purpose was applied to the data identifying all references to verifiable and unverifiable success and failure with respect to America and al-Qaeda.

These data were analysed using thematic analysis,[5] an approach involving a reflexive relationship between the data, prior theoretical knowledge and research experience. Predominantly an inductive approach, it aims to elucidate patterns in the data, and uncover the groundwork of understandings at work. In the initial phase of analysis, sources were read repeatedly, and preliminary categories describing prominent themes were identified. Further analysis and coding produced sub-themes, which led to a distillation of the data into a number of coherent themes that are set out in detail below.[6] Thematic analysis allows greater depth of analysis than techniques such as content analysis, but does not require the much deeper examination of text that, for example, discourse analysis demands. Given the scope of the

analysis and the amount of data that was necessary to offer a sufficiently detailed comparative analysis, thematic analysis offered an appropriate balance of breadth and depth.

In the process of the research, a number of issues emerged which bear consideration. First, it was challenging to source a comparable number of English language Arab media articles in the early years of the conflict, something reflected in the uneven sources over the years. Up until 2004, there were relatively few mainstream Arab media outlets publishing in English. To compensate for this, sources were drawn from BBC Monitoring's translation service, and by over sampling articles from Al-Hayat. Although this means a somewhat different set of sources, this approach was necessary to ensure similar amounts of data were available for comparison across the years. Second, there is a liberal bias evident in the Western media sources.[7] This is important to bear in mind when interpreting the results, as they do not purport to offer a cross section of the media, but rather focus on particular sources considered to share a largely liberal political stance. Similarly, there is something of a 'Western', or at the very least, Saudi bias in the Arab media data. Al Hayat, Arab News, al-Arabiya and Asharq Alawsat are all financed, supported or based in Saudi Arabia. This has implications for the extent to which the analysis presented below can be said to relate to wider Arab perspectives represented in Arabic language media, a subject which demands further investigation. It is also important to recognise the broad designations of 'Arab' and 'Western' media are used as 'shorthand' for the different sources. Here, 'Western', largely means American and whilst still encompassing a range of sources, is perhaps more homogenous than the Arab press, which represents a somewhat more diverse source.

Therefore, this article focuses primarily on the dominant themes that emerged through analysis. Whilst this potentially masks important minority views and debates, in offering an overview of the most frequently discussed metrics, the paper focuses on those issues considered most important in the media. With this in mind, what follows draws out the main features of the discourse through the years of the GWOT, to shed light on how different media sources interpret and understand success and failure in the conflict.

Western Media Metrics

A unifying feature of Western media discourse on the GWOT is the lack of clarity over appropriate ways to measure and conceptualise the conflict.[8] As the GWOT progresses, different types of metrics accumulate, which demonstrate a shifting notion of the 'enemy' and the character of the war. The early focus on military measures is supplemented in the early-2000s by the 'war of ideas', and the related battle for hearts and minds, which in turn evolves into the language of a global insurgency. These different paradigms paint a shifting picture. Depending on the measures used, journalists infer al-Qaeda is stronger than ever, others that the US is making gains. Almost all recognise the difficulty of 'measuring', in any meaningful way, who is 'winning' the GWOT. The following discussion highlights the evolution of Western media portrayals of success and failure.

Metrics of Violence and Military Conflict

The ubiquity of militaristic metrics reflects the language frame of the 'Global War on Terror'. Such a conceptualisation makes tactical measures highly salient, and they are common in Western media efforts to understand progress. The exceptional nature of the conflict and the necessity for a new and uncompromising military response is particularly prevalent in the aftermath of 9/11. As Michael Kelly observed:

[S]ome (mostly on the left) have persisted in the delusion that we are involved here in something that can be put into some sort of context of normality – a crisis that can be resolved through legal or diplomatic efforts, or handled with United Nations resolutions, or addressed by limited military 'reprisals'. [9]

Through this frame, political, social and diplomatic solutions are excluded, thereby prioritising a militaristic and retributive response to 9/11. Such an approach is reflected in congruent measures including 'body counts', applied to al-Qaeda, the Taliban, other (often ill-defined) 'enemy' actors, as well as US and coalition forces. Military metrics in Afghanistan, and then Iraq, include measures of 'collateral damage'; geographical control; stabilising military gains; shifting levels of violence; number of terrorist attacks; and number of enemy fighters. Disrupting al-Qaeda's command and control structure and its training and organisational apparatus, and keeping them 'on the run' are also regularly applied to assessments of progress. Evidence of success against these measures applies to the home front as well as the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, with the absence of attacks on the US homeland regularly rehearsed as a measure of the GWOT's positive impact.

