THE MASS MEDIA
IN MODERN ARMED CONFLICT
THE CASE OF IRAQ IN 2003–2010

by Wojciech Stankiewicz

The development of mass media and media coverage of public life has led to a situation that access to information anywhere on the globe has become universal and free. The priority of the media today is to provide the fastest and most accurate information to the public. The competition between the media causes noisy information in the transmission, which makes the average receiver not able to absorb such a large amount of information. As a consequence, the result of communication distortions is a lack of information and message distortion. The original function of the media has gradually begun to change. Significant importance has gained information of a shocking sensation, whose main purpose is to draw the viewer’s attention and elicit appropriate responses.

Modern mass media broadcast all major national and international events. Foreign correspondents, leading live reports from the scene, allow the viewer to participate in virtual real time. Media played a huge role in the transmission of events after September 11, 2001. The entire world was focused around the tragedy associated with the terrorist attacks on the

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World Trade Center. Viewers from almost every place in the world could observe the disaster and further developments. Technological progress and the progress of information technology enabled people to globalize the media and universalize communication. Information about the attack on the WTC and the Pentagon rapidly spread around the world. On the one hand, the media seized the opportunity to increase viewership, but on the other hand they showed an important event that has suffered long-distance consequences in the form of intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq.

War has always been in the interest of the media. From the first moment of showing the military actions by the mass media, every conflict consistently becomes a global event, where most citizens of the world begin to know and think about it. Modern wars are primarily informational, and events do not happen only on the frontlines, but they are also reflected in the media\(^2\). The American offensive against Iraq in 2003 is an excellent example of modern art warfare. Apart from soldiers in military range operations, also present are representatives of the largest television networks and war correspondents from around the world.

The hypothesis of this article claims that: \textit{mass media play a crucial impact in modern armed conflicts, particularly during the American aggression against Iraq in 2003.}

In order to verify the assumed hypothesis the following research questions are raised:

1. How important are the mass media for U.S. foreign policy, created by the former President George W. Bush against Iraq, especially after the September 11, 2001?
2. To what extent did American and Polish media highlight the involvement in the preparatory phase of the conflict in Iraq? Did the press and television significantly impact on citizens’ attitudes to the invasion of Iraq?

1. MASS MEDIA AND THE FOREIGN POLICY OF GEORGE W. BUSH OVER IRAQ AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

U.S. foreign policy against Iraq would change depending on the situation in the Middle East. For many years, Iraq was regarded as a major partner in international cooperation by the United States. The USA largely used Iraq, in a plan to stop the influence of Soviet communism in the Middle East. Iraq - a former ally, for many years was supported financially and militarily by both the United States and Great Britain, therefore it was able to take advantage of the situation\(^3\). In the years 1980–1990 the Americans cared about the interests of the Middle East and supported the regime of Saddam Hussein. Despite the aggressive military actions and policies of the president of Iraq, in 1982, the U.S. State Department crossed out Iraq from the list of countries that supported terrorism\(^4\). The United States in a sense, allowed Saddam Hussein to strengthen his position in the Middle East, leading to many wars with the participation of Iraq (Iran-Iraq war of 1980, attack on Kuwait in 1990). The United States provided support for Iraq, even when they got information about Iraq using chemical weapons in 1991\(^5\).

The situation of Iraq severely worsened after the First Persian Gulf War. President George H.W. Bush could not deprive Saddam Hussein of his power. Since the war in 1991, the President of Iraq had become the main enemy of the United States. Undoubtedly, it was one of the main reasons for the U.S. aggression against Iraq.

Ali Hassan Jamsheer claims that the Republican Party undertook plans to eliminate the regime of Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi problem at meet-

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\(^5\) For the first time Iraq used chemical weapons in 1987, the so-called Anfal plan, against the Kurdish population. For the second time in 1988; M. Makiela, *Amerykańska polityka wobec konfliktu zbrojnego w Iraku*, [in:] *Irak: dylematy*..., p. 86.
ings before the official appointment by President George W. Bush\textsuperscript{6}. No specific decisions were made. The attitude toward Iraq changed dramatically after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. The U.S. President began media propaganda, which the main tool became the largest television stations and press companies in the USA. The media were then used for the manipulation of public opinion\textsuperscript{7}.

