

Article No. #

Memo: Where is Downing Street? ... An Opinion Page Analysis.

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Abstract

First appearing in the United State's national media during the summer of 2005 the Downing Street memo is a document that was leaked from a 2002 meeting with the British Prime Minister Tony Blair. The memo stated that the Bush Administration had intentions of going to war with Iraq 8 months prior to when the war began and even planned on going to war if weapons of mass destruction were not found by inspectors. If the document was shown to be credible it could have turned American public opinion against the war and the administration. Using framing theory the author looked at a total of 16 opinion pieces that dealt with the Downing Street memo. The researcher used textual analysis to look at each writer's opinion of how important they believed the memo was to telling the full story. Findings showed that 81 percent of opinion piece writers believed that they media should have covered the memo more thoroughly.

Introduction

On May 1, 2005, *The London Sunday Times* published a story about a British intelligence memo leaked from a July 23, 2002 prime minister's meeting (Manning, 2005). The memo, now called the Downing Street memo, stated that 8 months before the Iraq war began, President Bush's administration planned on fighting a war regardless of whether or not weapons of mass destruction were found.

"It seemed clear that Bush had made up his mind to take military action, even if the timing was not yet decided. But the case was thin. Saddam was not threatening his neighbors, and his WMD capability was less than that of Libya, North Korea, or Iran. We should work up a plan for an ultimatum to Saddam to allow back in the UN weapons inspectors. This would also help with the legal justification for the use of force" (Manning, 2005).

After the story first ran on May 1, the American media were slow to follow with coverage of the document. On May 2, the *New York Times* mentioned the memo in a story about Tony Blair's reelection, and the *Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post* each waited a week to write a story. A month after the Downing Street memo had been made public; *the Associated Press* wrote its first story on the topic. News organizations did not begin to talk in-depth about the memo until after a June 7, 2005 news conference where President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair were both asked about it (Rieder, 2005).

The Issue

When a document is leaked with implications such as these it is the duty of the American media to investigate it. Because the press is seen to serve a watchdog function for the American people they must examine subjects of this nature (Hohenberg, 1971). The responsibility for the press to act in this manner is very important to the idea of American democracy. A key in fulfilling this obligation to the American citizens would be to examine a document that puts into question a government's reasoning for a war that has cost taxpayers millions of dollars while leading to the deaths of U.S. soldiers and Iraqis. By May 2005, Congress approved about \$192 billion for the Iraq war, another \$58 billion for Afghanistan, and about \$20 billion to enhance air security and other Pentagon preparedness measures. In total that is \$270 billion for military operations since 2001 (Grier, 2005).

"More spending on the war is sure to come — even if the U.S. begins to draw down troops levels. While it is difficult to estimate precisely, it is sure to be in the hundreds of billions, experts say. The Congressional Research Service pegs the cost of U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan at an additional \$458 billion through 2014" (Grier, 2005).

This study has built on previous research conducted by Kim, 2000; Van Belle, 2000; and Livingston and Bennett, 2003, on the United States' media coverage of foreign nations. Also, work done on stories that most effectively attract news consumer's attention will be analyzed to provide insight into what they want to read. Studies on framing theory will also be looked at since it will be the basis for interpreting each piece.

While applying framing theory, this study will examine the importance each author gives to the Downing Street memo. Looking at the frames used by each writer will help the researcher to explain how every individual rationalizes his or her opinion. The fact that authors are writing about the Downing Street memo does not constitute a view of its importance, thus the actual opinions they express will be analyzed. Each sample will be analyzed by the researcher to find how each editorial and opinion piece is framed. Since the opinion section acts as the paper's "voice", views expressed toward what is important in the world should translate to the news section. Opinion pages, unlike the hard news section, offer the ability to express views on any subject. The purpose of this study is not to decide if the memo is true, it is to find the writers' opinions about how it was covered.

Research Questions

R₁: Will the views expressed by the writers show a belief of weak coverage by the United States media on the Downing Street Memo?

R₂: What percentage of pieces analyzed show a belief that the Downing Street Memo is a credible document?