Periodically 'scorecards' are produced which identify a range of factors, including the number of convictions; detainees in Guantanamo; the financial cost of the conflict; and number of civilians killed. These can be critical, for example, noting the number of detainees who have at some point been at Guantanamo (775) vs. the number of detainees convicted (0). [10] However, they still largely reflect a militarised, counterterrorism framework (such lists do not, for example, detail the number of cross-cultural exchanges undertaken, or shifts in foreign policy). In concentrating so heavily on military factors, the media support the idea that the conflict can best be resolved with violence, measured through battlefield victories or failures. Although this conceptualisation is particularly prevalent early on in the conflict, it maintains throughout the years, tracking initial 'victory' in Afghanistan and Iraq, and their deterioration into bloody insurgencies.

The War of Ideas

The 'war of ideas' became increasingly prominent from 2004 onwards. In this measure, al-Qaeda the organisation becomes al-Qaeda the theory, a 'jihadist ideology [which] has spread like a virus around the world'. [11] Against this ideological threat, the US is said to need a defence, 'a story of its own to counter the one told by opponents, who argue that we are an

occupier with designs to steal [Iraq's] wealth and suppress its faith'.^[12] Described as the 'fourth war' (alongside Iraq, Afghanistan and the international war against al-Qaeda), the war of ideas is considered vitally important but largely neglected by the Bush administration. Implicated in this are interim metrics, exemplified in a quote by an anonymous senior military official: '[i]f this is a global battle for hearts and minds, we haven't even stood up an army yet'.^[13] Hence, the need for a vehicle to gain leverage in the ideological war can be seen as a further measure of progress.

Although the ideological battle is poorly defined, it is possible to discern three sub-themes. The first assesses how successful the West is at communicating the 'real' reason for US action in the face of 9/11, and by extension, persuading the audience of the 'true (positive) nature' of America. For example, that the Iraq invasion was designed to free the region of a tyrant, track down Weapons of Mass Destruction, and spread freedom and democracy for the benefit of the Iraqi people. Furthermore, that it was *not* designed to control oil, expand Western hegemony, and conduct a religious crusade against Islam. The second, and much less commonly discussed set of measures, are largely political and social, and are described by Michael Scheuer in an interview with the BBC:

'Bin Laden is attacking us because a specific set of US policies that have been in gear for 30 years and haven't been reviewed, haven't been debated, haven't been questioned.' ... He cited the apparently unquestioning US support for Israel; America's presence on the Arabian peninsula; and support for regimes perceived as oppressing Muslims and for Muslim 'tyrannies'.^[14]

Efforts to attack al-Qaeda's message are a final set of measures, including attempts to degrade public support for al-Qaeda and stem the tide of recruitment and radicalisation, particularly as the Iraq war deteriorates. However, clear metrics are hard to discern, beyond efforts to promote 'acceptable' and 'moderate' Muslim voices, and Bush's 'vague pledge to spread democracy'.^[15] Despite this, they are considered vital and are increasingly described as superordinate to the militaristic 'body count' measures discussed above. According to Daniel Benjamin and Steve Simon:

Despite the increasingly frequent avowals from Bush and his aides that we are fighting, in his words, a 'hateful ideology', the sad fact is that the United States still has not provided that opposing narrative. Indeed, it is still fighting against individual men and measuring progress accordingly. By doing so, it continues to foster the notion that our opponents are finite in number and destructible and that, on a good day, we will wipe them out.^[16]

Hearts and Minds

Closely linked to the war of ideas is success in the battle for 'hearts and minds', establishing 'the battle for public opinion [as] a new front for the Bush administration.'^[17] Whilst popular support was largely taken for granted in the early days of the GWOT, over time, the importance of – largely unfavourable – Muslim public opinion comes to the fore: 'as polling ... demonstrates, the war in Iraq has severely damaged the already poor American image in the Islamic world, and more Muslims are thinking in the terms of the jihadists. Despite our claims to be liberators, they see the U.S. as the enemy of Islam, eager to destroy the faith and subjugate its people.'^[18] This becomes an increasing concern. International Pew polls are pored over in the press, drawing out a largely hostile set of attitudes towards the US, a subject the government was not keen to dwell on as one journalist writing in the *Los Angeles Times* puts it: '[o]ne metric that administration officials don't like talking about involves how people in other countries view the U.S.'^[19]

Human rights and the impact on civil liberties are important features of the battle for hearts and minds. Western press discourse draws out the increasing dissonance between the values America purports to promote and its behaviour. Measures of Western public support, the opinions of the judiciary and international partners, as well as Muslim public opinion are all used to assess progress, becoming a prominent feature of media commentary: '[d]oubts, division and defections have developed among American allies. For many around the world, sympathy for the United States has changed into suspicion and, for some, even into hatred. The prisons at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, the treatment of prisoners, secret prisons and rendition flights all added to this feeling.'^[20]

