

**The Bush Administration, Inoculation Strategies,
and the Selling of a “War”**

by

Lt Andre Billeaudeau, USCG; David Domke; Capt John S. Hutcheson, USAF; Philip A. Garland

With acknowledgements to: Jae W. Shim and David Ko

Address correspondence to:
Andre Billeaudeau
University of Washington
School of Communications
Box 353740
Seattle, WA 98195
FAX: (206) 543-9285/PH: (206) 510-9171
cgsardog@juno.com

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Abstract

Research regarding President Bush and his administration’s use of communication strategies in preparing for waging a long war on terrorism was conducted through the NY Times. We tested our hypothesis that “inoculation” was not only employed, but that journalists responded. Our findings suggest that the Bush administration aggressively used classic inoculation techniques in preparing for the war on terrorism and that journalist’s valence on key wartime issues moved in step with the administration’s inoculation attempts.

The Bush Administration, Inoculation Strategies, and the Selling of a “War”

On September 20, 2001, in his address before the U.S. Congress and a national television audience, President George W. Bush began to lay out his administration’s plans for a “war on terrorism.” Included in this address were claims that the conflict would be lengthy in duration and would specifically not target Islam (Bush, 2001). Over the next three weeks, the President and his top aides publicly noted these and several additional concerns and challenges about a potential military campaign, including U.S. military casualties, Afghan civilian deaths, and the difficulty of rebuilding Afghanistan afterwards. It is the argument in this paper that the Bush administration carefully and intentionally publicly acknowledged these challenges in an attempt to head off criticism of its plans, criticism by either the U.S. press or public. In essence, the Bush administration undertook what scholar Michael Pfau (Pfau & Kenski 1990) has called a strategy of “inoculation,” whereby political leaders facing a legitimate threat engage in *two-sided refutational arguments*, in which both the validity of one’s goals as well as the challenges to such an outlook are discussed. Such a communication strategy, as discussed below, has been found in scholarship to be particularly persuasive upon audiences and the public. In this research, we document this two-sided strategy used by the Bush administration in the weeks between the September 11 attacks and the October 7 start of the military campaign against the Taliban, and attempt to assess its impact upon news coverage, specifically the *New York Times*.

It is important to note that U.S. Presidents long have used the language of sacrifice to ennoble their goals, maintain focus among fellow political leaders, and hold onto often fickle public and media support. One notable exception, however, was Lyndon Johnson, who rarely acknowledged concerns or downsides in escalating U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia in the 1960s.¹ For example, as a prelude to increasing both U.S. troop strength and bombing in

¹ As evidence that Lyndon Johnson had not adequately prepared Americans for the challenges of Vietnam, as of May 1964, 64 percent of the U.S. public said that they had given “little thought” to Vietnam (Mueller, 1973, p. 81).

Vietnam following the Gulf of Tonkin events,² President Johnson in an August 1964 address to Congress did not discuss any of the challenges facing the U.S. military campaign; instead, he focused solely on the campaign’s positive goals, with such claims as “This is not a jungle war, but a struggle for freedom on every front of human activity.” Further evidence that Johnson preferred to use *one-sided* communications about Vietnam — in which concerns or challenges were not publicly acknowledged — can be found in the fact that many U.S. soldiers in Vietnam resented that their involvement in the fighting was being kept quiet by the administration during this same period of post-Tonkin buildup (Hallin, 1986, p. 222). Johnson’s consistently one-sided communications about the Vietnam conflict ultimately hurt the administration’s credibility with the press. One former diplomatic and military correspondent for the *Washington Post* said that the Johnson administration “oversold greatly” the position and likely success of U.S. military early in the Vietnam conflict, prompting unrealistic expectations about the Tet offensive in 1968 that ultimately helped to turn the Tet battles — by the numbers alone a U.S. military victory — into a severe public relations defeat (Becker, 2001).

To examine how the Bush administration “sold” the war on terrorism, this research examines the interplay between President Bush, key members of his administration, and news media in the weeks following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Specifically, we content analyze news coverage in the *New York Times* to (a) identify specific two-sided, refutational communication strategies used by the Bush administration in an attempt to inoculate both citizens and journalists against criticism and concerns regarding the war on terrorism; and (b) examine whether this communication approach by the President and his key administration members was followed by discernable patterns in news coverage once the U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan began on October 7.