R₃: If the writers do believe the United States media did not cover the memo properly, what factors will they believe lead to the lack of coverage?

The researcher will be looking for opinions within the pieces that point to a belief of importance or unimportance by each author. The researcher will analyze positive and negative aspects. If an author says the memo is important or that it should have been looked at more by the media, that point will show a positive opinion of the memo. The belief that an idea should be further researched illustrates an interest of the document in the writer. A piece will be seen as negative if the writer does not believe the memo is important, or if it is discredited. An example of discrediting the document would be to say that the memo is just a form of liberal propaganda. An example of the liberal media argument is illustrated in Michael Kinsley's *Baltimore Sun* column.

Literature Review

Studies on International News

Hargrove and Stempel III (2002) looked for what type of international news readers are most interested in. To do this they used a national telephone survey of 1,007 randomly selected adults from June 17 to June 28, 2001. Interviewers read twenty headlines to them and ask how interested they would be to hear about each. The researchers recorded people who said they would be "very interested" to read each story since those people would be most likely to read the story. The study found that good news (news in a positive tone) is more popular than bad news (negative tone). It was also found that international stories about politics are not as popular as stories about an average person making news. Another finding was that international stories featuring Americans draw an above average interest from the sample.

Some gatekeepers have argued that Americans do not care about foreign news. This argument is flawed in that if a reader does not care what news is presented he or she will probably not purchase the paper and readership will be lost. Some of the findings in this study support that idea, showing that Americans in the study care more about non-governmental news about an average person. But the study also showed that participants were more interested in foreign news that included Americans.

Lehmann (2005) used qualitative research to focus on the differences in the media coverage of UN weapons inspectors by the United States and Germany. Coverage from one print and one television

outlet in each country were analyzed. Print coverage included the *New York Times* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Television programs analyzed were *NBC Nightly News* and *Die Tagesschau*. Nine different events were analyzed in the research that were believed to be important events in the UN weapons process. The researcher also looked at both hard news stories and opinion sections from the newspapers. Findings of the study illustrated that U.S. and German media acted quite differently in covering the UN weapons inspectors. U.S. media seemed to be stuck on the idea of a “War on Terror” and commonly associated Saddam Hussein with Sept. 11, 2001, doing nothing to clear up those assumptions although there was never a proven connection. The German media did not challenge the weapons inspector’s honesty. Similarities were found in the editorials of the *New York Times* and *Allgemeine Zeitung*, but not in the nightly television shows. While *Die Tagesschau* continued to report its news with opinions from both side of the issue, the NBC nightly news began using the title “The Road to War.” The German program used sources from both sides of the issue while NBC used “experts” on the situation who did not express a wide range of opinions. The relationship drawn between Iraq and the terrorists attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 caused U.S. reporters to present “Patriotic Journalism,” in which they would report the stories in a manner that turned the war into an event where the anchors presented a “we are going to go get them” attitude, rather than presenting perspectives from both sides of the fighting. Actions such as these showed the Americans nightly news to be quite biased.

The study used textual analysis and also looked at newspapers, the same text as the researcher. Also, that this study focused on the UN weapons inspectors who played a large role in the lead up to the Iraq war, it is another reason this study is very important. Because it builds on the idea that the media did not necessarily do their job in the run up to the war by reporting stories accurately, but declaring that it instead took the “patriotic” path in reporting. This study focused on hard news stories and the researcher looked at editorials, but the opinion pieces that are being examined often discuss how the news side is not covering the memo properly.

In 2004, Wanta, Golan, and Lee wanted to find if the amount of positive or negative attention a foreign nation was given would translate to the news consumer’s opinion of the nation. The study used public opinion surveys and media coverage preceding them. Stories about foreign countries on ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN were all analyzed from Jan. 1 to Oct. 15, 1998. Each analyzed report was coded for the nation or nations involved in the story, United States domestic stories were not coded, and the frequency of the nations discussed determined their total for the content analysis. The stories were also coded to see if they were positive, negative, or neutral. If a country was involved in actions that threatened U.S. interests or was opposed to U.S. interests the story was coded as negative. If the foreign country was involved in activities consistent with the U.S., it was coded as positive and if stories showed a balance of positive and negative information, they were coded as neutral. This study found that there was indeed a correlation between the amount of positive/negative coverage a country received and the respondent’s feelings towards the situation.