Global Insurgency and the 'Homegrown' Threat

Epitomised by John Arquilla's analogy: '[w]e have taken a ball of quicksilver,' ... 'and hit it with a hammer',^[21] the notion of al Qaeda as a violent social movement begins to take hold in 2004, with the idea of a 'global jihadist insurgency' becoming increasingly entrenched as the conflict progresses. In response, an international set of measures are set out to address the threat, described in existential terms: 'Islamic terrorism may have metastasized into a cancer of independent terrorist cells that, while claiming inspiration from Al Qaeda, no longer require its direction, finance or advice.'^[22] This 'new model of Islamic terrorism',^[23] comes to include the phenomenon of 'homegrown terrorists' – an increasing preoccupation of the Western media. Initially confined to the Muslim world, its spread to Europe further expands the threat: '[s]o now we face a world of ideologically driven homegrown terrorists – free radicals unattached to any formal organization.'^[24]

The Limits of American Power

Midway through the decade, a metric reflecting America's declining ability to project power emerges, leading to speculation about 'a crisis of American leadership in the world.'^[25]

Related to the battle for hearts and minds, the impact of the GWOT is understood in terms of US standing in the world. Encompassed within this is its perceived legitimacy as a force for good, the ability to project power at the state level, and the image of America in the eyes of its own people. The result is a reflective turn that sees commentators compare US prestige and power before and after 9/11, largely blaming the Iraq war for America's weakening position. For instance, as Michael Hirsch notes:

[A]n administration that had sought to reassert U.S. power now finds itself projecting weakness. An America that was at the top of its game internationally on Sept. 10, 2001 has squandered its prestige. Iraq is draining the most powerful Army in history, America's moral standing in the world is diminished, and our policies, according to the CIA's own analysis, may have only helped to foment the jihadi movement globally. We possess less leverage over the nuclear-minded states of Iran and North Korea.[26]

A further related issue is the potentially long-term impact on the character of the United States and its institutions: 'the price of this president's military and domestic overreach has been highest in the loss of faith in America itself, in the values and institutions that have historically defined this nation.'[27] Measures of progress question whether the US is true to its own image of a free, liberal democracy. Debates over torture, rendition, civil liberties and the power of the executive all feature heavily. Interestingly, 'success' against these measures shifts as the conflict goes on, reflecting public and political debates about the relative importance of different values. In the aftermath of 9/11, protecting the homeland was the number one priority, which meant sometimes advocating suspension of, for example, habeas corpus rights. However, as the conflict progresses, success becomes (re)aligned with defending traditional components of liberal democracy. According to Michael Ignatieff:

When terrorists strike against constitutional democracies, one of their intentions is to persuade electorates and elites that the strengths of these societies ... are weaknesses ... If this is the logic of terror, then democratic societies must find a way to renew their belief that their apparent vulnerabilities are actually a form of strength. [28]

Arab Media Metrics

Unlike Western sources, the Arab media portray a more consistent interpretation of the GWOT, with the nature of the metrics remaining relatively stable over the years of analysis. Measures are conceptualised from the perspective of US and Arab governments, and that of the Muslim peoples, stipulating appropriate responses from civil and political standpoints. This involves defending Islam from those who seek to use it to promote violence, and from

Western attack. Importantly, much greater attention is given to the social, political and economic influences on the origins and evolution of the GWOT, and their interaction with US policy, as one observer in *al-Arabiya* put it:

It is impossible in analytical or historical terms to separate the four main strands of sentiment and policy that have given birth to the contemporary Salafist terrorist movements we all suffer today: dictatorial or merely corrupt and incompetent Arab and Asian governments; violent and colonial Israeli policies; hypocritical and Israeli-influenced American policies that often manifest themselves in warfare; and the consequent, more recent phenomenon of demeaned and disoriented young Arab-Asian immigrants in Europe.[29]

The behaviour of political leaders is weighed through the lens of different measures. For example, Bush is criticised for prioritising a military response over political reform and social development, whilst Obama is initially praised precisely because of this change in emphasis: ‘binding himself politically to the course of diplomacy and negotiations whereas Bush bound himself militarily to the course of the war in Iraq and the war on terror.’[30] What follows charts the primary themes by which success and failure has been conceptualised in the Arab media, beginning with the need to defend Islam and address perceived ‘root causes’ of terrorism, moving on to reflect on US policy in the Middle East and the extent to which the GWOT has made the world a safer place, and finally applying the measure of whether America has upheld the standards of liberal democracy it purports to represent.

