

**PORTRAYAL OF THE IRAQ WAR (2005-2008) IN  
THE BBC'S ENGLISH ONLINE NEWS: A  
CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

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ONLINE NEWS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

**by**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
ABSTRAK	ix
ABSTRACT	xi
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1-13</b>
1.0 Overview	1
1.1 Why Online News?	3
1.2 Why the BBC?	5
1.3 Statement of the Problem	6
1.4 Research Objectives	8
1.5 Research Questions	9
1.6 Significance of the Study	9
1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study	10
1.8 Definition of Key Terms	11
1.9 Dissertation Organisation	12
<b>CHAPTER 2: SITUATING THE IRAQ WAR</b>	<b>14-38</b>
2.0 Introduction	14
2.1 A Brief Historical and Political Account of Iraq	14
2.2 The Iraq-America Crisis	17
2.3 The Iraq War (20 March 2003 - 9 April 2003)	18
2.4 Post-Saddam Iraq (9 April 2003 -)	20
2.5 New Iraq (2003 -)	21
2.6 New Iraq and Regional Challenges	23
2.7 Al-Qaeda and the Iraq War	26
2.8 Armed Groups and the Iraq War	31
2.9 A Brief Overview of the Sunnis and Shias	33
2.10 Conclusions	35
<b>CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>39-88</b>
3.0 Introduction	39
3.1 Media at War	39
3.2 Iraq War Naming	43
3.3 Past Studies on the Iraq War	46
3.4 The Present Study on the Iraq War	51
3.5 Review of Related Research	52
3.6 Meanings of Discourse	54
3.7 Discourse and Ideology	56
3.8 An Overview of Critical Discourse Analysis	60
3.9 Relevant Theories and Their Attendant Concepts	63
3.9.1 Critical Linguistics	63
3.9.2 Fairclough's Approach	66

3.9.3	Van Dijk's Approach .....	68
3.9.3.1	Thematic structure.....	71
3.9.3.1.1	Propositions and Macro-propositions .....	71
3.9.3.1.2	Schematic structure .....	74
3.9.3.2	Syntactic style .....	77
3.9.3.3	Lexical style .....	78
3.9.3.4	Rhetoric .....	79
3.9.4	Van Dijk's (1998) Theory of Ideology.....	80
3.9.4.1	Discourse topics.....	81
3.9.4.2	Discourse schemata.....	81
3.9.4.3	Local meanings.....	82
3.9.4.3.1	Lexical items .....	82
3.9.4.3.2	Style .....	83
3.9.4.3.3	Rhetoric .....	83
3.9.5	Wodak's Approach .....	84
3.10	Conclusions .....	87
<b>CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY .....</b>		<b>89-107</b>
4.0	Introduction .....	89
4.1	Methods on Media Studies .....	89
4.2	Sample Size .....	90
4.3	Data Selection .....	91
4.4	Criteria for Data Selection .....	93
4.5	Theoretical Framework .....	99
4.6	Conceptual Framework .....	102
4.7	Procedures of Analysis .....	102
4.8	Addressing the Research Questions .....	104
4.9	Addressing Objectivity and Validity .....	106
4.10	The Researcher's Background and Ethical Considerations .....	107
4.11	Conclusions .....	107
<b>CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE CASE STUDIES .....</b>		<b>108-288</b>
5.0	Introduction .....	108
5.1	Analysis of Case study (1): Iraqis vote in landmark election .....	109
5.2	Analysis of Case study (2): Iraqi parliament approves Cabinet .....	135
5.3	Analysis of Case study (3): Breakthrough in Iraq oil standoff .....	160
5.4	Analysis of Case study (4): A bitter family saga is at an end .....	175
5.5	Analysis of Case study (5): Arab states watch Iraq with dread .....	195
5.6	Analysis of Case study (6): Maliki returns fire at US critics .....	210
5.7	Analysis of Case study (7): Blast hits key Iraq Shia shrine .....	227
5.8	Analysis of Case study (8): Iraqi insurgents kill key US ally .....	242
5.9	Analysis of Case study (9): Iraq Shia leaders sign truce deal .....	253
5.10	Analysis of Case study (10): Sunni group attacks al-Qaeda base .....	264
5.11	Analysis of Case study (11): Twin bombs kill scores in Baghdad .....	276

<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	289-314
6.0 Introduction.....	289
6.1 A Brief Overview .....	289
6.2 Findings and Discussion of Research Question 1: Semantic Macro-structure .....	291
6.3 Findings and Discussion of Research Question 2: Semantic Micro-structures .....	297
6.4 Findings and Discussion of Research Question 3: Ideological manifestations .....	305
6.5 General Conclusions and Implications.....	306
6.6 Contributions of the Study .....	311
6.7 Suggestions for Future Research .....	312
6.8 Recommendations of the Study .....	313
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	315-322
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	323
Appendix A: A BBC news story: Iraqi PM visits insurgency hotbed .....	323
Appendix B: Wodak's emailed comments on the proposed approach .....	324
Appendix C: Article 1: Iraqis vote in landmark election .....	325
Appendix D: Article 2: Iraqi parliament approves Cabinet .....	327
Appendix E: Article 3: Breakthrough in Iraq oil standoff .....	330
Appendix F: Iraqi Constitution (p.19) .....	332
Appendix G: Article 4: A bitter family saga is at an end .....	333
Appendix H: Article 5: Arab states watch Iraq with dread .....	336
Appendix I: Article 6: Maliki returns fire at US critics .....	338
Appendix J: Article 7: Blast hits key Iraq Shia shrine .....	340
Appendix K: Article 8: Iraqi insurgents kill key US ally .....	343
Appendix L: Article 9: Iraq Shia leaders sign truce deal .....	345
Appendix M: Article 10: Sunni group attacks al-Qaeda base .....	347
Appendix N: Article 11: Twin bombs kill scores in Baghdad .....	349