Although none of this research is very surprising, it does show how consumers of the media are affected by what perspective they take. An interesting statistic that comes from this research is that Iraq is the nation that received the most negative coverage and was seen as the most negative by the people who responded to the survey. This factors into the research because the preexisting negative feelings that Americans have toward Iraq, combined with a lack of coverage of the Downing Street Memo, could increase editors' feelings that there is not a need to push for more diverse reporting on the issue.

Coverage By Media

When looking at media coverage, Kim (2000) focused on the *New York Times* and *Washington Post's* coverage of the East Asian Political Movements in the 1980s. Researchers used content analysis to see to what extent the relationship between the U.S. media and U.S. government's foreign policy would affect reporting on the Kwangju movement in South Korea and the Tiananmen movement in China. The two papers were chosen because they are top papers in the U.S. and are seen as agenda setters. The researchers found that the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* both used U.S. Government Officials as their second most important source behind Korean government for the Kwangju story and demonstrators for the Tiananmen.

These findings help to illustrate what influence government officials have on news content and what points of view are being expressed most of the time. This shows that the media might not be playing "follow the leader" on international news issues. This is important because some people credit a lack of coverage on the Downing Street Memo by the media because government officials did not talk about it very much and denied it when it came up.

Livingston and Bennett's (2003) study analyzed different stories to find if events occurring spontaneously are more common in news programs and if reporters are beginning to look less toward officials for their news. To do this, *CNN International* was analyzed from 1994 to 2001 because it is defined as a leader in global news. The study was limited to stories originating outside of the United States or having to do with countries other than the United States. It was found that event driven news stories that are spontaneous in nature and are unmanaged by officials tend to dominate the *CNN International* programming.

This study brings up the point that if something is handled by public officials; it might not get the same amount of media coverage that a bombing or a natural disaster might get. Something with an eye-grabbing visual like an explosion or a natural disaster might draw the reader in more than a story without an amazing visual. This could be a reason that the Downing Street memo did not get as much coverage as other stories during that time.

Van Belle (2000) studied what factors influenced the amount of coverage that United States media would give to foreign disasters. The researchers studied the *New York Times* and network news coverage of the events to see which would get the most coverage. The researchers found that the higher amount of human impact the disasters inflicted translated into more media coverage.

Although it is believed to be proof that President Bush was planning a war with Iraq regardless of the means to justify such action, there were no actual casualties from the release of the document. If the amount of human impact is the driving force in some United States media coverage it could be seen why the Downing Street memo did not get the media coverage that many believed it should have. Possibly if the actual release of the document caused some sort of accident or death, it might have been covered much more by the media.

Framing Theory

The theory utilized for this study is framing. Reese defines frames as “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese, Gandy, Jr., & Grant, 2001). Framing is used in this study because the researcher is looking to see how authors of the editorials and columns framed their opinions of the Downing Street memo. The way authors framed their opinion pieces will reflect how well they believe news media covered the Downing Street memo.

Entman (1993) defines frames as something that describes problems and makes moral judgments on situations. Frames also diagnose cause and suggest remedies. He states that one sentence can perform all of these functions. Frames also have at least four different locations within communication: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture. Frames also determine how people understand and remember a problem; Entman also believes that framing is very important to political news because it identifies the actors or interests that competed to dominate the text.

Framing will be applied to help understand each text within the study. It is important to look at how editorials define problems, make moral judgments, diagnose causes, and suggest remedies on the Downing Street memo. Frames will be used to analyze the text when deciding what the author’s opinion of the editorials and columns mean.