² On August 7, the U.S. Congress passed, almost unanimously, the “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution,” which gave Johnson support to use “all necessary measures” to deal with “aggression” in Vietnam. The Johnson administration had been seeking such a resolution from the Congress; the Tonkin Gulf incidents presented a good opportunity (Hallin, 1986).

The Strategy of Inoculation and the Bush Administration

The concept of “inoculation” as a communication strategy grew out of research on one- and two-sided messages in the 1950s. An unanticipated finding of this research was that exposure to two-sided persuasive messages increased an audience’s resistance to subsequent attitude change (Lumsdaine & Janis, 1953). These findings were central to McGuire’s formulation of the inoculation message theory: “Refutational” arguments — in which a speaker not only advocates his or her viewpoint but also identifies potentially threatening counter-arguments likely to be raised by others — will motivate listeners to strengthen attitudes, thereby prompting greater resistance to subsequent attitude change (Papageorgis & McGuire, 1961; see also Lumsdaine & Janis, 1953). To be clear, as Pfau and Kenski (1990) have noted, a two-sided communication strategy qualifies as an inoculation approach only when a speaker in initial communications (referred to as “pretreatments” by scholars) can specify a legitimate *impending* and *potentially influential* counter-attack. Inoculation, therefore, in its classic formulation is more than simply responding to counterarguments in advance; if an initial message contained only such preemptive refutation, it would make for limited value as communicators would need to prepare specific messages corresponding to each and every potential counter-argument. In contrast, when the initial communication *both* includes preemptive refutation and can specify a legitimate, looming threat, individuals exposed to the message become motivated to bolster attitudes, thereby enhancing resistance to counter persuasion *more generally* — i.e., not just on the exact point discussed — if and when a wider counter-attack occurs (Pfau & Kenski, 1990).

Much of the early inoculation research focused on what McGuire (1970, p. 37) defined as “cultural truisms” — culturally embedded beliefs “so generally accepted that most individuals are unaware of attacking arguments.” And indeed, for such topics a number of early laboratory studies confirmed the relative superiority of an inoculation communication strategy over one-sided, bolstering messages in promoting resistance to subsequent persuasive attacks (Anderson & McGuire, 1965; McGuire 1961, 1962; McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961, 1962; Papageorgis & McGuire, 1961; Tannenbaum, Macaulay, & Norris 1966; Tannenbaum & Norris, 1965).

Subsequently, a sizable number of studies expanded McGuire’s theoretical boundaries to test — and find support for — the efficacy of pretreatment inoculation strategies when the domain of concern included controversial topics (Burgoon et al., 1976; Burgoon & Chase, 1973; Burgoon, Cohen, Miller, & Montgomery, 1978; Burgoon & King, 1974; Freedman & Steinbruner, 1964; Infante, 1975; McCroskey, 1970; McCroskey, Young, & Scott, 1972; Ullman & Bodaken, 1975), including some in the domain of political communication (Pfau & Burgoon, 1988; Pfau, Kenski, Nitz, & Sorenson, 1989).

It is in this application of inoculation message strategies to the study of political communication that this research is centered. To be specific, our theoretical argument is based upon the premise that it is possible, and reasonable, to draw parallels between the Bush administration’s communication approach in the weeks after September 11 and the ways in which inoculation works in biological matters (for discussion of the biology of inoculation, see McGuire, 1970). The potentiality of a “war on terrorism” may have brought a number of concerns to the minds of Americans in the immediate aftermath of September 11; such concerns, for example, could have included the length of a military campaign, extent of U.S. casualties, possible U.S. exit strategies from any campaign, and whether Muslims would be targeted. Any such concerns among U.S. citizens in these initial post-September 11 days, we suggest, might be viewed as “germs” with the potential — *if not addressed, i.e. neutralized* — to develop into full-blown “viruses” which might ultimately become debilitating to the U.S. government and its war on terrorism goals. The severity of the September 11 attacks undoubtedly fostered among the American public some willingness to not easily give in to the germs of concern about any U.S. military campaign. Individual resistance to germs usually has limited lasting power, however, especially if the encompassing environment has previously experienced damaging, “virulent strains” of germ festation — as was the case with U.S. public reactions to the Vietnam conflict after the Tet offensive.