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1	The corpus of the study obtained from the BBC news website ordered chronologically except for the numbers 3 and 6 .....	93
Table 4.2	Criteria/justifications for major themes selection .....	94
Table 4.3	Criteria/justifications for minor themes selection.....	95
Table 4.4	Types of analysis and function of the three theories employed.....	101
Table 4.5	Steps of analysis.....	103
Table 4.6	Addressing the Research Questions of this study.....	105
Table 5.1	Macroproposition or topic Derivation.....	110
Table 5.2	Macropropositions Derivation in Article 1.....	111
Table 5.3	Further derivations of macropropositions in Article 1.....	113
Table 5.4	Semantic macrostructure and the application of Wodak's (2001a) model.....	114
Table 5.5	Van Dijk's (1998) Ideological Square for the macrostructure of Article1.....	115
Table 5.6	Numerical actor in Article 1.....	120
Table 5.7	Frequent words (elections register) in Article 1.....	122
Table 5.8	Positive and negative role of the main participants in Article 1.....	132
Table 5.9	Analysis summary of case study (1).....	133
Table 5.10	Macropropositions Derivation in Article 2.....	136
Table 5.11	Further derivations of macropropositions in Article 2.....	138
Table 5.12	Derivation of semantic macrostructure and the application of Wodak's (2001a) model.....	138
Table 5.13	Van Dijk's (1998) Ideological Square for the macrostructure of Article 2. ...	140
Table 5.14	Syntactic structure of the Summary category in Article 2.....	142
Table 5.15	Identification of roles in the Summary category in Article 2.....	143
Table 5.16	Analysis summary of case study (2).....	158
Table 5.17	More General Macropropositions.....	162
Table 5.18	Derivation of Semantic Macrostructure.....	163
Table 5.19	Van Dijk's (1998) Ideological Square for the macrostructure of Article 3.....	164
Table 5.20	Approving and disapproving structures.....	167
Table 5.21	Analysis summary of case study (3).....	174
Table 5.22	Higher-level Macropropositions.....	178
Table 5.23	Derivation of Semantic Macrostructure.....	179
Table 5.24	Ideological representation for the macrostructure of Article 4.....	180
Table 5.25	Derogatory terms assigned to Saddam, Bush I and Bush II.....	185
Table 5.26	Analysis summary of case study (4).....	193
Table 5.27	Higher-level Macropropositions.....	197
Table 5.28	Derivation of Semantic Macrostructure.....	198
Table 5.29	Key actors and the affected/beneficiary entities in the main topic of the article (Arab fears).....	200
Table 5.30	Analysis summary of case study (5).....	209
Table 5.31	Higher-level Macropropositions.....	212
Table 5.32	Derivation of Semantic Macrostructure.....	213
Table 5.33	Actors' role.....	216
Table 5.34	Analysis summary of case study (6).....	226
Table 5.35	Derivation of macropropositions in Article (7).....	227
Table 5.36	Higher-level Macropropositions.....	229
Table 5.37	Analysis summary of case study (7).....	241
Table 5.38	Derivation of macropropositions in Article (8).....	243
Table 5.39	Higher-level Macropropositions.....	244
Table 5.40	Frequency of war and political vocabulary in Article 8.....	246
Table 5.41	Analysis summary of case study (8).....	252
Table 5.42	Derivation of macropropositions in Article (9).....	254

Table 5.43	Higher-level Macropropositions.....	254
Table 5.44	Analysis summary of case study (9).....	263
Table 5.45	Derivation of macropropositions in Article (10).....	265
Table 5.46	Higher-level Macropropositions.....	265
Table 5.47	Agency and the active voice.....	267
Table 5.48	Agency and the passive voice.....	269
Table 5.49	Metonymy in Article (10).....	271
Table 5.50	Lexical and nominal war metaphors in Article (10).....	272
Table 5.51	Analysis summary of case study (10).....	275
Table 5.52	Derivation of macropropositions in Article (11).....	277
Table 5.53	Higher-level Macropropositions.....	278
Table 5.54	The actor of the two bombings.....	280
Table 5.55	Frequency of war vocabulary in Article 11.....	281
Table 5.56	Analysis summary of case study (11).....	288
Table 6.1	The semantic macrostructures and the ideological representations in the corpus.....	292
Table 6.2	The frequent syntactic structures in the corpus, their functions, and messages....	298
Table 6.3	The frequent lexical structures in the corpus, their functions, and messages.....	302

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1	The components of semantic macrostructure concluded from van Dijk's studies in 1988a, 1988b, 1991 and 1997.....	70
Figure 3.2	A hypothetical schematic structure for a standard news story adopted from van Dijk (1988a, p. 55) .....	75
Figure 4.1	Theoretical framework of the study .....	100
Figure 4.2	Conceptual framework .....	102
Figure 6.1	The components of semantic macrostructure in this study.....	290

**PEMAPARAN PERANG IRAQ (2005-2008) DALAM BERITA INGGERIS DALAM  
TALIAN BBC: SATU ANALISIS WACANA KRITIS**

**ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini telah meninjau 11 buah artikel mengenai perkembangan di Iraq selepas tamatnya Peperangan Iraq 2003 yang diterbitkan dalam laman sesawang rasmi BBC. Artikel-artikel tersebut diterbitkan di antara 15 Disember 2005 hingga 1 Februari 2008 ketika peristiwa utama telah berlaku di Iraq. Fokus kajian ini adalah pada tahap makro dan mikro semantik teks dan seterusnya ideologi yang tersirat di wacana yang berkaitan. Untuk menjalankan kajian ini, dua teori utama digunakan iaitu Teori *Semantic Macrostructure* (1980) van Dijk untuk mengkaji wacana berita pada tahap makro dan mikro dan Teori Ideologi (1998) van Dijk untuk menyiasat ideologi kumpulan yang dipegang pada kedua-dua tahap. Analisis linguistik dan ideologi dalam kajian ini disokong oleh maklumat latar di mana satu kritikan sejarah dan politik diberikan untuk memastikan objektiviti proses interpretasi. Ini berdasarkan pendekatan *discourse-historical* yang disarankan oleh Wodak (2001a). Pada peringkat makro, setiap artikel dikaji untuk menentukan maksud global yang menunjukkan Struktur Makro Semantik. Manakala, pada peringkat lokal, setiap teks dikaji untuk menentukan makna lokal wacana berita dari segi pilihan sintaks, leksis dan retorik. Sementara itu, analisis ideologi berpusatkan imej positif *in-group* dan imej negatif *out-group* di kedua-dua peringkat.

Dapatan kajian di peringkat makro menunjukkan bahawa maksud global yang tersirat di wacana yang dikaji ialah: Demokrasi Iraq Baru menghadapi masalah politik dan cabaran dari segi keselamatan oleh kerana campur tangan pihak luar dan

sikap negatif mereka dan ini menunjukkan Struktur Makro Semantik korpus yang dikaji. Analisis mikro-semantik iaitu analisis struktur sintaktik, leksikal dan retorikal menyokong analisis di peringkat makro. Contohnya, penggunaan vokabulari peperangan/kekejaman (*war/violence*) menonjol di keseluruhan korpus kerana musuh 'baru' Amerika di Iraq iaitu al-Qaeda yang bersekutu dengan penyokong-penyokong Saddam melancarkan peperangan ke atas Iraq Baru dan rakyat negara tersebut sebaik selepas pengumuman berakhirnya peperangan Iraq pada bulan Mei 2003.

Ideologi kumpulan dipamerkan melalui tindakan positif pihak 'dalaman' seperti pengamalan dan perlindungan nilai-nilai demokrasi dan peperangan yang dilancarkan dengan dengan pihak luar seperti al Qaeda dan penyokong-penyokong Saddam Hussein yang digambarkan secara negatif melalui serangan bunuh diri dan pengeboman terhadap rakyat Iraq. Didapati juga bahawa pihak media BBC tidak menyebelahi mana-mana pihak tetapi lebih bersikap neutral.

**PORTRAYAL OF THE IRAQ WAR (2005-2008) IN THE BBC'S ENGLISH ONLINE  
NEWS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

**ABSTRACT**

This study examined the subsequent events of the Iraq war 2003 by selecting eleven stories from the BBC news website. The corpus covers a span of three years from 15<sup>th</sup> December 2005 to 1<sup>st</sup> February 2008 when key events took place in Iraq. The focus of the study was on the macro- and micro-semantics of the texts and ideological representations. To carry out the study, the researcher employed van Dijk's (1980) theory of Semantic Macrostructure to examine the news discourse at the macro-level and micro-level, and van Dijk's (1998) theory of ideology to investigate group ideology at both levels. The linguistic and ideological analyses were supported by background information where a historical and political critique was provided to ensure objectivity in the process of interpretation. This is based on Wodak's (2001a) discourse-historical approach.