Bush’s administration announced a “war on terror”, which was to take an unimaginable size and bring far-reaching consequences in terms of overthrowing the regime of Saddam Hussein, eliminating structures of terrorist groups. The government began introducing numerous bills that have to justify and guarantee the possibility of later U.S. intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. The purpose of intervention in the Middle East was developed in details by the president in the so-called “Bush Doctrine”. The plan recognized the new priorities of U.S. foreign policy. Reorganization of American actions in the international arena confirmed a serious intention to start a war against terrorism, and any country that supported terrorists’ actions.

George W. Bush’s speech on September 20, 2001, after the al-Qaeda attacks, was the first step towards convincing the public to support the “war on terror”. The Bush administration knew perfectly well that the best way to persuade the public to accept the decision of war was to stimulate a national sense of fear and discredit the enemy to achieve internal integration of society. Furthermore, he used references to the glorious history of the United States and the country’s position as a world power\textsuperscript{8}. The president’s speech was addressed primarily to the citizens of the United States, emphasizing the unity and solidarity of the American people. He thanked all the countries that united with America in their moment of danger, and imposition of accusations toward the terrorists was to con-


vince other governments that declared “war on terror” was only right and at the same time an unavoidable initiative.

George W. Bush was repeatedly stressing that the attacks on the United States were attacks on freedom and democracy in all free and democratic countries. In a speech he defined terrorists as “murderers” whose goal is to eliminate the Christians, Jews and Americans—mostly civilians, regardless of age or gender. The illustration of the number of terrorists and countries supporting the Taliban strategy was also an effective argument that was used. President Bush declared a significant issue, often repeated by the media around the world, a declaration of countries on the “war on terror”. The U.S. president made a clear distinction: either you are with us or against us. Short, but a very important statement confirmed the intention to start a war in the name of freedom and democracy. The governments of other countries were placed in a difficult situation and the determination of the United States’ fight against terrorism seemed to be relentless, which did not tolerate any objections. The most firm step in Bush’s speech was the announcement of the fight, which did not specify the end: Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it’s not over yet. It is not the end until every terrorist group of global reach is found, stopped and defeated. The statement clearly heralded an escalation of U.S. military operations in the Middle East. Most controversial in the Bush doctrine was raising the idea of “preventive war”, the pre-emptive war was to justify the later attack on Iraq.

The President’s speech made it clear to the public that terrorism was the main and most dangerous threat to the United States, and that the country must effectively eliminate it as soon as possible. The Speech gave rise to widely expanded rhetoric of war that the U.S. government and the

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10 Ibidem, DOA [07.04.2012].


12 Ibidem, DOA [25.03.2012].
president were applying until the start of the attack on Iraq. The declaration of war against terrorism has become a major goal of American foreign policy, and thus gained the rank of the most important topic among the national media.

George W. Bush’s “war on terror” is closely linked with certain countries that had or were accused of having weapons of mass destruction. In the annual address, to the State of the Union, on January 29, 2002, the U.S. president mentioned Iran, Iraq and North Korea as rogue states, and described them as the “axis of evil”\(^\text{13}\). The term was quickly used by the media to intensify the public mood against terrorism, but at the same time raised more anxiety and concern for the safety of the country. The accusation of Iran, Iraq and North Korea led to far-reaching effects in the international area and led to the collapse of the transatlantic relationship in terms of the opposition of France, Germany and Russia to intervene in the Middle East.

In order to convince the UN Security Council, George W. Bush, on October 12, 2002 presented another speech in which he insisted on Iraq facing the consequences of its actions. The main allegations concerned the failure by the Iraqi State to undertake UN Recommendations on the use of violence against the Iraqi people (Resolution No 688 UNSC), as well as UN inspections of Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction (Resolution No 687 UNSC). George W. Bush demanded a visitation of the inspection bodies of the United Nations in Iraq\(^\text{14}\). The President of the United States in order to convince NATO invoked a United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441 (November 8, 2002). Resolution 1441 states that Iraq will face serious consequences if Saddam Hussein does not comply with the resolution’s demands\(^\text{15}\).