Tracy (2004) used textual analysis to study the news coverage of the 1965 American Newspaper Guild Strike against the *New York Times*. This study also looked at the content through the use of frames. The textual analysis included 130 articles that appeared in 30 commercial newspapers that were gathered to analyze the strike. Each article was published from Sept. 15, 1965 to Oct. 20, 1965 in major metropolitan areas. Every frame used by the writers in some way reinforced the idea of downplaying or leaving out related issues while giving attention to authority leaders. The researcher believed the manner in which the commercial press represented the strikes is an example of how the media reinforces the ideal status quo. He also believed that the mainstream press has never demonstrated objective reporting.

Tracy looked at a newspaper issue by using textual analysis and used framing theory to interpret the different frames that writers used within their stories, then drew conclusions from them. Also, this can be related because it was found that the media pushed the status quo of the majority and that could be seen

in the limited coverage of the Downing Street memo. Because the major media organizations function by relaying news to the public, when they do not properly cover a subject it does not empower the people, but rather, it keeps knowledge in the hands of a select few.

Method

Data was collected using the Lexis-Nexis online database on Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's Lovejoy library website. The first 14 opinion pieces were obtained from the database on Sept. 7, 2005, and two more were found Nov. 7, 2005 to increase the sample size. Pieces were collected only five and seven months after the memo first appeared in the *Sunday London Times* so it was likely there would still be coverage on the subject. The phrase used in the Lexis-Nexis searches was "Downing Street Editorials." Editorials that ran more than once were disregarded to not alter the sample. After editorials and columns were found, the researcher applied textual analysis to each piece. The researcher looked to find whether or not each piece believed the memo was important and deserved more attention from the American media. Specific quotes from each piece that reinforced the researcher's opinion of each were also chosen to give a bias for opinions. Textual analysis was used for this study because the researcher interpreted the text to make meaning from what is written. "Textual analysis is a methodology: a way of gathering and analyzing information in academic research" (McKee, 2001). The goal will be to find the most likely interpretation of the analyzed texts presented by the authors within these opinion pieces. While analyzing each piece, the researcher will be looking to find how important each writer believes the memo is and what examples he or she uses to back-up each arguments. By looking at how the writers argue their opinions, it will show the researcher what political opinions are being expressed.

Results

Out of the sixteen pieces, the first was published on May 25, 2005 and the last on June 30, 2005. Three articles were used from one paper, the *Baltimore Sun*, and the other thirteen articles were taken from papers across the country. Papers surveyed included:

Virginian-Pilot – May 25, 2005

Seattle Weekly – June 8, 2005

San Francisco Chronicle – June 10, 2005

Houston Chronicle – June 10, 2005

Baltimore Sun – June 12, 15, & 26, 2005

Star Tribune – June 12, 2005

Denver Post – June 17, 2005

Time Union – June 18, 2005

Pittsburg Post-Gazette – June 19, 2005

News Tribune – June 19, 2005

Capital Times – June 21, 2005

Detroit Free Press – June 22, 2005

Palm Beach Post – June 26, 2005

Chicago Sun-Times – June 30, 2005

Thirteen of the pieces examined believed either the memo was important or that it deserved more coverage; two were against more coverage of the memo or believed it said nothing, and one was neutral. Textually analyzing the editorials and columns, research showed that authors believed the media did a poor job covering the Downing Street memo. This was shown even more by the amount of columns and editorials found on the memo from around the country. While applying framing to the pieces, many attributed a lack of coverage of the memo to a lack of stories on wire services and a breakdown of the media. The earliest opinion piece that was studied ran on May 25, 2005, and the last ran June 30, 2005. The first piece analyzed ran almost four weeks after the actual memo ran in *The Sunday London Times*.

Research showed that an overwhelming majority of authors studied believed the media missed an important opportunity with the Downing Street memo or at least the memo was important enough to be written about. Analyzing each editorial and column individually will give a better perspective on the opinions expressed by the authors.

Editorials and Columns

The May 25, 2005 *Virginian-Pilot* piece was positive toward the memo, mentioning its importance and that reporters were not asking the proper questions about it at the time. The editorial mentioned that at that point 89 members of the U.S. House of Representatives had signed a letter asking the White House about the memo and some were considering sending investigators to London. “Comments like that mostly prove that there's not a little politics left in the debate over Iraq. But just because the Democrats are posturing doesn't mean that they aren't asking important question -- questions the White House should answer.” Something interesting that the writer did not mention was how many of those 89 members who voted were Republican or Democrat. If a huge majority of those people were Democrat, then it could be argued to be a political move, and also if only a few Republicans voted for it they could have also been acting politically to defend the president who is from the same party.