At the macro level, each text was analysed to assign the global meaning which stands for the Semantic Macrostructure. Whilst, at the micro level, each text was analysed to examine the local meanings in the news discourse in terms of syntactic, lexical, and rhetorical choices. As regards the ideological analysis, it focused on the image of in-group and out-group representations i.e. a positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation at both levels.

The findings at the macro level revealed an overall meaning encapsulated in the macroproposition 'New Democratic Iraq is facing political and security challenges due to negative foreign interference and negative out-group stance' which stands for the Semantic Macrostructure of the corpus. Micro-semantic analysis of syntactic, lexical, and rhetorical structures was in agreement with the macro-semantic analysis. For example, the use of war/violence vocabulary is prominent in the corpus because the new invaders, al-Qaeda in Iraq who allied with Saddam's cohorts, launched their war against the New Iraq and the Iraqi people soon after the US declaration of the 'end' of the Iraq war in May 2003. Group

ideology was manifested through positive in-group actions such as practising and protecting democracy, working for Iraq's unity and prosperity, and fighting the out-group alliance of al-Qaeda and Saddamists who are depicted negatively through their suicide attacks and bombings against the Iraqi people. On the other hand, the BBC has mostly taken a neutral position in its news reports in this study.

## **Dedication**

This work is particularly dedicated to the non-Iraqis as well as to the people of Iraq, the victims of every war since 1980.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Overview

News has become increasingly important to many people as they want to know what is going on in the world (Barker, 2004). The media has the effect of changing stock prices drastically, especially in the event of a war as the one in Iraq now. This is so as war itself discourages investments in the countries involved (Barker, 2004). At wartimes there seems to be a negative impact on the economy. Tumber and Palmer (2004) cited the Guardian's report in June 2003 in which the newspaper reported the negative economic impact of the Iraq war. To Tumber and Palmer, it discourages commercial organisations from investing in Iraq and to participate in its re-construction efforts. This worsens the Iraqis' situation as they have to face the challenges of war themselves. However, ironically, Pestalardo (2006) has pointed out, war times are among the most profitable times for media business.

Eid (2004) stated that America has accused Saddam of possessing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and that he was a big threat to the Americans. However, the double standards practised by the US are revealed by van Dijk (2005) when he cynically raised the issue of the earlier support from the USA to Saddam by supplying him with toxic gas and other weapons used in his war against Iran.

While reviewing the literature, it was noticed that this controversial war has been examined by many scholars of different disciplines and from different perspectives as it will be demonstrated in the sections to come in this study. For example, Pestalardo (2006) reported that the Iraq war has brought new challenges for different disciplines such as, politics, military, diplomacy, international politics, and media. In addition, part of the Iraq war debate revolves around the issue of its naming and the use of headlines in the media as well as among scholars as it will be discussed in the literature review chapter.

Some researchers have seen this war as a clash of civilizations as Daim (2004) has questioned it; whereas, Ramesh (2004) has stressed that many define the Iraq war as a historic turning point that may have profound effects on the Arab psyche. Murray and Scales (2003) revealed the implications of the Iraq war of 2003 that it was not just about oil and stability in the Middle East, liberation of the Iraqi people or even about disarming weapons of mass destruction.

Rather, like the operation in Afghanistan, the Iraq war was a clear demonstration to the entire world that the United States, in the wake of September 11, has the capacity and will to defend rogue states and confront those who threaten the vital interest of the American people (pp. 251-252).

Ramesh (2004) contended that this war is like the others before whereby “a media war was being fought alongside the military conflict” (p.252); and Thompson (2006) argued that innuendo and distortion were used in Bush’s campaign against Iraq to garner popular support for the coming war. One of the media’s current proliferating channels is online news as some scholars give their accounts in this respect. Williams (2004) stressed that today’s society relies highly on the news media such as print, radio, TV, and the Internet seeking vital information, especially matters pertaining to politics and homeland security. Another fact, he pinpointed here, is the mass media’s role in updating the public on political figures, issues and events. He also pointed out the technological development in the arena of media and explained how it has been moving forward from the newsreels to radio to TV to the Internet. Williams went on saying that the electronic news has been able to provide people with news, especially during wartime giving coverage which may mean life or death and also getting up-to-date information. Yang (2004) asserted that newspaper and online news readers tend to have more political knowledge with respect to the Iraq issue.

So far, there are two wars deemed as part of the ‘war on terror’ initiated by the US-UK ally in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. The first military operation began in

Afghanistan in 2001 with ‘Operation Infinite Justice’ which, as the researcher believes, is manipulatively selected as it carries a very positive message and a sublime mission to be conveyed to the media consumers. The second major military operation started in Iraq in 2003 with the name of ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’. Given such a name before the actual war starts is to prepare the world and the audiences for the coming war in a positive way that it is to liberate the Iraqis – which is indeed something good – rather than attacking them; and it functions as a good start for the propagandists to pave their way into Iraq. The selection of naming the two military operations is consciously made to envisage the positive self-representation of the USA’s ‘good intention’ towards both the Afghans and the Iraqis. The positive self-representation which is theorised by van Dijk (1998) along with the negative Other-representation is very common in such political atmospheres. This concept of van Dijk’s (1998) theory of ideology will be explained later in Chapter Three.

Perhaps, many do not realise when the Iraq war actually started and when it ‘ended’; why it is important to study it and how to study it. The Iraq War (2003-2008) in the title is used by the researcher to indicate the ongoing signs of war up to this moment of writing up this study as will be revealed in ensuing arguments. The researcher believes that there is a dearth of academic research looking at the Iraq war from a linguistic and ideological perspective. Such scrutiny necessitates the employment of a critical discourse analysis perspective to examine the BBC’s English online news which is the target text in this study. The scarcity and gap relevant to the Iraq war studies will be raised in depth in the problem statement in this chapter and in the literature review chapter as well (see section 3.3).

### **1.1 Why Online News?**

One may need to know what is the difference between online news and offline news (non-online news) before giving any justifications for the online news selection made by the researcher here. Therefore, it is important to see how scholars look at the realm of online news and how it has recently become a new trend and an indispensable source of information to Web users.

Garrison (2005) investigated the origins of online news which can be traced back to the 1980s although online news websites started to appear such as, the *Chicago Tribune* in 1995 and *The New York Times* in 1996. After that, the number of online newspapers soared. Moreover, Abdullah, Garrison, Salwen, Driscoll, and Casey (2005) stated that “the number of adults using the Internet to find and read news online is on the rise” (p. 147).