Despite George W. Bush’s assurances that countries having weapons of mass destruction threaten the security of the whole world, he still failed to convince the governments of other countries to accept decisions

\(^{13}\) R.A. Kosta, op.cit., p. 94. The creator of the term “axis of evil” is David Frum, the neoconservative from Bush’s administration, who has links with the media

\(^{14}\) R.A. Kosta, op.cit., p. 97.

\(^{15}\) R. Tarnogórski, Interwencja w Iraku a prawo międzynarodowe, “Biuletyn” (PISM) 2003, No. 19(123), p. 784.
about the war on Iraq\textsuperscript{16}. The U.S. government did not have any evidence that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. Information from the U.S. intelligence community turned out to be, after the attack, completely unfounded. The government’s propaganda also failed, even though Colin Powell, then U.S. Secretary of State, gave a speech at the United Nations in an effort to try to convince the UN that Iraq had chemical weapons. He displayed the alleged evidence in the form of three test tubes\textsuperscript{17}. A couple of days after Powell’s speech, the media reported that both the report and the evidence of Iraq’s weapons were a hoax made up by special services\textsuperscript{18}.

Another argument made by the Bush administration to convince the international community to reasonable intervention in Iraq, was to overthrow Saddam Hussein. President Bush in his speeches quoted by the American and Western media linked Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda\textsuperscript{19}. Americans deliberately insinuated the possibility of acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by extreme Islamic groups in order to use it against the West. The allegations against Hussein were made by the U.S. government to characterize the Iraqi dictator as a tyrant and terrorist that was financially and militarily supporting Arab militants. Iraq was presented as the “greatest evil” that must be mastered as soon as possible and consequently, eliminated\textsuperscript{20}.

The U.S. administration was preparing the country for a war in a considered and appropriate way, trying not to officially inform the public of all the facts related to a possible confrontation with Iraq. The media were limited to the transmission of information from the American headquarters and the president himself. Therefore, the public in the first days after the attack on the WTC was forced to accept new U.S. foreign policy priorities. For the government it was much easier to convince the public to support

\textsuperscript{16} P. Matera, R. Matera, Transatlantyckie rozbieżności w dobie wojny z terroryzmem, “Sprawy Międzynarodowe” 2004, No. 1, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibidem, p. 96.
\textsuperscript{19} D. Dadge, D. Schechter, The war in Iraq and why the media failed us, Westpoint 2006, p.11.
\textsuperscript{20} W. Michnik, op.cit., p. 124.
the war in Afghanistan since the people could see a direct link between the attack and the “war on terror”. The reasons for invading Iraq were quite different than the reasons for invading Afghanistan. In this respect, the attitudes of the Americans and Europeans were not clear. They began to suspect other causes of war other than just the fight against terrorism and to the overthrow of the Iraqi regime.

Bush’s administration paid special attention to the content of media communication. War Propaganda was possible because the vast majority of the U.S. media were linked to the presidential administration officials, mostly from the environment of neoconservatives. A very important figure who combined politics with journalism was the media mogul Rupert Murdoch – the owner of one of the largest TV corporations (including Fox News), press and publishing- News Corporation.

The magazines: “Washington Post”, “Time”, “The Weekly Standard”, “National Review”, “Wall Street Journal”, “New Republic”, “The American Spectator” and “New York Sun” were associated with the neoconservatives from the Bush administration. The number of periodicals that were related to the Bush administration portrays how much American media were dependent on politics. The President, despite the fact that he had an impact on the media market, was still afraid of the undeniable force that the media held. To further limit and subject the media and journalistic criticism, the Bush administration has introduced new legislation. The legislation directly concerns the media and has precisely defined how television, newspapers and radio should provide information on terrorists and terrorist attacks.

Introduced codifications clearly limit the freedom of speech and thoughts. The U.S. government designated points, according to which journalists were obliged to report on. It was aimed primarily to subordinate the media. One of the guidelines related to the loyalty and cooperation of the media to the government and support for the political actions. The next section clarifies that the media should be pro-state, so it automatically

blocks the actual functions of the media. Media should present terrorists as “murderers”, unscrupulous people without any values, who do not take part in dialogue and use violence to manifest any right. The new media task was also to avoid emotional images and prevent misinformation.