Defence of Islam

Defending Islam and protecting Muslim identity are important issues that recur in the Arab media. Focused on the effort to avoid Islam being conflated with terrorism, the discourse distances mainstream Islam from al-Qaeda, reflecting an effort to protect Islam against Western polemic. Metrics therefore include promoting ‘correct’ interpretations of Islam, and protecting Muslims from being influenced by al-Qaeda’s ideology. Through their commentary, journalists self-consciously seek to develop and defend a “unified Arab position’ to protect pan-Arab identity against ‘Islamic extremism’ and Bin-Ladin’s views.’[31]

Religious, political and civil constituencies are all urged to respond to the threat to Islam, and are berated when they are perceived to fail: ‘[t]he war on terror has reached London. Undoubtedly, its first victim is the Muslim population. Why is it then that, unlike the run up to the war in Iraq, no one single soul, not even a British Muslim, has taken to streets in protest against the spread of terrorism in the capital?’ [32] Whilst not necessarily constructing the GWOT as a ‘religious war’, such themes reflect a desire to defend Islam and counter the growing relationship drawn between terrorism and Islam: ‘Muslims and their religious institutions have a major role in portraying the true Islam and breaking the artificial link

between it and terrorism, in addition to getting rid of the effects of 9/11. The U.S. should also halt all the generalizations; for bin Laden is not all the Arabs, and Taliban is not all Islam.’[33]

Addressing ‘Root Causes’

The need to tackle ‘root causes’ is repeatedly discussed as the best way to prevent the alienation described as feeding terrorism, thus prioritising non-military solutions: ‘America should have been more restrained and patient, and given diplomacy a chance to succeed ... [and] root out the cause of the disease instead of dealing with its symptoms.’[34] The primary causes of terrorism established in the metrics are social, economic and political, and include the Israel-Palestine conflict. This refutes the ideological and religious roots the West are thought to blame: ‘[t]errorism is a symptom of other ailments and distortions, and a tool that fanatics use to express themselves and change conditions in society. It is not an ideology that springs out of purely religious milieus and it can be defeated and eliminated only if its underlying causes are recognized and seriously addressed.’[35] Measures of progress are therefore ‘mid and long term approaches, aimed at resolving political crises in order to deprive the terrorists of any legitimacy. This is why tackling the problems of oppression and occupation, along with bolstering development, education and the attainment of a better life, will surely lead to shrinking the human pool that feeds extremism.’[36]

At the heart of much of the Arab media discourse on the GWOT, the Israel-Palestine conflict is one of the primary lenses through which progress and regress is understood. The need to resolve the conflict is both intrinsic and instrumental, perceived as a way of undermining the legitimacy of the ‘fanatics’, as well as serving long-term US strategy in the Middle East and softening Muslim public opinion towards America. Conversely, Israeli ‘terrorism’ and ‘Zionist propaganda’ are conceptualised as impediments to addressing the root causes of the terrorism America experienced.

Despite this heavy emphasis on addressing terrorism’s social and political antecedents, there is debate about the implications of claiming these to be causes of terrorism. For example, discussing fundraising which supports terrorism, one journalist argues: ‘[we] the Muslims, especially the Arabs, are really quite surprising. We participate in the crimes, [through giving money] and then we justify them by our solidarity with the oppressed people and call these justifications humanitarian positions. But when we find out that these crimes actually killed people, we do not even apologize.’[37] Hence, the extent of Muslim responsibility for terrorism, and the need to stop the funding streams that support it are also operationalised as metrics. Although this is a weaker theme, measures of progress therefore look inwards to the political and civil responsibility of Arabs and Muslims, as well as outward to American and Israeli policy.

U.S. Policy in the Middle East

The Iraq war, in particular, is seen through the lens of America's global political ambitions. Described as 'Bolshevism', Nazism, colonialism, and imperialism, US foreign policy is conceptualised as 'a plan to extend America's hegemony, which means that it is a proposal to poison the area and delay its development and needed reforms.'^[38] Metrics are conceived as the ability of the US to satisfy its geopolitical ambition. In particular, the effort to secure Iraq's oil, strengthen Israel's position in the region, and expand US influence and secure its position as the global hegemon. Progress against these aims marks failure for the people of the region but success for America's GWOT.

There is a paradox in that the US is generally depicted as wishing to 'consolidate its hegemony over world affairs as the sole superpower', ^[39] but in so doing further degrades its image in the Arab world. The implication is either that the US cares little for its public perception, prioritising power over popularity, or that 'the regnant American ideology is still undergirded by the view that U.S. power is fundamentally benign and altruistic.'^[40] Ultimately, the impact of Iraq on the regional political situation is seen as a 'further weakening of the region's States and creating better circumstances for the American's attempt to nibble at the region's fringes.'^[41]

Making the World a Safer Place?