Ward (2002) has stated that news organizations (e.g. newspapers, television companies, and news agencies) on the web are “seen as a primary means of communication” (p. 13). This is because journalism online assures more information access in an extensive and rapid way for both, the journalist and the reader. In this way it helps promote researching as well as reporting online. Ward added that quality news websites include immediacy (posting dozens up-to-date stories every few minutes), multiple pagination (hundreds of separate pages linked to each other on the same site), multimedia (audio, video, graphics, and pictures), flexible delivery platforms, archiving (archives are useful for search and research purposes), and finally interactivity (consumer-provider interaction via e-mailing the writer and consumer-consumer interaction via message boards on the website to exchange views among the news story readers).

Interactivity is one of the salient features of prominent online news sites that some researchers, such as Ward (2002) and Garrison (2005), have documented. They have referred to the interactional model some online newspapers offer to their readers as they give a chance to the readers to post their comments and ideas about current events and issues reported through the day’s news. For example, Freedom Forum website and other devoted online newspapers make room for the readers to participate with the least degree of content control.

In addition, Garrison (2005) pointed out the importance of online newspapers and journalism today which resides in their growth as technologies are continuously evolving; and most importantly, online news readers can view different “newspapers from around the

world and get different perspectives regarding the same international events” (p. 44). Salwen (2005) and Williams (2004) shared similar views in this respect.

Salwen (2005) stated that the week after 9/11 attacks in 2001, news websites became overwhelmed to the degree when office workers went online to follow the news, causing online traffic jams and crashing some servers. That is why CNN and BBC added more servers to boost their websites.

## **1.2 Why the BBC?**

After this brief prelude about online news, now the researcher would like to discuss the target news institution in this study, the BBC. Stokes (2003) stated that broadcasting in Britain has been getting a lot of concern by the successive governments since its establishment in the 1920s. In addition, the BBC director-general “is appointed by the board of governors, who are in turn selected by the government of the day” (p. 103). Stokes has also pointed out few case studies previously conducted by a number of researchers looking at the BBC in particular over time starting with the first case study between 1922-1939, then between 1955 to 1982, and finally studying the BBC newsrooms in 1977.

Ward (2002) mentioned that the BBC is among the major news providers along with CNN since both news websites of the BBC and CNN “sit on a digital goldmine of content from their broadcast operations” (p. 135). With regard to the BBC online archive, he stated, by mid-2000, it had around 700,000 stories with hundreds being added daily. A case in point, for ethical considerations based on the BBC Online Producer Guidelines which Ward cited, the BBC journalist should consider “editorial integrity” and “taste and decency” (p. 144) as the BBC has total control over its own output. In addition, Lacey (1998) stated that the BBC is an impartial and leading institution in the United Kingdom. Tumber and Palmer (2004) mentioned that the BBC is one of the leading media organisations. They argued that the BBC took an uncertain stance on the Iraq war during the invasion phase and the subsequent events

for the period they studied. Daim (2004) stated that “the BBC has more finesse and depth, with 250 correspondents” (p. 97).

Up to this point, what has just been introduced is part of the researcher’s justifications made about the selection of online news, in particular the BBC. More is given below. First, the BBC news viewer is offered greater access to the news reported on the BBC’s website. Second, the BBC website has allocated a wide range of space on the Iraq war 2003 and the subsequent events. For example, under the Middle East category, the BBC allocated the heading **STRUGGLE FOR IRAQ** under which key stories accompanied with visuals and sometimes with videos are posted. Third, the website is reinforced with hypertexts, such as relevant links to the topic in question, footage sometimes, an extensive relevant archive, and opinion polls. Furthermore, at times there is room for the website readers to comment on some of the hot news stories. This enables them to participate through their comments and views on the news story. In this way, the readers can also criticise each other’s comments in a written dialogue, making a news forum. These readers cannot find such forums elsewhere, offline in particular, at least at this moment. Fourth, on the BBC website, news stories can be emailed; and in this way, news can be circulated through emails. In this case, it is different from any offline news outlet as it requires certain time and place. Moreover, one can access online news anywhere, anytime, in an office or even on the board of an airplane.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

In spite of the fact that the Iraq war 2003 has been the focus of many researchers, there have been calls for more analysis, perhaps seeking better understanding for the representation of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’. This is also argued by Musolff (1995) who basically asserted that there is a need for more analysis of the language in which wars are being represented to identify the scenarios for “proper” [his emphasis] beginnings, courses and endings of wars.

Ager (2003) contended that although efforts are being made to develop linguistics to solve practical problems such as the writing of grammars and textbooks and the development of dictionaries, open statements of political ideas and ideologies are generally avoided. He stated that “the whole field of political discourse and its analysis has become a central concern of political scientists, sociologists and economists as well as of linguists” (p. 119). A similar call has been evoked here for political discourse analysis. Van Dijk (2005) argued that there is a need to look not only at the structural features of text and talk, but also to account for the conditions and functions associated in the political process which ultimately involves political cognition as well as political action.

Another key issue was raised by Hamelink (2004) who argued that the mainstream mass media of the coalition forces rallied for the U.S. and U.K. governments in this war. Thus, there is a need to conduct more critical analyses of the reporting of this war. A similar call was raised by Merrill (2004) alongside with Nordenstreng’s (2004) call for international media monitoring through a scholarly collaborative project to annually report and academically monitor media behaviour. In this respect, White (2004) mentioned that there is little amount of research in the area of “military/media issue and media framing [...]” (p. 3). In addition, Fowler (1991) pointed out that there is a gap in the early media theory whereby linguistics was neglected; and this lack of linguistic connection has weakened the link with semiotics. Although there are a number of linguists who are actively involved in the analysis of news discourse, there is still a need for more; therefore, Fowler called for more work to be conducted on the media in order to find out how language works in the news media.

In the introduction of his edited book, Berenger (2004) stated that the Iraq war 2003 has extensively been reported by the global media as it is the war of religious misunderstanding, political ideologies, inequalities and differing cultural norms and values. Furthermore, contradictions, discrepancies, opinions, ideologies and the discomfort of ambiguity all revolve around the news event, especially when the audience is culturally and

geographically distanced from the circumstances surrounding the news event and when there is very limited information (Barker, 2004).

Therefore, the researcher is driven by the scholars' calls for more analyses in terms of exploring the language of war, of political statements/thoughts and ideologies and of the media which have become worthy of academic study. After conducting an exhaustive search through online sources, databases, electronic journals and reviews as well as book references, no study so far has attempted to examine the Iraq war linguistically (both macro and micro structures) and ideologically in the media in general and the BBC news website in particular. Van Dijk (1988a; 1988b; 1991; 1998; 1997) suggested that news reports may be analysed linguistically and ideologically at the macro level to see how themes are organised and at the micro level to see how micro structures such as word choice, syntax and rhetoric are selected. Musolff (1995) asserted that there is a need to study war scenarios linguistically. Some researchers such as White (2004), Eid (2004), Williams (2004), Sjoberg (2004), Geary (2004), Galindo (2004), Crotty (2005), Jaramillo (2006), Zheng (2006), and Pestalardo (2006) looked at the Iraq war; however, they did not pay much attention to language and ideology. That is, little attention has been paid to the qualitative analysis of news reports. Hence, the researcher argues that this study can bridge the gap in the literature; and because this war is controversial and most reported so far, it deserves a further and closer investigation in terms of themes, language use/choice and ideology.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

This research is aimed to accomplish the objectives listed below:

- 1) To identify the semantic macrostructures of the news discourse on the Iraq War
- 2) To identify the semantic microstructures in terms of syntactic, lexical and rhetorical choices that are used in the news discourse on the Iraq War
- 3) To reveal the participants' ideology in this news discourse

## **1.5 Research Questions**

1. What are the semantic macrostructures of the news discourse on the Iraq War?
2. What are the semantic microstructures in terms of syntactic, lexical and rhetorical choices that are used in the news discourse on the Iraq War?
3. What do the semantic macro- and micro- structures reveal about the participants' ideology?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Wars, crises, and conflicts, such as the Gulf War 1991, have provided some of the main topics of news coverage. Thus, media attention to war and its portrayals in the press of different countries require close scrutiny (Lee, 2004). According to Gordon and Shapiro (2004), the Middle East has been the focus of attention as it is deemed a region of critical political conflicts, such as the conflict between Israel and Palestine, the Iran crisis represented in its controversial nuclear programs development and Iran's interference in post-Saddam Iraq and the Middle East. This also includes Syrian influence on both Lebanon as well as post-Saddam Iraq as it has frequently been reported in the global and local news media.

Most importantly, the Iraq war 2003 has brought about a dramatic political change in the country by establishing a democratic Iraq to be a model in the Middle East. Hence, the study aims to shed more light on the subsequent events of the Iraq war to reveal how it has been portrayed in the media linguistically and ideologically. This is important as what is going on now in Iraq has had so far a great impact on the ongoing process of establishing a New Iraq to have a new look. The New Iraq, in the near or distant future, may influence the region and the world at different levels, economically, politically, educationally, ideologically and culturally. Moreover, the Iraq war 2003 "was the most covered war ever, with more than 3,000 journalists assigned to the region" (Tumber & Palmer, 2004, p. 161).

This war is associated with a controversial political dispute at the international and national levels among the public and politicians. Signs of that are, for instance, the antiwar protests around the globe which have resulted in the political leaders involved to lose their people's support at home (Pestalardo, 2006).

Analysing the text in the read media linguistically and ideologically can help understand relevant and crucial issues revolving around the discourse of this war. From a linguistic point of view, it is hoped to assist the media readers of political issues to critically and consciously read the news articles pertaining to this war. This will help to see how certain linguistic meanings are conveyed through the discourse of this war. That is, it is important to empower ordinary people through critical analysis of the discourse of war (Vaughan, 1995). Furthermore, this study will help readers to realise the kind of fluctuations over the selected period for more understanding [to the war discourse] (Altheide, 1996). Perhaps, it is crucial to examine the discourse of this war as a genre from a CDA perspective.

### **1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The Iraq war started on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2003; then shortly, the US officially declared 'the end of the war' by 1st May 2003. Yet, media have continuously been reporting scenes of the war observed almost every day since then. Owing to the huge number of the news stories reporting this war on the BBC news website, and because the analysis will be rather extensive, the researcher will select eleven key events which revolve around this war. The researcher believes that this selection will be quite sufficient to realise the objectives of this study and to throw some light on the war and its discourses as well (see Chapter Four, section 4.2). The target text in this study is a hypertext and so the researcher will restrict himself to avoid analysing any picture, video or links that could lead to another related text on the website. Owing to time and space constraints, the researcher ignores graphics; and also because semiotics will not be incorporated in the theoretical framework of the study. This, in fact, does not mean that graphics are not significant or have no value in the analysis process, but this will be too overwhelming for this study.

Essentially, the study will focus on the macropropositions or the themes of the news story to assign the global meaning; whereas, at the micro level, the linguistic choices whether they are syntactic, lexical, or rhetorical will be analysed to account for the local meanings in the news discourse. As regards the ideological analysis, the focus will be on the image of a positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. Finally, general implications will be revealed for the purpose of having an overall assessment about the Iraq war based on the selected corpus.

### **1.8 Definition of Key Terms**

**Representation:** Lacey (1998) defined it in terms of media studies, arguing that “media representations are usually a product of institutions ...” (p. 143) and that this product may be influenced by certain factors such as cultural norms, institution’s conventions, and ideology. In this study, the researcher has used the word *portrayal* in the title to reflect the BBC’s representations of the Iraq war (2005-2008).

**Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):** it is believed that Critical Linguistics has contributed to the emergence of CDA which has been developing since the 1990s. Nowadays, CDA is widely used by many scholars to analyse discourses that deal with social and political issues which have been shaped by ideology and power relations conveyed through language (Wodak, 2001b; Fairclough, 1992; 2001b).

**Ideology:** Van Dijk (1991) defined it as “the fundamental interpretation framework that monitors the development of knowledge and attitudes, provides coherence to such cognitions, and brings them in line with specific group goals and interests” (p. 36). In 1998, he stated that ideology is both mental and social whereby mental properties are socially acquired, shared and changed. It is a system of beliefs, especially in politics, the arena in which group polarisation (US versus Them) is manifested. For example, within the framework of political discourse, the in-group and out-group strategy takes the shape of polarisation which establishes the opposition between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ as two ideologically

different groups. That is to say, 'We' are represented positively and 'They' negatively. Therefore, van Dijk (1998) stated that "positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation seems to be a fundamental property of ideologies" (p. 69). In other words, 'positive self-presentation' reflects the 'in-group' strategy which emphasises and manifests 'Our' good things and 'Their' bad ones; whereas, negative other-presentation reflects the 'out-group' strategy which de-emphasises and conceals 'Our' bad things and 'Their' good ones (van Dijk, 2001). By applying this theory, one may study, for example, the journalists' ideology and the contents and structures of their news reports (van Dijk, 1991).

**Online:** It is defined by Ward (2002) as a generic term used "to describe digital information access, retrieval or dissemination" (p. 9); and what is needed to be online is to have a computer, modem, telephone line, and Internet access.

**Online journalism:** De Wolk (2001) defined online journalism as "quality news and information posted on the Internet [...] where people can read, see and hear it through their computers and other similar devices" (p. 6).

## **1.9 Dissertation Organisation**

This study comprises six chapters. **Chapter One** contextualises the study by providing an introduction that includes an overview, problem statement, research objectives and questions, significance and scope of the study, definitions of key terms, and an outline of the study.

**Chapter Two** situates the study by providing a brief historical and political account of Iraq. This chapter also discusses the political situation before and after the actual war, the notion of New Iraq, and regional and domestic challenges. The chapter ends with a brief overview of the Sunnis and Shias.

**Chapter Three** discusses some relevant issues such as media at war and the Iraq war naming. It also reviews the literature pertaining to previous studies on the Iraq war,

meanings of discourse, discourse and ideology, and critical discourse analysis (CDA). The chapter also presents relevant theories and concepts to help draw the theoretical framework of this study.

**Chapter Four** is the methodology chapter; it sets up the corpus and sample size of the study. It also shows how to apply the theoretical framework to analyse the news discourse. The conceptual framework, procedures of analysis, how to address the research questions, issues of objectivity, validity, and ethical considerations are also presented in this chapter.