The introduction of censorship during the preparations to the war and during its duration is a common procedure used by authorities. Mikołaj Jewdokimow reports that on October 10, 2001 Ari Fleischer, a White House spokesman, said that terrorists could pass through the U.S. media encoded information for Osama bin Laden and other terrorists. After a spokespersons statement for major television networks such as Fox, CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS the Fleicher’s guidelines were used. Jewdokimow justifies censorship as: the real reason for the censorship of bin Laden’s speech could be that in these statements the terrorist justified attacks on WTC. He could not give very good arguments justifying attacks, as U.S. media refused him, because according to the American propaganda bin Laden is a psychopath who, by making attacks, is guided only by blind hate. (…). Besides, it could sow uncertainty in society in relation to the firm consequences of the fight against terrorism. It is difficult not to agree with the above statement, however, some doubts are raised, because terrorists are actually able to use media messages for particular purposes.

The U.S. government, in addition to censorship in order to convince the public to support the attack on Iraq, applied one of the oldest methods used by the state in crisis, propaganda. The administration of George W. Bush applied all kinds of propaganda, especially “black”, whose main goal was to create an appropriate image of the enemy, demonization, dehumanization and to discredit an opponent. Garth Jowett said that public manipulation was carried out successfully because Americans tend to think that propaganda is used only by other countries.

The government, through the permanent intimidation of public and threat of the next terrorist attacks, managed to enter legislative acts, which

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24 Ibidem, p. 67.
limited the civil liberties. These were acts such as the USA Patriot Act and Homeland Security Act of 2002. New regulations were to increase the security of the U.S., tighten entrance rules for citizens and tourists upon arrival to the United States citizens and to increase airport security\textsuperscript{28}. The Bush Administration used mass media very well to manipulate public opinion both in the U.S. and Europe. The U.S. government not only managed to convince the public but also prevented a loud public protest against the war. As Benjamin R. Barber wrote: \textit{from the fear of the empire, the empire of fear is born, the enemy of freedom and security}\textsuperscript{29}. In such an empire George W. Bush ignored public opinion, the decision of the western countries, as well as the lack of consent of the UN Security Council. The United States attacked Iraq on April 20, 2003\textsuperscript{30}. The military operation launched named “Iraqi Freedom”, as well as another “media war”, reported by media in every country, regardless of the expressed relation to the U.S. military actions.

2. THE ROLE OF US AND POLISH MEDIA IN THE PROCESS OF CITIZENS’ PREPARATION FOR THE CONFLICT IN IRAQ

U.S. media, widely regarded as a perfect example of the, so-called, fourth estate, faced a new and difficult challenge after September 11, 2001 and during the anti-Iraq campaign of the government. On the one hand, the mass media should serve as a missionary that is to inform the public in a fair and objective way, on the other hand, they have been forced by the U.S. government to be obedient and loyal. In this situation it is difficult to clearly determine whether it was possible to control the functioning of the activities of government by media, which in many democratic societies is the basis and condition of organizing the mass media.

American journalists accuse the press and television, of lack of commitment to prepare citizens for the war in Iraq, as well as ignorance and leaving actions of the administration of President uncontrolled. The big-


\textsuperscript{30} R.A. Kosta, op.cit., p. 100.
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gest complaint and the most important one concerns presenting false information by the media, leading to misinformation and distortion of the war. In the twenty-first century, in a country with a historically advanced democracy, freedom of speech and the home of investigative journalism, it seems impossible. Media, giving false information on Iraq, repeating only messages coming from the White House, led to a situation where the vast majority of the American people believed in the truth of reports. Citizens, in fear of further terrorist attacks, strongly supported the intervention in Iraq, believing that this country is directly related to the attack of 9/11. Media in the United States failed to perform function of the “watchdog”, and completely forgot that they have an ability to control power. Press and television unanimously transmitted to the public fragments of the president talking about having hard evidence of the chemical weapons located in Iraq.