Early in the conflict, Arab media reflect on the likelihood that America's actions are liable to make the world less safe in the long run. Metrics assessing this include the number of terrorist attacks, the strength of militant groups, political instability, and the negative impact on public opinion, all of which are considered likely to provoke the violence the GWOT purported to try and eradicate: '[the] US government initiated military action today ... This action may result in strong anti-American sentiment and retaliatory actions against US citizens and interests throughout the world by terrorists and those who are sympathetic to or otherwise support terrorism.'^[42]

According to one assessment of the ability of militant groups to organise and recruit: 'the overt wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the covert wars in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen are mostly inflaming anger and providing new recruits for al-Qaeda and its mutations, making intelligence gathering and 'terror prevention' ever more impossible.'^[43] Assessed by levels of geopolitical stability: 'Iran is on the verge of creating a nuclear bomb, China is protecting Sudan, Russia is backing Syria, Hamas is occupying a third of the new Palestine, Iraq is in the hands of extremist religious figures and Al Qaeda is present all over the world.'^[44] And measured by the amount of terrorism: '[e]ver since the US declared a war against terror, the phenomenon has been on the rise, not the decline, and the number of suicide operations has grown by many times over. The war on terror has failed and this failure will continue because the US is not treating the causes. Instead, the US has helped the phenomenon expand.'^[45]

Maintaining Liberal Democratic Standards

America's commitment to the standards it purports to represent is an important factor in Arab media discourse. Failure to do so is presented as likely to have knock-on effects for a range of factors, including terrorist recruitment; setting standards for state behaviour; Arab public opinion; and civil liberties and human rights. In addition, it is portrayed as fulfilling the terrorists' aims of provoking a response that is antithetical to the qualities America believes it embodies: 'al Qaeda's war will succeed as long as it drives the superpower to act as a renegade state.'^[46] One writer sets out why he believes political reform and maintaining the standards of liberal democracy are side-lined in favour of a more aggressive counter-terrorism approach, and why he thinks this balance is so important:

In the Arab world, there is no heritage of freedom, but there is a long heritage of inflexibility and misuse of state violence. That is why respecting the human, his rights and freedoms were priorities of any political reform. ... As long as America's primary 'interest' is fighting terrorism, it will be ready to bargain with reform.^[47]

Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, extraordinary rendition and torture are all cited as examples of America's failure in the GWOT. Through these abuses, America provides 'a model for Israel's indiscriminate violence against civilians, and its breach of international humanitarian law ... [because] When the world's superpower creates conditions of international anarchy by destroying the checks and balances of the international system, lesser powers feel free to follow suit.'^[48] Conversely, positive progress would see: 'the restoration of the right moral authority to the world that holds the dignity of human life in the highest esteem.'^[49] On the international stage, the failure to do so is presented as degrading US capital in the world, reducing the chances of long-lasting peace, and at the national level is considered likely to increase the gaps between communities, ultimately working in the militant's favour.

Discussion

The GWOT has been described as a 'macro-frame' within which the political debate takes place.^[50] Although both Arab and Western media critique the GWOT concept, no alternative paradigm competes with it as an organising construct, remaining the predominant frame by which the actions of a diverse array of agents, identity groups and causes are understood. The GWOT therefore comes to be described as an 'Orwellian nightmare, an ill-defined conflict with a fractious group of terrorists that seems to be ever-escalating.'^[51] Many of these issues demonstrate the well-worn debate over declaring war against a tactic, as one journalist puts it: 'President Franklin Roosevelt ... did not declare a war against U-boats and kamikaze pilots.'^[52] Consequently, the GWOT construct comes to be portrayed as damaging to the project it set out to encapsulate. Reflecting this, it became a contested term, its increasingly problematic nature marked in journalistic discourse by surrounding it in quotation marks, putting it in italics or adding prefixes such as the 'so-called' War on Terror. Despite this, both

sets of media operate within the GWOT framework, developing distinct discourses in the metrics they set out, and making different issues about the character and reasons for the war salient. This is important as the audience sees ‘what the system and frames within them allow us to see’ [53] through a press which mediates between social and political actors and the public.[54]

Although the GWOT came to comprise multiple conflicts, [55] it began with an act of terrorism. In response, the US government had a range of options – political and diplomatic initiatives, economic measures, overt military action, covert operations, and law enforcement. [56] All of these ‘instruments of statecraft’ are represented in the GWOT. However, Western and Arab media give different priorities to these various approaches in their discussion of success and failure. For the Western media, the conflict was a confrontation with a global ‘phantom enemy’ waged through covert and overt military operations, alongside a public relations effort. For the Arab media, the GWOT was an extension of US power and a result of social, political and economic ‘root causes,’ implying political and diplomatic responses.

These differing ideas about the nature of the war are reproduced in the measures used to assess progress, and importantly, reflect different concepts of victory. The American government approach was predominantly militaristic, something echoed in the Western media.[57] Hence, metrics of violent conflict are the most common way of understanding success and failure in the Western press, and resonate in the war of ideas and the battle for hearts and minds.