**Chapter Five** analyses the corpus which comprises 11 case studies. Each article is analysed at macro and micro levels. The macro-level is concerned with the macro-theme or the semantic macro-structure of each article. The micro-level undertakes three stages of analysis: (1) Syntactic structures (2) Lexical structures and (3) Rhetorical devices. Ideological representations at both levels are also examined.

**Chapter Six** discusses the findings obtained from Chapter Five and addresses the three research questions. The chapter draws general conclusions and implications and it examines the corpus longitudinally to provide an overall picture of the Iraq war (2005-2008). Contributions of the study, possible future studies, and recommendations are also presented in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **SITUATING THE IRAQ WAR**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter will provide a brief historical and political account of Iraq, the Iraq-America crisis, the Iraq war, Post-Saddam Iraq, New Iraq and Regional Challenges. It will also include a discussion of al-Qaeda and the Iraq war, armed groups and the Iraq war, and finally ends with a brief overview of the Sunnis and Shias.

It is important to provide the relevant historical and political backgrounds as Wodak (2001a) argued that this is substantial knowledge which helps in the analysis process. Brown and Yule (1983) and Salkie (1995) stressed that socio-cultural knowledge or background knowledge is of importance as it helps the discourse analyst to make meaningful inferences in the process of interpretation. Fairclough (1992) stated that besides linguistic background, discourse analysts need to have knowledge of other backgrounds, for instance, politics, sociology, or psychology, depending upon the type of investigation. He also argued that language studies should not neglect social, critical, and historical accounts. Van Dijk (1988a, 1988b) stated that knowledge about the topic of investigation plays a pivotal role as it facilitates in text interpretation in that it makes the analysis coherent and objective. Within this context, knowledge includes information about culture, beliefs, and politics. The opinion of these researchers in this respect supports the justification of writing this chapter.

#### **2.1 A Brief Historical and Political Account of Iraq**

Iraq is the cradle of civilizations; its ancient name was Mesopotamia. In the Middle Ages, it was the centre of Islamic Empire lying from Morocco to the Indian subcontinent. Iraq became a country in 1920 and obtained its independence from Britain in 1932 (BBC<sup>1</sup>; Pipes, 1983). There was no political stability after independence. In ten years starting from 1958 to 1968, Iraq had experienced ten military coups (Ayubi, 1983). A. Rahim (1991)

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<sup>1</sup> BBC (2007, January 22). *Country profile: Iraq*. Retrieved January 22, 2007, from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/country\\_profiles/791014.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/791014.stm)

added that Iraq had continuously been ruled by the military since the revolution of 1958; in 1968, a military coup brought the Baath<sup>2</sup> Party of Iraq into power. In 1979, the President of Iraq at that time, al-Bakr was removed when the Revolutionary Command Council of Baath Party was under the chairmanship of Saddam. Saddam, the leader of the party then, became the President of Iraq by then until 2003.

Pipes (1983) provided some demographical information about Iraq's society. He stated that Iraq's majority are Shias (55 to 60%) who mainly live in the south with less wealth and power than the Sunnis who make up around (35 to 40%) including the Arabs and Kurds; whereas, the non-Muslims are about 5%. He said that the three main groups, Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds exist in neighbouring nations to Iraq and in the region, for example the Shias exist in Iran, the Sunnis in all Arab states, and the Kurds in Iran, Syria, and Turkey. He added that "Although they [the Sunni Arabs] constitute only one-fifth of the population [in Iraq], they have been able to maintain a hold on power through all changes in governments (*sic*)" (p. 9) when what is now Iraq was an Ottoman province, British mandate, independent monarchy, and a Socialist Republic.

Pipes (1983) said that when the Baathists came to power, the Sunni domination over power re-asserted more than ever before. By mid-1970s, Tikrit, a small Sunni town in Selah Eddeen province, ruled Iraq since then by assigning the top political and military leadership to its people. Keddie (1983) argued that normally minorities are often economically oppressed or neglected thus causing them discontent. However, "In Iraq, most Kurds [a minority] and Arab Shias (actually an oppressed majority) have long been manipulated by Sunni Arab-dominated governments" (p. 89). Rubin (1983) has also commented on the conditions of Iraqi Shias who constitute half the country's population; however, they have been excluded from the nation's economic and political power centers and often relegated to slums. He added that "the military and the ruling Baath Party have been dominated by Sunni Muslims from the northwest"; "the ruling Sunni group is further diluted by the very large

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<sup>2</sup> Baath literally means 'renaissance'.

Kurdish community in the northeast” (p. 131). Pipes (1983) argued that in Iraq “as minority rulers, the Sunni Arabs are obsessed with prospect of losing power to the Shias” (p. 9). A. Rahim (1991) shared a similar view and said that “although the Shia Muslims form the majority in Iraq, the country had been politically dominated by the Sunnis” (p. 101).

As a result, the Daawa<sup>3</sup> Party founded in the late 1960s as an anti-government Shia group which was backed by Ayatollah Muhammad al-Baqr al-Sadr who was arrested in June 1979 and executed along with his sister in April 1980 because anyone who opposes Saddam Hussein’s rule “would suffer arrest and execution” (Rubin, 1983, p. 131). A. Rahim (1991) also asserted that in 1980, the Baathists executed Iraqi Shia spiritual leader, Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr, for “his political activities” (p. 10).

Hashem (1991) stated that the Iraqis have never lived in peace since 1958 when hundreds of thousands were tortured, jailed, exiled or killed during the wars waged against Iran in 1980 and against Kuwait in 1990. Saddam’s appearance on the political arena in 1979 synchronised with Khomeini’s Islamic revolution in 1979. Shortly, in 1980 the first Gulf War, Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) broke out between the two Islamic neighbouring countries (Tahir-Kheli & Ayubi, 1983). Western military analysts and some scholars expected that this war to Saddam would be a blitzkrieg and would finish Iran’s armed forces in a few weeks to establish him as the most powerful leader in the Gulf region (Staudenmaier, 1983; Tahir-Kheli & Ayubi, 1983; Rubin, 1983). Other analysts and researchers suggested that the war erupted because of hostility between Saddam and Khomeini, and also because the Baathists feared Khomeini’s Islamic revolution which might stir up a Shiite rebellion in southern Iraq (Pipes, 1983; Tahir-Kheli & Ayubi, 1983). On the other hand, Washington does not want to see Iraq as a military and economic power capable of challenging Israel or other regional states – the oil-rich Gulf states (Tahir-Kheli & Ayubi, 1983).

The first Gulf War ended in 1988 leaving behind between half a million and a million from both sides, huge debts faced by Iraq, and damage to both countries’ industrial

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<sup>3</sup> Daawa literally means revelation.

infrastructures wasting tens of billions of dollars (Murray & Scales, 2003; Mossavar-Rahmani, 1983). Two years later in 1990, Saddam's army invaded the neighbouring Arab state of Kuwait; the invasion lasted almost seven months which resulted in the defeat of the Iraqi army decisively by the US-led coalition forces, and subsequently the imposition of a blockade on the Iraqi people continued until the Iraq war 2003. This put an end to the sanctions as well as to Saddam's era (Stevens, 1995; Sjoberg, 2004). This is succinctly summed up by Sjoberg's words below.