The June 8, 2005 column by Geov Parrish from *Seattle Weekly* was positive toward the memo and states that the media did a poor job in covering it. He also believes the news industries hierarchy has hindered more coverage. “It's hard not to contrast the frenzy that greeted the revelation of a 30-year-old secret with the thudding indifference U.S. media have given the Downing Street Memo. The memo has scarcely been mentioned in the country's leading newspapers and has been completely ignored by evening

network news.” It is also mentioned that a fear some media might have in covering the story is being labeled as part of the “liberal media” by saying something negative about the administration. Parrish writes about how the country’s leading newspapers look hard enough at the story while his column is written for a small weekly paper, placing this into the frame of the small paper willing to talk about the memo while larger papers shy away from it. Also, if there is a problem with the hierarchy of the industry, how did Parrish write his piece? This point reaffirms the frame of the small paper willing to talk about issues while the major ones will not.

A June 10, 2005 editorial by the *San Francisco Chronicle* was positive toward the memo, saying that the American public deserves “a more intensive investigation and expansive explanation to the extremely serious allegation that their government “fixed” intelligence to justify a pre-emptive war.” This editorial also brings up the point that nobody has challenged the accuracy or authenticity of the memo. It is important to the context of this study because it does not hinge on whether or not the memo is accurate, but merely if it should have been covered more. The more media coverage the memo was given would help to explain if it was factual or not. It had been six weeks since the memo first ran and that nobody had checked the authenticity of the memo is an interesting point in the piece. A possible reason for this is that the media might believe Americans do not care because it happened in another country or that they do not understand all of the implications (Hargrove & Stempel III, 2002). With media professionals believing something like this, it could lead to less coverage because they want people to watch their programs and buy their papers for advertisers. If people are not viewing a company’s programs or buying papers, they will lose money and advertisers. So, they must lead with the events that will draw the largest audience.

A June 10, 2005 editorial from the *Houston Chronicle* was positive toward the memo because it says whether or not the memo is true, it needs to be explained more and that burden falls on the media’s shoulders. “In the interest of the nation and the administration, the source and content of the Downing Street Memo need to be fully explained.” This is a very normative approach to media by saying it is the press’s duty to explain what is happening rather than merely presenting the information. If there is ever any question that hard news sections of papers should take the role of explaining an event it is never a question that the opinion page should work in that fashion. That is essentially the definition of the opinion page, to take something and explain it by using their opinion. So, it is ironic how the *Houston Chronicle* uses an editorial advocating for the memo to be explained when they could have cut out the middleman and explained it themselves.

A June 12, 2005 column by Michael Kinsley of the *Baltimore Sun* is negative toward the memo, stating that it was a left wing conspiracy against Republicans and that the memo was not important. “The memo is not proof that Mr. Bush had decided on war. It says that war is ‘now seen as inevitable’ by ‘Washington.’ That is, people other than Mr. Bush had concluded that he was determined to go to war. There is no claim of even fourth-hand knowledge that he had actually declared this intention. Even if ‘Washington’ meant actual administration decision-makers, C is only saying that these people believe that

war is how events will play out.” Tony Blair’s political party in the United Kingdom, the Labour Party, which is left of center, so a left-wing conspiracy might not be too far fetched if the goal of the party was to cut its losses and get out of Iraq. But the memo also came out around Blair’s time of reelection so it is likely that members of his party would not like something like this to come out and potentially hurt his chances of reelection. Even if people around Blair disagreed with his reasons for backing the United States in war, it is still unlikely they would want him out of office.

