

Theorising Media and War: Lessons from Case of British Media Coverage of the 2003 Invasion of Iraq

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The case of British media coverage of the 2003 invasion of Iraq presents a unique test case for existing theories of media state relations. The war was deeply controversial whilst a significant part of the UK media sought to oppose the war. As such the case presents a critical test for both elite theories of media-state relations as well as for alternative models on the relationship between media and state. In summarizing the results of recent research, it is argued that whilst the elite-driven model holds significant explanatory power (especially in relation to ideology, sources and patriotism), there is substantial evidence of critical and independent journalism occurring, even in the context of war. In specific subject areas and in specific media outlets, independent and oppositional journalism was able to occur. These conclusions have three broader implications: First there exists greater variability in media-state relations than suggested by the elite-driven model; second, in comparison with the US, there is greater media independence in the UK context due to the structure and remit of UK media. Third, whilst there exists some degree of academic controversy over the balance of power between media and state post Cold War, there are important continuities, with respect to ideology and the national perspective, which continue to constrain the broader parameters of media coverage during war.