The last fifteen years have been a time of upheaval for Iraq: the end of Iran-Iraq war [1980-1988], the Gulf War [1991], a twelve-year sanctions regime, a repressive government, and the United States-led takeover have been sources [of] social, political and economic distress. (Sjoberg, 2004, p. x)

## **2.2 The Iraq-America Crisis**

Because the Iraq war 2003 was a result of previous political crises between the U.S. and Iraq as pointed out by Eid (2004), the researcher believes that a brief discussion on some pre-war eventful political scenes would provide the readers with a brief overview of what was happening and how and when the actual war really started.

As a consequence of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, on 3 April 1991, the U.N. Security Council declared a formal ceasefire and tough terms that Iraq must comply with for example, banning chemical and nuclear weapons, compensating the Kuwaitis for their losses, imposing trade sanctions that have to be reviewed every sixty days and to monitor Iraq compliance with the ceasefire terms (A. Rahim, 1991). Between 1991 to early 2003, there were a number of skirmishes in the form of ground attacks and air strikes against Iraq, and mounting tensions between Iraq and the US-UK alliance. For example, in mid-1997, there was a US threat of using force against Iraq if it did not comply with the UN inspectors of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Because Iraq did not cooperate, in December 1998,

the alliance launched Operation Desert Fox which lasted four days targeting crucial sites to be the largest attack against Iraq since 1991 (Gordon & Shapiro, 2004; Galindo, 2004).

Gordon and Shapiro (2004) added that in October 1998, the US Congress strongly supported the Iraq Liberation Act to be passed which stated that the United States would support efforts to remove Saddam from power as he was perceived as a threat to the people of Iraq, the region, and the world. Pestalardo (2006) stated that on the evening of 17 March 2003, Bush in his televised address gave Saddam Hussein forty-eight hours to leave Iraq or he would be forcibly removed; Saddam refused to leave. On 20 March 2003, the US-led coalition troops waged the war.

### **2.3 The Iraq War (20 March 2003 - 9 April 2003)**

Even though Operation Desert Fox launched in 1998 and other attacks before 2003 suggest the start of the war, Williams (2004) believed that with the military operation called 'Operation Iraqi Freedom', the actual military action against Iraq started on 20 March 2003. Pestalardo (2006) defined war as "a complex thing and involves different realities from different perspectives" (p. 6). She went on saying that the Iraq war is unique and has brought all sorts of challenges for the Americans and the rest of the globe. Jaramillo (2006) defined war as "a fabrication, and media elevate it to the level of spectacular distraction" (p. 1); that is to say as she argued in her research on this war that "institutions and organizations can and do represent, negotiate, and explain war in so-called Hollywood terms [...]" (p. 1). From these two simple definitions of war, one can say that warfare is complex in itself as it involves perspectives or ideologies as this war and that the media has a role in it. If this role is dishonest, then the media will make it even harder to understand what is going on in a war such as this one. The media may also present a foggy picture for either institutional ideology or to serve political and national interests as it will be shown here in brief (see Chapter Three, section 3.1 on media at war).

Thompson (2006) stated that the invasion of Iraq backed with the opinion polling data which showed “the vast majority of the American public heartily supported the decision to pre-emptively invade Iraq” (p. 3). Yang (2004) also stated that the anger resulted from the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. which was strongly influenced by television news has positively backed the US administration to go to war. On the other hand, Galindo (2004) pointed out that the invasion was started by the “coalition of the willing” (p. 1) led by the US; actually, it was beyond the UN’s willing; it was against the UN Security Council which did not authorise the use of military force against Iraq.

Galindo (2004) asserted that today’s perils represented by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as well as the terrorist groups should be tackled for a safer world. She mentioned that Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 was a result of Saddam’s regime’s defying various Security Council Resolutions in a decade. Sjoberg (2004) argued that the United States of America justified its war on Iraq as it was “a threat to international peace and security” (p. 3) because Iraq possesses prohibited weapons; and she said that the “coalition invaded Iraq from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia [Iraq’s neighbours]” (p. 4). She added that the coalition controlled most of Iraq in late March and early April 2003; Saddam was then overthrown and went into hiding. After that, he was captured by the US marines.

The foreign forces were not welcomed as ‘liberators’ (Rogers, 2006; Tumber & Palmer, 2004). On April 9, 2003, the Iraqis headed towards Firdouz Square in Baghdad where Saddam’s huge bronze statue was erected aloft. They pulled the statue down and the scene was broadcast live and it has received wide media coverage. As such, the following headlines were reported by the UK and US media as cited by (Tumber & Palmer, 2004, pp. 108-110): “Grateful civilians welcomed [the UK forces] who liberated Basra”, “This joyous moment recalls the deposition of scores of statues of Lenin...”, “A giant concrete and metal statue of Saddam Hussein with his arm outstretched [...] pulled down in a dramatic scene [...]”, and “Saddam statue toppled in central Baghdad. Crowds cheer as a statue of Saddam Hussein falls”.

## 2.4 Post-Saddam Iraq (9 April 2003 –)

Tumber and Palmer (2004) stated that on 9 April 2003, Saddam's regime collapsed and on 1 May 2003, President Bush declared that major military operation in Iraq was over. They also mentioned that after Saddam's fall, British media focused on Saddam's abuses of human rights at home which later have been used by the UK government as part of the justifications to go to war. They also said that soon after his regime's fall, Saddam, through his videotaped speeches, used Arabic media to call for jihad against the occupation forces. As a result, many insurgent groups started their attacks on the foreign and Iraqi forces as well as international and local civilians through guerrillas. This is also indicated by Rogers (2006) who stated that "the sheer size of the dispersed arsenals was of great advantage to the forces opposing occupation as the insurgency began to develop within a few weeks of regime termination" (p. 14) (see section 2.7 below).

News reports from the BBC and local agencies have revealed the insurgents' renewable tactics. For example, at one time, while carrying out attacks and criminal activities, some of them used police uniform in order to vilify and distort the image of the new police and to move freely in the target area. This has created insecurity in the country where many criminals who were released before the invasion were being nurtured amid this chaos. This is based on what was said by the then Interior Ministry spokesman, General Abdul Kareem Khalef who appeared on the state TV channel *al-Iraqiya* on 19/11/2006. He said that "750,000 criminals have been released before the invasion" and that they contributed to insecurity and criminality. He also said that the ministry is filtering its security personnel. Such a scene does not only underscore the complexity of the Iraq war, but it also suggests the start of another kind of war in Iraq which began soon after Bush's declaration of the end of the Iraq war on 1 May 2003 (see section 2.7 below).

## 2.5 New Iraq (2003 –)

So far, the researcher has provided some background on the situation in Iraq before, during, and after Saddam's reign. Based on the previous discussion, one can see Iraq moving from military coups to the iron fist of Saddam's power to the collapse of his Baathist regime – the one party ruling. Galindo (2004) provided a brief history on Saddam and stated that “Saddam Hussein was the absolute authority in Iraq for more than 24 years, during which he ruled by the fear and corruption and with reckless disregard of the basic human rights of the people of Iraq” (p. 3).