The June 12, 2005 *Star Tribune* column by Kate Perry was positive of the memo and held the overall sentiment that it was not covered enough by the media. “The British and U.S. governments were mum on the memo, as if hoping the story would just wither away if not fed with comment. Media silence. Curiously, that silence extended to most of the U.S. media — including the *Star Tribune*. For days, it appeared the story had no legs. Unless you went online.” Perry also cites the Internet and bloggers as helping the story get as much coverage as it did. The *Star Tribune*’s explanation for its lack of coverage was that other important stories at the time pushed the memo story away from page one. This could be seen as another example of a newspaper wanting to give readers what they want to see in order to sell the paper. Another reason for this is that because the *Star Tribune* is not a large national paper, it might believe that readers go to it for their local and state news and if they want international news they would be more likely to seek out another source.

The *Baltimore Sun* published its second opinion piece on the memo on June 15, 2005, saying it was an important issue but did not focus on the media’s actions with it. “The significance of the memo — and additional leaked British documents now surfacing in public view — can hardly be overstated. They conceivably could lead to impeachment proceedings against President Bush.” The context of impeachment brings up the last president who was impeached Richard Nixon. President Bush has also been compared to Nixon in the degree of cooperation his administration has had with the media. Both have been said to be extremely tight with what information is let out of the White House. This could be a frame that the writer picked up on, when bringing up the idea of impeachment.

The June 17, 2005 *Denver Post* editorial on the Downing Street memo was positive toward it and gives the memo credibility because it was written by British intelligence chief Sir Richard Dearlove. “The memo’s warning should have carried weight.” This reiterates the point for weak coverage because of lack of interest by the American public. Because this was written about a month and a half after the memo was printed, it would lead to more public disinterest in itself because after all that time has passed the issue was on its way to being dropped off the radar of the American news consumer.

The *Times Union*’s June 18, 2005 column by Rex Smith was moderate about the actual memo, but it also stated that it should have been given more attention. The column also cited the paper’s use of wire content as a reason for limited coverage. “*The Associated Press*, which provides the backbone of foreign coverage for most American news organizations, largely ignored the memo. “AP dropped the ball,” the wire service’s international editor concedes — and it wasn’t until Friday of that week, May 6, that the

memo first was mentioned in the *Times Union*, on page A3, in a story from the *Knight Ridder* Washington bureau.” With so many of the nation’s papers dependent on the *Associated Press* for content, they did not have the ability to gather foreign coverage on their own. But by pointing the finger outward for the *Times Union*’s poor coverage this column serves more to provide an excuse than to giving actual facts about the memo.

In the June 19, 2005 edition of the *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*, an editorial ran that was positive toward the memo, focusing on what it means and stating that it is important. “The Downing Street memo will be a key footnote in the history books; it should have made front-page headlines.” This shows the writer’s belief of how important future generations will view the document.

Also on June 19, 2005 the *News Tribune*’s column on the memo by David Zeeck was negative toward it; he did not believe the memo really said anything. But he still mentioned how the public wanted to hear about it because a lack of coverage. “Nothing in the Downing Street memos proves the U.S. had determined war was inevitable in July 2002 or that it knew at the time the intelligence was wrong.” This is another piece where the author said the media is not covering the memo. Instead of this, the author could have written the column about the memo by bringing light to it himself but he chose to take the angle of the media not covering it.

On June 21, 2005, The *Capital Times* ran a column by John Nichols saying that the memo is important and the media has done a poor job covering it, and goes on to say what this means for the media. “The years of the Bush presidency will be remembered as a time when American media, for the most part, practiced stenography to power — and when once-great newspapers became little more than what the reformers of another time referred to as “the kept press.”

The *Detroit Free Press* ran an editorial about the Downing Street memo on June 22, 2005. The editorial said nothing directly about the media’s coverage, but does state that it is a very important issue. “Granted, finding a way to end the ongoing bloodshed in Iraq is at present more pressing than re-examining the rationale that was developed to start the war there more than two years ago. But the so-called Downing Street memos are still too significant to be dismissed as simply old news as the White House would like or left to historians.” Although stating the memo is important, the editorial still gives it a negative connotation by calling it the “so-called” Downing Street memo. Labeling it in that fashion brings doubt to how important the memo really is.