Achievement against these measures lies in the audience accepting that a military response to 9/11 was appropriate, and that with success will come the ‘hearts and minds’ of Muslim, Arab, and Western audiences. ‘Winning’ therefore involves US military victory on a global scale, alongside the acceptance of an assertive American power, able to attract public support for its version of global governance. In focusing on the social, political and economic aspects of the conflict, the Arab media instead concentrate on the perceived causes of terrorism and longer-term solutions. In this construction, a positive outcome involves tackling important socio-political issues, including the Israel-Palestine conflict and American military interventionism.

Nevertheless, despite conceptualising success and failure in very different ways, both sets of media normalise the GWOT as an organising framework. In so doing, they produce and reproduce particular discourses about the nature of the conflict that embed boundaries between widely dispersed identity groups. For example, Mona Makram Obeid, writing in *Al Hayat* suggested that ‘the U.S. under the current administration seems to be dividing the world in two: the civilized world and the developing world (the other world) that should be changed by force, without any consideration for the value of cultural specificities.’[58] Whilst Roger Hardy for the BBC argued that ‘[w]hile coping with Muslim suspicion of the West, the president also has to deal with the other side of the coin – Western suspicion of Islam. Many still believe that what’s under way is a clash of civilisations.’[59]

In their construction of the conflict, the media frame their audience’s experience of events and normalise particular sets of responses. As Richard Jackson argues ‘the *language* of the ‘war on

terrorism' normalises and reifies the *practice* of the 'war on terrorism' (italics in original).[60] Culturally and politically bound, [61] Arab and Western media perspectives naturalise US policy in the GWOT, but in crucially different ways. The Western media normalise military conflict as a largely appropriate response given the existential threat from a globalised enemy, and the concomitant need to protect the homeland. The Arab media naturalise these same responses as a by-product of American desire to assert its global power and secure the resources and political capital that go with it. In this way, it is possible to see how particular attributes of the actors come to be associated with specific issues: US hegemony with violent conflict and occupation, and international terrorism with the need to assert global power and increase military reach.

Discussion of al-Qaeda's aims and achievements is comparatively overlooked. Coverage is dominated by US actions, demonstrating that the GWOT framework takes America as the primary agent. This means it is largely through US progress and regress that success and failure in the GWOT is understood. In this regard, both Arab and Western media suggest that at the turn of the decade, America is losing. However, they present different reasons for why this is the case. For the Western press, America's military project has led to a degradation of US power and standing in the world, eroded its image of itself, and has betrayed those standards it wished to impart to other countries. The Arab press perceive failure in the misdirection of power; America is losing because it prioritised a military response over working for social and political change, and by asserting its hegemony through military might. By most of these metrics, the US is judged to have failed. Despite the absence of a major attack on the American homeland, the world is widely presented as a less safe place for America and its allies, and the Arab and Muslim peoples. Notably, the main area of synergy between the two sets of media is the need to focus on human rights, democracy and freedom in order to win the GWOT. As one journalist writing in *Al Arabiya* puts it: '[t]he major reason that the massive wave of sympathy for Bush and the US following 9/11 has changed to worldwide anti-Americanism, was that the US abandoned its core values in pursuit of the terrorists.'[62]

Comparative interpretations across such a range of diverse and dynamic sources are bound to neglect important nuance and context. However, in examining the way Western and Arab media conceptualised metrics of success and failure in the years when the GWOT paradigm was at its most salient, this article has demonstrated not only that different sources construct different metrics, but also that they develop different notions of success and failure. Through this, they come to normalise the US response to international terrorism by seeing the GWOT as either a military or a geo-political confrontation. Above all else, this analysis demonstrates the power of the 'Global War on Terror' as an organising framework by which an array of actors' behaviour is interpreted and contextualised.

About the Author: Sarah Marsden is a Lecturer in Terrorism Studies at the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, University of St Andrews. Her current work examines the social and political outcomes of terrorism, considering both its ineffectiveness, and exploring why individuals and militant groups move away from violence.

Support for this research was provided by the Department of Homeland Security, Science and Technology Directorate, through the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Homeland Security. The author would like to thank Rashmi Singh for her support in the preparation of the paper, and Daniel Stojanovski for his valuable work compiling the data on which this analysis is based.