Michael Massing asks a question of where were the media at a time when the Bush’s administration displayed only “suitable” information to the government, the public, misleading a significant part of the population. The involvement of the mass media in the preparatory phase of the war consisted mainly on assisting the government propaganda, and so on creating the image of the enemy – terrorists who plan to destroy all Americans. The job of the media was based on the direct linking of 9/11 events with the leader of Iraq, who was allegedly in contact with Osama bin Laden and had the information about the planned attack. The media’s manipulation focused on the wording used by the president- the terms like “war on terrorism” and “terrorist” have become the most commonly

34 Ibidem, DOA [07.04.2012].
heard words in America. The mass media did not play the basic role— the
objectivity and accuracy. They were focused much more on evaluating the
actions of terrorists instead of presenting facts. They also did not try to
find other causes of the war with Iraq. Without any objection, the media
published all accusations directed at Saddam Hussein. Along with the
Government, they ensured the desire of creating a democratic country in
Iraq and to organize safe living conditions of the Iraqi people. U.S. citi-
zens since September 2001 believed that terrorism is the main threat to
U.S. security, and in 2003 believed that the war in Iraq is the continuation
of military operations against terrorism.

The proof of insufficient information about the media are, surveys
and studies conducted among American communities by The Program
of International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland
and Knowledge Networks. The study was conducted from January to
September 2003. They concerned the perception of receiving information
related to the planned attack on Iraq in particular television stations. The
surveys confirmed the lack of knowledge about Iraq among Americans. The
insufficient knowledge of the reasons for the possible intervention
caused the vast majority of American citizens considered war with Hussein
for the appropriate solution. The study revealed that 48% of respondents
believed that there was evidence found of a direct link of Saddam Hussein
to al-Qaeda, 22% believed in founding weapons of mass destruction in
Iraq, 25% believed that the USA had the support of world opinion on the
issue of intervention. A total of 60% of the respondents had misconception
on at least one of these three problems.

In terms of support for the war the acceptance of U.S. citizens increased
along with the false thinking about Iraq. Respondents who had more infor-
mation about the announced intervention, to a lesser extent supported the
attack on Iraq (23%). More willing to accept the U.S. war in Iraq turned out
to be those with more misconceptions (86%). The research proved that
false beliefs in the reasons for the planned attack on Iraq, to a large extent

38 Ibidem, DOA [07.04.2012].
were depending on the source of information from which the recipient benefited.

The questionnaire included among others the question- What source respondents are willing to turn to get most of the information? Respondents were given a choice of newspapers and magazines or television and radio. The vast majority opted for TV and radio (80%). When asked about most viewing/listening to the TV/radio station they responded as follows: two or more networks chosen by 30% of respondents, FOX – 18%, CNN – 16%, NBC – 14%, ABC – 11%, CBS – 9%, PBS/NPR – 3%.

The table below shows that most informed were recipients of programs National Public Radio (NPR) / Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), as many as 77% of the respondents corresponded truthfully to all questions. Fox News was the source of most introduction of confusion. As many as 80% of respondents watching Fox News had the highest gaps in knowledge about the real reasons for the planned attack on Iraq.²⁰³

Table 1. The impact of individual TV and radio stations on the level of knowledge about the intervention in Iraq.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The number of false beliefs</th>
<th>FOX</th>
<th>CBS</th>
<th>ABC</th>
<th>NBC</th>
<th>CNN</th>
<th>PRINT SOURCES</th>
<th>NPR/PBS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None of 3</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or more</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Stefan Zgliczyński made his opinion on Fox news clearly known when he stated that: Number of lies, which was subjected every day to the average American, has caused that the nation was completely fooled after 9/11.²⁰⁴ Apparently these lies went undetected by the average American, as they and information provided by other media had a significant effect on the


American people’s attitude towards the war and their government. As of April 2003, George W. Bush could pride himself in an 80% public approval rating\(^{42}\).