The *Baltimore Sun*’s June 26, 2005 column by Paul Moore wrote about how the memo was positive, saying that the memo should be covered more and that it is hard to find the proper balance of coverage. It is hard to find that because the Republican and Democratic sides are at odds to whether it should be covered more or not. “Additional reporting is required to provide readers with background needed to weigh questions raised by the Downing Street documents.” This was the third piece by *The Baltimore Sun* analysis for this study and the paper continues to state how the media needs to cover the document

more. Although the paper has published three pieces, many more than any other paper analyzed in this study, the paper continues not to explain the document but says how the media has not explained it.

In the June 26, 2005 edition of the *Palm Beach Post*, an editorial by C. B. Hanif was positive about the memo for the standpoint the readers wanted to know more about it. "Even if the memos are saying only what everyone already knows, the administration needs to answer for them more than it has. In failing to seek those answers, news organizations also have a lot for which to answer."

The last column looked at on June 30, 2005 by Lynn Sweet of the *Chicago Sun-Times* is positive about the memo, saying that it is an important document and should have been covered more by the media not just bloggers pushing the story. "However, I have to say it's a sad testament to the current state of the media that some reporters feel the "story" is bloggers covering the Downing Street documents ... The real story here is the explosive contents of the documents themselves." Sweet puts another twist on the irony of many pieces that said the media should have covered the document more when they are the media and they could have covered it in their columns. She mentions that many see the story as the bloggers covering the memo, but she is following along with that by writing this column. She is continuing to push the idea of the story around the story without actually doing a column directly on the memo.

Another interesting aspect that should be looked at is that the first editorial studied was printed on May 25, 2005. This is very interesting. Since the Downing Street memo was published on May 1 in *The Sunday London Times*, it took almost four weeks for something to be written about it in the opinion section of United States papers. There could have been an editorial published before that, but there was not one found earlier than May 25 on Lexis-Nexis. There also were not any articles found on Lexis-Nexis after June 30, 2005, which could draw back to the idea that if government officials are not talking about an issue, it is no longer considered an issue.

Different types of papers were represented from different states and differed in size from large metropolitan papers to midsize papers and weeklies. This is meant to illustrate diverse opinions from different markets across the country to see what authors are saying around the country as a whole.

It is interesting to look at the date the memo was printed in *The Sunday London Times* and the time period in which editorials were found on Lexis-Nexis in relation to the events in Iraq. In March 2005, the United States Military casualties numbered 36 and Iraqi civilian deaths were at 240. In April 2005, United States Military casualties more than doubled to 84 and Iraqi civilian deaths went up to between 340 and 371. On May 1, 2005, the memo was printed, which could have been a reason for increased concern by the United States and people around the world. During the time the editorials were looked at, the amount of American military casualties remained at 83 in May and 78 in June. Numbers then dropped in July of 2005 to 54 United States Military deaths, bringing up an interesting question of why a spike in military deaths, occurred and why the United States media saw the document as a bigger issue (CBC News Online, 2005).

A major frame the authors continued to repeat was that media did not cover the memo enough. As mentioned above, this is ironic because all of the pieces analyzed were printed in newspapers making them part of the media. It would have done more to educate the public if writers of the editorials and columns wrote about the documents and not how other media acted.

A reoccurring theme expressed by the opinion piece writers was that the memo was not important. Many of the writers believed the memo reaffirmed what they already believed about the administration. This should raise some interest in the state of the media. If so many journalists and consumers of the news already believe that the administration was “fixing facts,” where is the outrage of the public? If the press believed that, why would they ignore the story?

Out of the pieces analyzed, 81 percent of the time editorials and columns would say the media needed to cover the memo more but would not give reasons why it was not covered more. Some possible reasons for a lack of coverage are the idea that “if it bleeds it leads.” The document in its self did not harm anybody or cause any explosions that would have been good attention getters. As mentioned above with an idea that Americans are generally not interested in foreign news this might push editors not to run stories about it to keep readers. If any type of news organization loses viewers, it will then lose advertising and income.

The Bush administration might not have wanted to speak about this issue extensively. This could be another reason for a lack of coverage because with so few foreign bureaus, if a news organization cannot afford to send people to Great Britain to investigate, they are at the administration’s mercy for information. This also happened with the *Associated Press* being slow to cover the story so papers were without a story to run.