Notes

- [1] Cottle, S. (2006). Mediatizing the Global War on Terror: television's public eye. In A. P. Kavoori and T. Fraley, (Eds.), *Media, terrorism, and theory: a reader*, (pp. 19-48). Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- [2] Heibert, R. E. (2003). Public relations and propaganda in framing the Iraq war: a preliminary review. *Public Relations Review*, 29, (3), 243-255.
- [3] Zawahiri famously stated that 'We are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. . . . [W]e are in a media battle for the hearts and minds of our Umma.' (July, 2006). See Payne, K. (2009). Winning the battle of ideas: propaganda, ideology, and terror. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 32, (2), 109-1128.
- [4] See, for example: Lewis, J. (2006). *Language wars: The role of media and culture in global terror and political violence*. Chippenham: Pluto Press; van der Veer, P. and Munchi, S. (Eds.) (2004). *Media, war and terrorism: Responses from the Middle East and Asia*. London: Routledge. Jackson, R. (2005). *Writing the war on terrorism: Language, politics and counter-terrorism*. Bath: Manchester University Press. DiMaggio, A. R. (2008). *Mass media, mass propaganda: Examining American news in the 'War on terror.'* Lanham MD: Lexington Books.
- [5] Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- [6] (Miles & Huberman, 1994).
- [7] Groseclose, T. and Milyo, J. (2005). A measure of media bias. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, CXX, (4), 1191-1237.
- [8] The range of analogies applied are just one indication of this, ranging from the Cold War, the Vietnam War and World War II, as well as efforts to paint the GWOT as an entirely 'new war': '[t]here are no historical precedents, no flattering parallels with Churchill or JFK that can be readily appropriated now. *We have to figure this one out for ourselves.*' (italics added). Judt, T. (2002, October, 20). The wrong war at the wrong time. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/20/opinion/the-wrong-war-at-the-wrong-time.html>
- [9] Kelly, M., (2001, 10 October). With a serious and large intent. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from: <http://docs.newsbank.com/s/InfoWeb/agdocs/UKNB/0EF1091707520A89/0F8BFF68D3921800>
- [10] Cole, D. and Lobel, J., (2007, 18 November). Are we safer?: A report card on the war on terror. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from: <http://www.latimes.com/media/acrobat/2007-11/33860990.pdf>
- [11] Corera, G., (2004 28 September). Analysis: does Bin Laden still count? *BBC*. Retrieved from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/3688282.stm>
- [12] Benjamin, D. and Simon, S., (2005, 3 October). How not to win the war on terror. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from: <http://articles.latimes.com/2005/oct/03/opinion/oe-benjamin3>
- [13] Hirsch, M., (2005, 11 September). 9/11-and counting: four years in, no clear plan. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/09/AR2005090902473.html>
- [14] Corera, G., (2004, 24 November). War on terror 'vanishes from agenda.' *BBC*. Retrieved from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4034833.stm>
- [15] Hirsch. 9/11 and counting. Op .cit.
- [16] Benjamin and Simon. How not to win. Op. cit.
- [17] BBC, (2006, 17 February). 'US losing media war to al-Qaeda.' *BBC*. Retrieved from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4725992.stm>
- [18] Benjamin, D., (2003, 11 September). Two years later, is terror still spreading?: We need an antidote for a Muslim ideology that breeds ever more radicalism. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from: <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/sep/11/opinion/oe-benjamin11>
- [19] McManus, D., (2006, 10 September). Is the U.S. winning this war? *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from: <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/sep/10/nation/na-terror10>
- [20] Reynolds, P. (2006, 8 September). 'War on terror' loses clear direction. *BBC*. Retrieved from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/5319522.stm>
- [21] Danner, M., (2005, 11 September). Taking stock of the forever war. *The New York Times*.