Another problem is that journalists are often guilty of covering up the facts. Even if the media were to obtain information from sources outside of the White House, they would not risk publishing material criticizing courses of action taken by the president\(^{43}\). This censorship has made it difficult to get all the facts regarding the relations between the U.S. and Iraq, and facilitated the plan to wage war on Hussein.

The above is not the only mistake that the media is guilty of. Journalists have escalated fear by portraying the West as being civilized and democratic, with the Middle East viewed as full of fanatics who resent the Western world\(^ {44}\). The fact that the media magnified such stereotypes caused even greater anxiety of the public much of whom were unaware of or had misconceptions regarding Islamic culture. Such ignorance led people being judged unjustly based on their religious or ethnic background. Such categorization of human beings, in turn, resulted in turning the other cheek to the wrongs done to others. This made it possible to gain the approval of the American public on declaring war on Iraq\(^ {45}\).

Polish media was no different from their American counterparts. Statements of government authorities and the president who tried to convince citizens that waging war on Iraq was synonymous to declaring “war on terror” were played over and over again. Polish Prime Minister Leszek Miller claimed that intervention was necessary because of the threat that Saddam Hussein’s government posed to international security, thus justifying the

\(^{42}\) W. Dzielski, Idealizm George’a W. Busha a II wojna w Zatoce Perskiej, [in:] Irak: dylematy…, p. 70.

\(^{43}\) Ibidem, p. 107.


participation of Polish troops in the war effort\textsuperscript{46}. He and other politicians attempted to swing public opinion in favor of the war, among others, by convincing Polish citizens that most European countries would also agree to join in the fight against terrorism.

The Polish government also fell back on the American government’s reasoning as to why direct action must be taken. Their arguments for engaging in the conflict in Iraq included ridding the country of weapons of mass destruction, liberating its citizens from oppressors and offering humanitarian aid, and ultimately, bringing peace and stability to Iraq by implementing a democratic system of government. It was also made known that Saddam Hussein intentionally disregarded the international community by not complying with UN recommendations, which was not to be treated lightly and called for American and European intervention\textsuperscript{47}. All the while, no efforts were made to get and present the Iraqis’ “side of the story”.

The press in Poland was also responsible for preventing the country from running pre-war propaganda. “Gazeta Wyborcza” was among the press most engaged in the pro-war campaign. It published numerous articles supporting the American president’s decision\textsuperscript{48}. Michael Bukowski and Paul Chase state that Adam Michnik, the editor-in-chief of the above-mentioned newspaper, was the main supporter of the war on Hussein. Comparing the Iraqi was to the Nazi attack on Poland in 1939, the articles went as far as to compare Saddam Hussein to Hitler and Stalin \textsuperscript{49}. Michnik made it clear that he supported the fight against a tyrant who was understood to support terrorists and try to gain hold of weapons of mass destruction. However, Bukowski and Chase believed the articles in “GW” not to be objective and based on guesswork and circumstantial evidence come upon by the U.S. and its allies.

Moreover, “Gazeta Wyborcza” went as far as treating any anti-war statements as propaganda against the United States, with its columnists arguing


\textsuperscript{47} M. Bukowski, P. Ścigaj op.cit., p. 18–20.

\textsuperscript{48} S. Zgliczyński, op.cit., p. 113.

\textsuperscript{49} M. Bukowski, P. Ścigaj, op.cit., p. 25.
that Poland would weaken its position on the international arena by not supporting the war effort. Although the newspaper did make reference to Americans’ interest in oil in a few of its articles, this issue was not given much attention. Prior to the American intervention in Iraq, most of its editorials supported the attack, conveniently ignoring the human factor and civilian casualties that were certain to follow. Instead, “GW” portrayed the attack on Iraq as a type of international mission, implying that it was the duty of countries which had agreed to fight global terrorism to join the war effort.