Further, the loss of nearly 3,000 U.S. civilian lives and the very-real possibility of more terrorist attacks perceived among the U.S. public (see Pew, 2001) presented an impending,

legitimate threat facing the United States. In this context, President Bush in his speech to the joint houses of Congress on September 20 offered the first “vaccination shot” of the government and military’s rhetorical strategy — two-sided refutational arguments with the goal of promoting among U.S. citizens resistance to subsequent counter-arguments (i.e., more germs) against a U.S.-led war on terrorism. It is our speculation that the President’s speech was only the beginning of this rhetorical campaign; that is, we theorize that over the next three weeks, prior to the beginning of the U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan on October 7, the President and his leading advisers — in particular Secretary of State Colin Powell; Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld; and Attorney General John Ashcroft, but also other U.S. government and military leaders — engaged in a concerted, consistent effort to present two-sided refutational arguments about the planned war on terrorism. If such a strategy was indeed present for the Bush administration, we should find the President, his advisers, and other key U.S. government and military members often addressing the potential challenges facing a U.S. military campaign in the days between September 11 and October 7, when the war began. With this in mind, we offer our first hypothesis:

H1: President Bush, his key advisers of Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld, and John Ashcroft, and other U.S. government and military leaders will consistently (i.e. most days) publicly discuss potential challenges to a U.S. “war on terrorism” in public communications between September 11 and October 7, 2001.

That such a strategy might prove influential upon the U.S. public’s resistance to counter-arguments and concerns is important to study and would be noteworthy, but it is not the ultimate focus in this research. Rather, our interest is in the relationship between the Bush administration and the news media. If the President and others in his administration did indeed regularly acknowledge potential challenges to a “war on terrorism” in the month between the terrorist attacks and the U.S. military campaign began, such an inoculation strategy might have produced meaningful effects upon U.S. journalists, many of whom — and this is not a minor point — also were American citizens. If the press grew to distrust Lyndon Johnson’s one-sided presentation of the Vietnam conflict in the 1960s, with the result increasingly negative coverage over time of the

U.S. role in the war³ (Lichty, 1988), perhaps the reverse occurred if President Bush and other key members of his administration in 2001 often spoke of potential challenges lying ahead in the campaign against terrorism. Specifically, it merits examination whether the news media themselves underwent a form of inoculation, so that when the already-spoken-of “war challenges” actually became confronted — that is, when the U.S. military campaign commenced — journalists became more supportive of U.S. government and military leadership.

To be clear, support for (or, stated another way, a lack of news media criticism of) a U.S. war effort would hardly be surprising if the U.S. government and military were engaged in a clearly successful campaign. Interestingly, however, the first month of the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan did not produce much in the way of significant U.S. victories. Public opinion data in early November indicated that only 27 percent of U.S. adults were “very satisfied” with the U.S. military campaign’s progress, and a full 18 percent expressed dissatisfaction (Gallup, 2001).” In such an environment, it would be reasonable for the press to ask questions and perhaps even be critical about U.S. military strategy, goals, and so on. Conversely, if the Bush administration’s two-sided arguments about the challenges of the “war” in the weeks before the military campaign began had been persuasively influential upon members of the press, we might expect to find U.S. news coverage slow to criticize and even perhaps leaning to supportive of the military campaign or Bush administration. It is our view, then, that *in the context of a less-than-stellar first month of the U.S. military campaign in the war on terrorism*, if the press coverage of the specific “challenges” discussed by the Bush administration became more positive once the war began, it would be suggestive of the success of the Bush communication approach. With this in mind, we now offer our second hypothesis:

H2: Journalists’ discourse about the U.S. “war on terrorism” challenges identified by President Bush, his key advisers of Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld, and John Ashcroft,

³ Lichty indicated that for two years after the US troop buildup began in 1965, network television reporting overall was favorable to the US effort in Vietnam, then began to change even before Tet, reflecting establishment disarray at home, toward "an increasing questioning of the ultimate success of the American effort."

and other U.S. government and military leaders in the days prior to the U.S. military campaign will become more positive *after* the campaign begins than beforehand.

Method

The purpose of this study is two-fold: First, we identify specific two-sided, refutational communication strategies used by President Bush and his top advisers in the weeks following the terrorist attacks of September 11; second, we explore whether this communication was followed by discernible patterns in news coverage once the U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan began on October 7. To study these strategies, we content analyzed news coverage in the *New York Times* from September 12 to November 9, when the defeat of the Taliban at Mazar-i-Sharif represented the first significant U.S. military victory in the Afghanistan campaign. For this analysis, we read all news coverage in the front section and in a special “A Nation Challenged” section that ran daily beginning in late September, as well as editorials and op-ed pieces.