-
- [22] Ignatieff, M., (2004, 2 May). Lesser evils. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/02/magazine/lesser-evils.html?scp=21&sq=%22war+on+terror%22+al+qaeda&st=nyt>
- [23] Frantz, D., Meyer, J., Rotella, S. and Stack, M. K., (2004, 26 September). The new face of al Qaeda: Al Qaeda seen as wider threat. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from: <http://articles.latimes.com/2004/sep/26/world/fg-qaeda26>
- [24] Bergen, P., (2006, 2 July). Al-Qaeda, still in business. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/30/AR2006063001342.html>
- [25] Hardy, R. (2005, 24 November). Bush war critics find their voice. *BBC*. Retrieved from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4467042.stm
- [26] Hirsch. 9/11 and counting. Op. cit.
- [27] LA Times Editorial Board (2007, 11 September). What we've lost. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from: <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-ed-war11sep11,0,5040527.story>
- [28] Ignatieff. Lesser evils. Op. cit.
- [29] Khouri, R.G., (2008, 10 September). Intemperance keeps terrorism alive. *Al Arabiya*. Retrieved from: http://www.alarabiya.net/save_pdf.php?cont_id=56346
- [30] El-Khazen, J. (2009, 23 April). The noose is tightening. *Al Hayat*. Retrieved from: <http://www.daralhayat.com/archivearticle/293640>
- [31] BBC Monitoring, (2001, 8 October). Regional media coverage in wake of attacks. *BBC Monitoring Research*.
- [32] Alhomayed, T. (2005, 22 July). Muslims speak out! *Asharq Alawsat*, Retrieved from: <http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=2&id=921>
- [33] Al Faqi, M. (2004, 16 November). The United States and Islam. *Al Hayat*.
- [34] Ramkumar, K. S., Haider, S., Ali Kahn, G., Ba-Isa, M. and Sharawi, M., (2001, 8 October). Let's hope sanity will prevail. *Arab News*. Retrieved from: <http://archive.arabnews.com/?page=1§ion=0&article=9669&d=8&m=10&y=2001>
- [35] Khouri. Intemperance keeps terrorism alive. Op. cit.
- [36] Al Arabiya, (2005, 20 September). Lebanon's Lahhud thankful over Al-Hariri probe in UN speech. *Al Arabiya, via BBC Worldwide Monitoring*.
- [37] Al Ziabi, J., (2004, 14 October). Partners in terrorism. *Al Hayat*.
- [38] Badrakhn, A. (2002, 28 November). A losing bet. *Al Hayat*.
- [39] Al Rimawi, M. (2003, 28 January). What comes after the war? *Al Hayat*.
- [40] Said, E. W., (2003, 14 April). A stupid war. *Al Hayat*.
- [41] Iskandar, A. (2006, 11 September). 9/11 and Iraq. *Al Hayat*. Retrieved from: <http://www.daralhayat.com/archivearticle/242013>
- [42] Ramkumar et al. Let's hope sanity will prevail. Op. cit.
- [43] Bishara, M., (2009, 31 December). Neither wars nor drones. *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from: <http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/imperium/2009/12/20091231125821208452.html>
- [44] Al Rashed, R. (2008, 30 October). Condoleeza: the Middle East is a better place? *Asharq Alawsat*, Retrieved from: <http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=2&id=14571>
- [45] El-Khazen, J., (2005, 28 November). America and the War on Terror. *Al Hayat*. Retrieved from: <http://www.daralhayat.com/archivearticle/240029>
- [46] Badrakhn, A. (2003, 12 September). Reproducing terrorism. *Al Hayat*. Retrieved from: <http://www.daralhayat.com/archivearticle/237811>
- [47] Badrakhn, A. (2004, 19 February). Reform and terrorism. *Al Hayat*.
- [48] Seale, P. (2006, 4 August). Israel and the US are losing the three-front war. *Al Hayat*. Retrieved from: <http://www.daralhayat.com/archivearticle/123873>
- [49] Shobokshi, H. (2007, 26 March). Four years of stupidity. *Asharq Alawsat*, Retrieved from: <http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=2&id=8442>
- [50] Reese, S. D. (2006). The framing project: a bridging model for media research revisited. *Journal of Communication*, 57, 148-154.
- [51] Hirsch. 9/11 and counting. Op. cit.
- [52] Bergen, P. (2009, 8 January). Commentary: how Bush botched the war on terror. *CNN*. Retrieved from: <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/01/07/bergen.war.terror/index.html>
- [53] Reese, S. D. and Lewis, S. C. (2009). Framing the war on terror: the internalization of policy in the US press. *Journalism*, 10, (6), 777-797.
- [54] Strömbäck, J. (2008). Four phases of mediatisation: an analysis of the mediatisation of politics. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13, (3), 228-246.
-

[55] Burke, J. (2011). *The 9/11 wars*. Allen Lane.

[56] Malvesti, M. (2001). Explaining the United States' Decision to Strike Back at Terrorists, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 13, (2), 85-106.

[57] Ryan, M. (2004). Framing the war against terrorism: US newspaper editorials and military action in Afghanistan. *Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies*, 66, (5), 363-382. It is worth noting that many of the measures identified in the Western press are similar to US government metrics. Indeed, the argument that the Western media used its reach to make the case, in particular for the Iraq war, has found support, see: Ryan, M. and Switzer, L. (2009). Propaganda and the subversion of objectivity: media coverage of the war on terrorism in Iraq. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 2, (1), 45-64.

[58] Makram Obeid, M. (2003, 17 September). Two years after September 11: in what ways did the US change? *Al Hayat*. Retrieved from:

[59] Hardy, R. (2009, 10 September). Eight years since the 'dark day' *BBC*. Retrieved from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/8247156.stm

[60] Jackson, R. (2005). *Writing the war on terrorism: language, politics and counter-terrorism*. Chippenham: Manchester University Press.

[61] Fahmy, S. (2010). Contrasting visual frames of our times: a framing analysis of English- and Arabic-language press coverage of war on terrorism. *The International Communication Gazette*, 72, (8), 695-717.

[62] Matthew, F. (2007, 8 November). Another case of double standards. *Al Arabiya*.