Something that also might be telling about looking at memo coverage in editorials and columns is that commonly it became a Democratic verse Republican debate rather than a question of the authenticity of the documents. This is not to say that opinion page writers are not going to express their political views but hopefully their main objective is not to argue for their political party. With the toll that the Iraq war has taken on the United States in lives lost and tax dollars spent, they should feel a duty to look for the truth even if it does not reaffirm their political stance.

Conclusion

After studying the data, it is clear that almost all of the opinion pieces studied believed the media did not report on the Downing Street memo as much as they should have. This translates into a lack of knowledge for the news consumer and will leave them ignorant about the situation. Limited coverage of the document will either leave the public in the dark about the memo or will lead to misconceptions. Even if the memo was proven to be false and it was not proof the administration “fixed facts,” the public would still be better off with increased coverage because it would clear up misconceptions.

A heavy burden also falls on the shoulders of the *Associated Press* for taking more than a month to put out a story about the memo. The majority of American papers depend on the *Associated Press* for their foreign coverage because most papers cannot afford to have foreign correspondents all over the world. The *Associated Press* must put out stories on foreign affairs or the event virtually does not exist to papers that do not have foreign bureaus all over the world. The AP is responsible for 1,700 United States daily, weekly, non-English, and college newspapers (*Associated Press*, retrieved 11-5-05). This can show a possible lack of foreign coverage on many events around the world because if an event that factored into American policy as much as the Downing Street memo did, what other events would the AP not cover or be slow to cover?

With this evidence on the Downing Street memo coverage it is evident that the U.S. media is not fulfilling its roll as a watchdog. By not providing an event such as this enough coverage, the press is not doing its part to keep areas of government in check and thus not fulfilling its duty to the public. This also leads into the media taking sides by putting politics before truth. Since columns were studied it should be no surprise that the authors would freely express their political agenda, but there must come a point where politics are left behind and the journalist is focused on a pursuit for the truth and not just to back up an agenda.

Reasons for the lack of coverage could also point to behind the scenes factors that the public is not privileged to see. Part of the reason that the Downing Street Memo did not receive more attention could have come from the relationship between the newsroom and management (Liebes, 2000). The selective perception that is added through the news in the editing process can affect the news with ideology. Owners who are commonly motivated by political or economic factors can apply pressures directly and indirectly. The owners might be worried that they could alienate advertisers or politicians if they clash with their interests.

“In public broadcasting, external pressures may be applied, directly or indirectly, by the institution’s director general (“editor in chief”) as the director endeavors to look after the interests of the politicians who may influence the director’s appointment. Thus, any news item that may critique or put in a bad light those who hold economic or political power is in danger of becoming the focus for a debate between unequal participants.” (Liebes, 2000, p.298).

One more factor for this could be the effect of newsroom socialization. Endres (1985) found that 64 percent of journalists believed that their ethical values change the longer they spent in the field. Out of that 64 percent, 31 percent believed that their ethical values had become stricter and more conservative. This could have been a factor of why newspapers did not run the memo because it could have been a risky issue to cover. Ethical questions could have been raised against the papers since this story could have been related to the CBS controversy from Sept. 8, 2004 (CBS News, 2005), when *60 Minutes Wednesday* ran a story about documents that put into question President Bush’s war records that were later deemed not credible.

This research can be expanded by a larger analysis of editorials of the country every editorial written on the memo was probably not on Lexis-Nexis. Also, analyzing what other recent foreign news events received a lack of coverage by the United States media could show a connection of some sort. How did editorials and columns from around the world on the memo compare to the U.S.? How did media coverage of the Downing Street memo compare to coverage of other events during wartime?

Limitations of the study include a small sample size since the researcher only used pieces from Lexis-Nexis. A more in depth sample size could have brought more information to the research. Also, knowledge of the writer's political preferences could have given a better idea of why they wrote their pieces in the first place. This data could also be compared to opinion pieces from other events that were also believed to have a lack of coverage.

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