In undertaking this analysis, we adopted the innovative approach of using the source (with journalists conceived as a distinct source) as the unit of analysis, rather than the story as is commonplace in content analyses. We did this because we were interested in (a) identifying the specific sources within the Bush administration that might have engaged in two-sided inoculation rhetoric about potential challenges in the war on terrorism, and (b) systematically distinguishing the valence — i.e., directionality — of language used by the journalists from that used by Bush administration sources, which allowed for examination of whether journalists appeared to be influenced by the inoculation approach. To be specific, as explained below we were interested in *what* potential challenges to the war on terrorism were discussed in news content, *who* was talking about them, *when* the challenges were discussed, and *how* they were discussed. Only sources that discussed at least one of the identified challenges to the military campaign were coded. Each source quoted or paraphrased was coded separately, and the entirety of each source’s statements in an article was taken into account when applying the coding categories.

Several source categories were identified in the broader project of which this research is part, including a range of U.S. sources, foreign sources, and journalists themselves. In this study we focus on three source categories:

- **Bush administration leaders:** This category consisted of comments in news content by President Bush, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and Attorney General John Ashcroft;
- **Other U.S. government or military:** This category consisted of comments in news content by any other federal government or military spokesperson such as a Congress member or U.S. Army spokesperson;
- **Journalists:** This category distinguished journalists, most often the writer of each article, as a distinct source in news content. Specifically, language clearly that of the journalist is the focus here; journalists’ paraphrased presentation of source statements was not included for this category, because these statements rightfully belong to other sources. In addition, if a story quoted or cited information from another U.S. journalist or media outlet, that source also was coded in this category.

The content analysis focused on source discussion of six distinct “challenges or concerns” about the U.S. military campaign. These six were selected because they emerged in the Bush administration’s public discourse between September 11 and October 7. Specifically, sources were coded for the presence and accompanying valence of comments and language on the following topics related to the U.S. military campaign:

- *U.S. casualties:* Sources were coded as “1” on this variable if they were explicitly critical about potential/actual loss of U.S. life *or* the Bush administration’s discussion of this subject; as “2” if they expressed concern or questions about potential/actual loss of U.S. life *or* the administration’s discussion of this subject; as “3” if they neutrally presented factual information about potential/actual loss of U.S. life *or* the administration’s discussion of this subject; and “4” if they were explicitly supportive or positive about potential/actual loss of U.S. life *or* the administration’s discussion of this subject. Sources who did not mention

potential/actual loss of U.S. life or the administration’s discussion of this subject did not receive a code on this variable.

- *Afghanistan civilian deaths*: Sources were coded as “1” on this variable if they were explicitly critical about potential/actual Afghan civilian deaths from wartime activities — including lack of food — *or* the Bush administration’s discussion of this subject; as “2” if they expressed concern or questions about potential/actual Afghan civilian deaths from wartime activities or the administration’s discussion of this subject; as “3” if they neutrally presented factual information about potential/actual Afghan civilian deaths from wartime activities or the administration’s discussion of this subject; and “4” if they were explicitly supportive or positive about potential/actual Afghan civilian deaths or the administration’s discussion of this subject. Sources who did not mention potential/actual Afghan civilian deaths from wartime activities or the administration’s discussion of this subject did not receive a code on this variable.

- *Duration of “war on terrorism”*: Sources were coded as “1” on this variable if they were explicitly critical about the potential/actual duration of the U.S. military campaign *or* the Bush administration’s discussion of this subject; as “2” if they expressed concern or questions about the potential/actual duration of the U.S. military campaign or the administration’s discussion of this subject; as “3” if they neutrally presented factual information about the potential/actual duration of the U.S. military campaign or the administration’s discussion of this subject; and “4” if they were explicitly supportive or positive about the potential/actual duration of the U.S. military campaign or the administration’s discussion of this subject. Sources who did not mention the potential/actual duration of the U.S. military campaign or the administration’s discussion of this subject did not receive a code on this variable.

- *U.S. campaign exit strategy*: Sources were coded as “1” on this variable if they were explicitly critical about the possibility of a “clean” U.S. exit from the Afghanistan war theater *or* the Bush administration’s discussion of this subject; as “2” if they expressed concern or questions about the possibility of a “clean” U.S. exit from the Afghanistan war theater or the administration’s discussion of this subject; as “3” if they neutrally presented factual information

about the possibility of a “clean” U.S. exit from the Afghanistan war theater or the administration’s discussion of this subject; and “4” if they were explicitly supportive or positive about the possibility of a “clean” U.S. exit from the Afghanistan war theater or the administration’s discussion of this subject. Sources who did not mention the possibility of a “clean” U.S. exit from the Afghanistan war theater or the administration’s discussion of this subject did not receive a code on this variable.