Another Polish newspaper, “Rzeczpospolita” also took part in convincing the country’s citizens that such an attack was valid, though it must be stated that it did so in a less biased and more thought-out way. It did not blindly look up to the U.S. military strategy, but rather emphasized the fact that the decision to invade Iraq, though reasonable, was complicated and not to be taken lightly, thus putting the readers in a tight-spot when formulating their own opinions on the matter. According to articles presented in this newspaper, the attack on Iraq would not be a violation of international law, as favorable UN Security Council rulings could be obtained for actions taken by the anti-Iraq coalition. Conversely, the newspaper also included the texts of those who voiced their clear disapproval of U.S. intervention and especially sending Polish soldiers to Iraq. Among others, Mark Garztecki and Rafal Ziemkiewicz took a negative stance on the war and openly claimed that attacking Iraq would be a regression into a sovereign state, violating international law. Overall, however, this newspaper left it up to the readers to decide on what stance he or she would take towards the war on Iraq, leaving the matter open to debate.

On the opposite end of the spectrum was “Nasz Dziennik”, a newspaper which clearly opposed the “Iraqi Freedom” operation. Its anti-war stance was mainly influenced by religion, especially the teachings of Pope John Paul II; important political figures were not quoted. Journalists writing for this newspaper used very strong words, emphasizing that an “attack” is an act of violence, not an attempt at bringing about stabilization, and that such issues should be resolved diplomatically. As could be expected, “Nasz

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50 Ibidem, p. 40–42.
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Dziennik” was even more strongly against Polish military involvement. It did everything to convince public opinion that no good could come of such actions.

The Polish public opinion was in fact influenced by the media, as confirmed by a CBOS report. As of May, a mere 32% of respondents were against the war, with over half (53%) voicing their approval. The rising support of U.S. intervention in Iraq reflects the effectiveness of the media in shaping the opinion of the common people, e.g., through the pro-war propaganda made evident in the Polish daily papers. Journalists had resorted to using strong statements that ultimately led to a major change in public opinion. Nonetheless, this was not enough to persuade the Poles to support sending Polish troops, with the majority of them being against such action as of March.

The following conclusions can be formulated on the basis of the above study concerning the role of the mass media in contemporary armed conflict in Iraq:

1. The nature and course of modern-day armed conflicts are affected by the fact that we are becoming an information-based society and media coverage of just about every domain of life. Over the course of the U.S.A. – Iraqi conflict, American media were used as propaganda to sway public opinion and validate military involvement.

2. Media nowadays is expected not only to report on military actions but also take an active part in shaping reality. Mass media relies on allusions as to how viewers should interpret and react to the presented information in order to achieve the desired public response. Truth is presented in a way that is convenient to those who exert control over it.

3. The American – Iraqi conflict gained the rank of the most important media event in 2003 and was consistently reported by the world’s largest news agencies and television stations. Both the

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U.S. Army and the Islamic radicals have used their own means of communication in order to present a biased opinion and subjective propaganda messages. Despite the significant interest of global media in the Iraqi conflict, each television station and news agency broadcast their messages in a separate way, and the content of the messages to a large extent depended on the policy of the country in which the media operate.

**SUMMARY**

The Article reflects on the influence and distortion of mass media in modern days. Its original role of a bearer of truth, accurate information and its role, nowadays, used mainly to manipulate the audience to achieve a specific reaction. The overwhelming forces of media are illustrated on the examples of the American conflict with Iraq from 2003 to 2010 starting with the World Trade Centre Attack and ending with the opinion of the polish audience concerning the American-Iraqi conflict.

The article is divided in two parts, analyzing mass media and the foreign policy of George W. Bush over Iraq after September 11, 2001 and the role of US and Polish media in the process of citizens’ preparation for the conflict in Iraq.

The first part approaches the importance of mass media for U.S. foreign policy against Iraq, created by President George W. Bush, especially after the September 11, 2001. It shows also how far society is involved in the maintaining of this policy. The article focuses on the influence of media during conflicts and how the public opinion and military actions influence one another.

The second part focused on the supposed role of media to inform and prepare the people for conflicts. Instead, the society is overwhelmed with information so the risk shows, that the necessary news get partially lost. To prove this distortion a survey was made showing an accordance to the given information with different newspapers, radio and TV stations. Regarding the increasing of fear and misleading public opinion the Polish media did not react differently than the American. This process resulted in the opinion of polish society that their military forces should join the conflict in order to protect their freedom and safety.

**Keywords:** conflict, media, conflict in Iraq