- *Rebuilding of Afghanistan*: Sources were coded as “1” on this variable if they were explicitly critical about the rebuilding of Afghanistan after the war *or* the Bush administration’s discussion of this subject; as “2” if they expressed concern or questions about the rebuilding of Afghanistan after the war or the administration’s discussion of this subject; as “3” if they neutrally presented factual information about the rebuilding of Afghanistan after the war or the administration’s discussion of this subject; and “4” if they were explicitly supportive or positive about the rebuilding of Afghanistan after the war or the administration’s discussion of this subject. Sources who did not mention the rebuilding of Afghanistan after the war or the administration’s discussion of this subject did not receive a code on this variable.

- *War on Islam*: Sources were coded as “1” on this variable if they were explicitly critical about the likelihood of Muslims not being targeted *or* of the Bush administration’s discussion of this subject; as “2” if they expressed concern or questions about the likelihood of Muslims not being targeted or the administration’s discussion on this subject; as “3” if they neutrally presented factual information about the likelihood of Muslims being targeted or the administration’s discussion of this subject; and “4” if they were explicitly supportive or positive about the likelihood of Muslims not being targeted or the administration’s discussion of this subject. Sources who did not mention the likelihood of Muslims not being targeted or the administration’s discussion/position of this subject did not receive a code on this variable.

Three people conducted the content analysis coding. As a check of the inter-coder reliability, a fourth coder coded a selection of 33 articles, which included 83 coded sources. For the source coding, this coder agreed on 76 of 83 codings, yielding a .92 reliability coefficient.

For the six “war challenges” variables, all of which had the same coding scheme, this coder agreed on 445 of 498 codings, yielding a .89 reliability coefficient. In the case of disagreements, codings were assigned after a re-reading of the article.

Results

This research is guided generally by two related questions. First, did President Bush and/or his key advisers of Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld, and John Ashcroft often publicly discuss potential challenges to a U.S.-led “war on terrorism” between September 12 and October 7, 2001? Second, if so, did journalists’ discourse about these “war on terrorism” challenges become more positive *after* the campaign began than beforehand?

Hypothesis one

Specifically, hypothesis one predicted that in the month between the September 12 attacks and the October 7 beginning of the U.S. military campaign, the President and his top aides would consistently (i.e. most days) publicly discuss potential “war on terrorism” challenges. To examine this hypothesis, we charted on a daily basis the *number of times* and *number of days* that the six identified “war challenge” topics — U.S. casualties, Afghan civilian deaths, war duration, U.S. exit strategy, rebuilding of Afghanistan, and targeting of Islam — were addressed by (a) President Bush; (b) administration Cabinet members Powell, Rumsfeld, and Ashcroft; and (c) other U.S. government and military leaders. These results are derived only from our analysis of news content, because news content is much more indicative than editorials and op-ed pieces of the *daily interactions* of key political actors and the press (see Table 1).

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The results in Table 1 indicate that, as predicted, the Bush administration’s discussion of the six “war challenge” categories was substantial during this potential “inoculation” period. A total of 58 times over the span of 26 days from September 12 through October 7, the President, his top aides, or other U.S. government and military members of the administration were quoted

as addressing these war challenges in *New York Times* news content. The most discussed category by the administration was the potential duration of the military campaign (24 times over 15 separate days), followed by Afghan civilian deaths (9 times over 6 days), war on Islam (9 times over 5 days), U.S. casualties (7 times over 5 days), U.S. exit strategy (5 times over 4 days) and Rebuilding of Afghanistan (4 times over 4 days). Further, President Bush was the primary administration source publicly discussing these concerns during these days: He was present 25 times, compared to a total of 11 appearances by his top aides (Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld, and John Ashcroft) and 21 by other government/military officials.

We also were interested in how *consistently* these challenges were addressed — ranging from rarely to occasionally to most days — by the Bush administration during this nearly month-long prelude to the U.S. military campaign. To examine this, we constructed a variable that indicated the *daily sum of challenges addressed* by the President, his top aides, and other U.S. government and military leaders. We then plotted this variable on a daily basis from September 12 through October 7 (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

This daily plot indicates that the Bush administration publicly addressed at least one of these war challenges, as reflected in *New York Times* news content, the majority of days in the month leading up to the beginning of the U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan. To be specific, the President, his top aides, or other U.S. government and military members of the administration were quoted in the *Times* addressing potential concerns about the war in 17 of 26 days during this period of potential “inoculation.” Further, of the nine days in which the Bush administration was not presenting two-sided refutation arguments in the *Times*, one was September 12, the day after the attacks, and three (September 19, 21, and 30) followed days of high presence in the *Times* of the Bush administration addressing war concerns. The results in Table 1 and Figure 1, then, provide strong support for hypothesis one.

Hypothesis two

Hypothesis two predicted that journalists’ discourse about the “war on terrorism” challenges identified by the Bush administration in the days prior to the U.S. military campaign would become more positive after the campaign began than beforehand. To examine this hypothesis, we compared the mean valence of journalists’ discourse on the six “war challenges” between (a) September 12 to October 7, and (b) October 8 to November 9, the first month of the U.S.-led military campaign in Afghanistan. As a reminder, the valence coding was as follows: criticism regarding the “challenge” or administration’s discussion of it received a “1”; expressions of concern or questioning regarding the “challenge” or administration’s discussion of it received a “2”; neutral presentation of factual information about the “challenge” or the administration’s discussion of it received a “3”; and explicit supportive or positive language about the “challenge” or the administration’s discussion of it received a “4.” For this analysis, we combined news content and editorials, because (a) we not concerned with the *day-to-day* interactions between political actors and news media, and (b) in combination these forms of discourse represent the *journalistic voice* of the *New York Times* (see Table 2).

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The results in Table 2 indicate a consistent movement over time toward more positive valence in journalists’ discourse about the “war challenges” discussed by the Bush administration. Across the topics, positive shifts in the mean valence of journalists’ language from before the war to during the war ranged from .52 for U.S. casualties to .91 for Afghan civilian deaths; all of the shifts were statistically significant. Indeed, for four of six topics, journalists’ discourse moved from roughly midway between questioning (valence = 2) and neutral (valence = 3) about the “challenge” in the period September 12 to October 7 to between neutral (valence = 3) and positive (valence = 4) in the period October 8 to November 9. Of these, the most positive of journalists’ language was found for “duration of campaign,” which moved from a mean valence of 2.63 in the month before the war to a mean valence of 3.27 after the military campaign began ($t=2.03, p<.05$). It is notable that this category also received the

greatest amount of attention from the Bush administration in the month before the war, having been addressed 24 times over 15 days in *Times* content, with the President discussing the issue 13 times. Conversely, the most critical of journalists’ language during the first month of the war was found for the topics of U.S. exit strategy and rebuilding of Afghanistan, which received the least amount of attention from the Bush administration during the month before the war, each having been addressed only four times in *Times* content. Nonetheless, the pattern of evidence is clear: Journalists’ discourse about the war challenges became significantly more supportive of the U.S. ability to address it or the administration’s handling of the subject in the first month of the military campaign *in all six cases*.

As a point of comparison, we also examined the op-ed pieces in the *New York Times* for potential shifts in valence between the month prior to the war and the first month of the U.S. military campaign. Even though some of these columns may be written by regular contributors to a particular newspaper (such as William Safire or Thomas Friedman in the case of the *Times*), op-ed pieces nonetheless represent voices that are distinctly independent from that of a newspaper; because of this, we conceptualize op-ed pieces in this study as indicative (albeit not necessarily representative) of non-governmental, non-*New York Times* elite opinions. Although the number of op-ed pieces in the *New York Times* in our sample that addressed the “war challenges” identified by the Bush administration was not high, the trends are useful as a point of reference to the valence of journalists’ language over the same periods of time. We again present the valence of journalists’ language to allow easy comparisons (see Table 3).

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

These results are notable in that the discourse about the “war challenges” in op-ed pieces became more negative for three of the six topics after the war began, and in only one instance was there a substantive positive increase. For example, discourse in the op-ed pieces about U.S. casualties shifted from a mean valence of 3.33 in the month before the war — which was the most positive mean valence among all categories for either op-eds or *Times*’ journalists — to a

mean valence of 1.33 after the war began — which was the most critical among all categories for either op-eds or *Times*’ journalists. Similarly, discourse in the op-eds about a U.S. exit strategy moved from a “neutral” 3.00 mean valence prior to the war to a questioning-to-critical 1.75 mean valence once the war began. Only for Afghan civilian deaths did discourse in op-ed pieces become notably more positive once the war began, moving from a mean valence of 2.67 to 3.40. The pattern of the discourse among the op-ed pieces, then, is quite different from the pattern found among the *Times*’ news content and editorials, and is suggestive that elite, questioning voices were present in the U.S. political arena during the first month of the war.

Discussion

It was the argument of this paper that the Bush administration carefully and intentionally publicly acknowledged the anticipated challenges to the inevitable war on terrorism in an attempt to head off criticism of its plans, criticism by either the U.S. press or public. By identifying the six primary war challenges (*U.S. casualties, Afghanistan civilian deaths, Duration of “war on terrorism”, U.S. campaign exit strategy, Rebuilding of Afghanistan, War on Islam*) this study tracked not only how many times and days that the administration was able to inoculate on these topics, but how well these efforts played out in the press. We had predicted that journalists’ discourse about the aforementioned “war on terrorism” challenges would become more positive after the campaign began than beforehand due to the administration’s inoculation efforts.

The findings reported here demonstrate that the Bush administration indeed undertook an aggressive strategy of “inoculation,” whereby he and his administration employed *two-sided refutational arguments*, validating their war goals as well as addressing the challenges expected to be encountered. The findings also demonstrated that the use of the inoculation strategy was

not only prevalent netting 39 (combined) days of challenge topic coverage over the 26-day inoculation period, but the data suggests that journalistic and editorial valence on the same issues not only withstood the daily news of war that lacked even minor victories and was proving to be tougher than expected, but actually increased in its support across all six challenge categories. Although this study was unique in its combining of journalistic valence measurement in a post inoculation news environment and use of single source coding, the findings follow a distinct pattern supporting the theory of inoculation demonstrated in academic studies since the 1950’s.

Taking a step beyond the macro data demonstrating a positive news valence shift based on administrative inoculation, our study captured other significant details. When we considered the “who” in inoculation delivery, it became notable that that variable made a significant difference. When the President gave a challenge topic the most attention in the press, with *Duration of campaign* capturing 52% of all Presidential attempts, it attained the highest positive mean valence among journalist in news/editorials. The three challenge topics (*U.S. casualties*, *Exit strategy and Rebuilding of Afghanistan*) receiving the least amount of Presidential attention (16% of all attempts) became the three with the lowest post-inoculation mean valence. This trend suggests that the “who” portion of inoculation delivery can make a difference. This data also demonstrates that the President, when tackling arguably the most sticky challenge topic, that of *U.S. Casualties*, seemed to step aside to allow other government or military spokespersons to take responsibility on this topic. The government/military spokespersons group accounted for 57% of all inoculation attempts on this subject, the highest percentage for government/military spokespersons among the six challenge categories. This same category, *U.S. Casualties*, receiving the least amount of Presidential attention received the largest and most critical valence

shift among Op-ed sources dropping from fairly supportive (3.33/highest among Op-ed) in the pre-war weeks to highly critical (1.33/lowest among Op-ed) once the bombing started. These findings further support the suggestion that the “who” in inoculation delivery, at least among the press, makes a difference.

In addition to the findings about the power of the individual making the delivery, the net inoculation attempts and number of days appearance in the New York Times also made a difference in valence shifts. Again as above, the topic of *Duration of campaign* received not only the greatest amount of attention from all administration spokespersons (President/top aids/government and military) in the month before the war, having been addressed 24 times in 15 coverage days, but also received the highest mean journalist valence in the post inoculation period suggesting redundancy in delivery over time helps. Conversely, the most critical of journalists’ valence during the first month of the war was found for the topics of *U.S. exit strategy* and *Rebuilding of Afghanistan*, which received the least amount of inoculation attempts at 15% with each only being carried four times, again suggesting redundancy in delivery helps.

In reviewing these findings, scholars might note that our post inoculation findings parallel those potentially found under a “rally around the flag” phenomena or as part of a National Identity Theory. Although this may be true when looking solely at the media’s valence shifts, our research was different in that it revealed not only the net valence gain among journalists, but further broke down the processes of inoculation demonstrating the administration’s utilization of an inoculation strategy. It is also interesting, as a point of comparison to other theories, that not

all coverage grew in support of the administration as many of the Op-ed categories demonstrated.

This study, by relying on sources identified in the New York Times, relied on a more naturalistic process as compared to the theories’ traditional controlled experimental format; it would be nearly impossible to perform the latter with journalists. Our application of inoculation theory was an attempt to move the theory forward into new grounds and we believe we achieved that goal. Further research on inoculation by the Bush administration is planned with a focus on war on other war topics that did not receive high levels of inoculation as well as a further historical analysis comparing previous administration efforts at inoculation in preparation for conflict.

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Tables 1-3 & Figure 1

Table 1
**Discourse in News Content by U.S. Government and Military Leaders
 About Potential Challenges of “War on Terrorism,” September 11-October 7, 2002**

<u>Potential Challenge</u>	<u>Times addressed</u>	<u>Days Addressed</u>
<i>U.S. casualties</i>	7	5
President Bush	1	
Powell, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft	2	
Other govt./military officials	4	
<i>Afghanistan civilian deaths</i>	9	6
President Bush	4	
Powell, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft		
Other govt./military officials	5	
<i>Duration of campaign</i>	24	15
President Bush	13	
Powell, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft	6	
Other govt./military officials	5	
<i>U.S. exit strategy</i>	5	4
President Bush	1	
Powell, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft	2	
Other govt./military officials	2	
<i>Rebuilding of Afghanistan</i>	4	4
President Bush	2	
Powell, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft	1	
Other govt./military officials	1	
<i>War on Islam?</i>	9	5
President Bush	5	
Powell, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft		
Other govt./military officials	4	
<hr/>		
	TOTALS	58
President Bush	25	
Powell, Rumsfeld, Ashcroft	11	
Other govt./military officials	21	

Table 2
Valence of Journalists’ Discourse About Potential Challenges in “War on Terrorism”

<u>Potential Challenge</u>	Sept. 12-Oct. 7		Oct. 8-Nov. 9		<u>Statistics</u>
	<u>Valence</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Valence</u>	<u>N</u>	
<i>U.S. casualties</i> Journalists in news/editorials	2.58	12	3.10	10	t=2.24, p<.05
<i>Afghanistan civilian deaths</i> Journalists in news/editorials	2.20	10	3.11	36	t=3.86, p<.05
<i>Duration of campaign</i> Journalists in news/editorials	2.63	8	3.27	11	t=2.03, p<.05
<i>U.S. exit strategy</i> Journalists in news/editorials	2.00	3	2.80	5	t=1.63, p<.10
<i>Rebuilding of Afghanistan</i> Journalists in news/editorials	2.00	3	2.63	8	t=2.38, p<.05
<i>War on Islam?</i> Journalists in news/editorials	2.60	5	3.20	5	t=1.90, p<.05

Table 3
**Valence of Journalists’ and Op-Eds’ Discourse About Potential Challenges
in “War on Terrorism”**

<u>Potential Challenge</u>	<u>Sept. 12-Oct. 7</u>		<u>Oct. 8-Nov. 9</u>		<u>Statistics</u>
	<u>Valence</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Valence</u>	<u>N</u>	
<i>U.S. casualties</i>					
Journalists in news/editorials	2.58	12	3.10	10	t=2.24, p<.05
Op-ed pieces	3.33	3	1.33	3	t=2.68, p<.05
<i>Afghanistan civilian deaths</i>					
Journalists in news/editorials	2.20	10	3.11	36	t=3.86, p<.05
Op-ed pieces	2.67	9	3.40	5	t=1.25, n.s.
<i>Duration of campaign</i>					
Journalists in news/editorials	2.63	8	3.27	11	t=2.03, p<.05
Op-ed pieces	3.00	8	3.00	5	t=.00, n.s.
<i>U.S. exit strategy</i>					
Journalists in news/editorials	2.00	3	2.80	5	t=1.63, p<.10
Op-ed pieces	3.00	3	1.75	4	t=2.20, p<.05
<i>Rebuilding of Afghanistan</i>					
Journalists in news/editorials	2.00	3	2.63	8	t=2.38, p<.05
Op-ed pieces	3.00	2	3.25	4	t=.26, n.s.
<i>War on Islam?</i>					
Journalists in news/editorials	2.60	5	3.20	5	t=1.90, p<.05
Op-ed pieces	3.20	5	2.83	5	t=.67, n.s.

Figure 1
Sum of Discourse in News Content by U.S. Government and Military Leaders
About Potential Challenges of "War on Terrorism,"
Plotted Daily for September 11-October 7, 2002