Soon after Saddam's fall in April 2003, the notion of New Iraq began to be circulated among Iraqi politicians and citizens through speeches, slogans and social practices as well as in the media, emphasising signs of democracy. For example, Ramesh (2004) mentioned that not only political freedom appeared in Iraq after Saddam's fall, but also freedom of religious practices when some Shia pilgrims chanted anti-American slogans while commemorating the death of Imam Hussein [once banned under Saddam] in Karbala where his mausoleum is located. Ramesh added that the Iraqi Communist Party raised red flags and a banner saying “A free country for joyful people” (p. 267). While, others set up the toppled regime's premises for their parties such as The Liberal Democratic Movement, The National Arab Democratic Movement, and National Congress. Ramesh stressed that the “seeds of democracy were undeniably being planted in Iraq” (p. 267). Among the dramatic transformations is the appearance of many media agencies. One of the first leading satellite TV channels is the state TV *al-Iraqiya*. The channel also streams online round the clock through the official website, *Iraqi Media Net*<sup>4</sup> through which one can also access *Republic of Iraq Radio*, and few more official TVs, radios, and *al-Sabaah* newspaper.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.iraqimedianet.net/>, recently moved to the new domain: <http://www.imn.iq/>, accessed December 12, 2009

As the BBC<sup>5</sup> illuminated, the democratic process has resulted in President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, to be the first non-Arab to head an Arab state, and al-Maliki, a Shia, to be the first elected Prime Minister of Iraq who formed a government of national unity to be the first democratically-elected government in more than 50 years. The New Constitution approved by voters in October 2005 is also an outcome of the new change in Iraq. Furthermore, New Iraq has also established the Ministry of Human Rights which is the first ministry in the region to monitor the abuses of human rights and to tackle and monitor human rights issues. Signs of freedom of speech can be seen through a number of programs broadcast live and repeated on the Iraqi TV channels and radios to evaluate the performance of the ministers and parliament members. For instance, the program, *Let's chit-chat* which was broadcast over a period of time on both *al-Iraqiya* TV and *Radio of Iraq Republic* and the program, *Human Rights in Iraq* broadcast on *Radio Free Iraq* aim to educate the Iraqi audience about democracy and human rights. Scenes of religious rituals that were forbidden under Saddam can be seen reported and broadcast live on some Iraqi TV channels.

Perhaps, the concept of New Iraq is summed up in al-Maliki's speech broadcast on *al-Iraqiya* on 3 December 2006 to a number of tribal leaders in Baghdad saying,

we are building a New Iraq to achieve justice [...]. The tribal leaders may guide their sons to secure the national unity and to refuse the killing policy and discrimination culture. New Iraq aims to accomplish respect and acceptance of the Other after being marginalised and discriminated in the past.

The above quotation suggests that the Prime Minister is trying to establish justice and mend the heavily injured society through a number of procedures. For example, as reported on *al-Iraqiya*, on 26 December 2006, al-Maliki received a number of Saddam's victims who were deprived of their properties to return their confiscated estates and

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<sup>5</sup> BBC (2007, January 22). *Country profile: Iraq*. Retrieved January 22, 2007, from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/country\\_profiles/791014.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/791014.stm)

properties. Other victims are also being prioritised for medical treatment and employment as frequently reported by the state TV channel.

## **2.6 New Iraq and Regional Challenges**

Geographically, Iraq is located in the Middle East and is surrounded by Arab countries (Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait) and non-Arab countries (Turkey and Iran). All of these countries including Iraq namely share Islam. As mentioned earlier, Iraq under Saddam's ruling had two wars against its neighbours, Iran and Kuwait. On the other hand, the unprecedented transformational changes occurred in Iraq after the 2003 events have brought along challenges to the New Iraq, to the region, and to the world.

Gordon and Shapiro (2004) stated that the Middle East suffers from a lack of political and economic freedom; chronically unemployed youths in almost every country in the region; and deep-rooted social, demographic, and political problems. They said that these factors make it a fertile ground for unrest and violent conflicts. They also pointed out that the key strategic location of the region and critical energy resources make it vulnerable to conflicts which frequently draw in outside parties and consequently leading to effects beyond the region, such as the U.S. and Europe. They also raised another key issue in the region; that is, the lack of democracy which "[...] barely reached the Arab states" (p. 212). This is so because, according to Daim (2004), the Arab leaders are tyrannical and that is why the Arabs despise their leaders. He added that "deceit and distrust grip relations in the Middle East" (p. 54).

Daim (2004) criticised the US interventionist policy in the Middle East, especially when the US removed Saddam from power. He argued that the Iraq war would not stop at Iraq, but it will include Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia. This was also covered in the British media; when studying the post-invasion phase, Tumber and Palmer (2004) identified a number of themes such as war on terror and potential targets in the region, referring to Iran and Syria. Such a scenario promotes the two allies Iran and Syria to undermine the US

project in Iraq so that the people of Iran and Syria would not be encouraged to have a similar regime change. This will be illuminated in the discussion below.

Murray and Scales (2003) mentioned that there are internal and external complexities in the Iraq war. For example, the Turks oppose independence for the Kurds in the north of Iraq as they also have Kurds in the South and that the Turkish Kurds may be promoted to have an autonomous region as in Iraq. They added that the Syrian Baathists and Iranian fundamentalists back like-minded groups in Iraq. Such cultural and geopolitical complexities were not foreseen before the war. Ayubi (1983) went even further and underlined the significant numbers of Shias in the Gulf states that some 200,000 live in Saudi Arabia's eastern region, 30 to 40% in Kuwait, 50% in the United Arab Emirates, 30% in Qatar, 50% in Oman, and in Bahrain 75%, taking into account the Shia majority in both Iraq and Iran. On the whole, this means that the new political system and change of power in Iraq may influence such neighbouring and regional countries.

Ramesh (2004) stressed that many already defined the Iraq war as a historic turning point that may have profound effects on the Arab psyche. For example, he stated that the Syrian state-run TV channel switched from the scenes of Iraqis attacking the symbols of Saddam's rule when the US forces swept into Baghdad to a programme about Islamic art and architecture. He commented on that and said that the scenes were unsuitable for "an authoritarian Arab regime" (p. 252). Therefore, Ramesh described the Iraq war as "a media war [which] was being fought alongside the military conflict" (p. 252).

A. Rahim (1991) contended that the regional governments in the Middle East are not willing to embrace democracy as suggested in the demand of the late King Fahd of Saudi Arabia when he "told the US to stop pressing for democracy in Kuwait" (p. 91). Berenger (2004) pointed out that regional countries promoted cynicism about the democracy brought by the West to post-Saddam Iraq. This is possibly because free press and transparent elections in Iraq are not in favour of most of the Arab governments. As such, Tumber and Palmer (2004) argued that normally, in the Middle East, the Arabs "have been dominated by

media directly subordinate to the political system and by privately-owned 'loyalist' media, exercising self-censorship in the interests of the political system" (p. 130).

The aforementioned critique does not exclude the key regional country, Iran from criticism. For example, among the large ethnic minorities of Iran are the Kurds and the Arabs; both of them feel discriminated and disadvantaged as reported by Keddie (1983). She said that the Arab of Iran's Khuzistan were seeking autonomy before and after Khomeini's 1979 revolution because they see themselves depressed as they hold lower-paying jobs than the non-Arabs in their oil-rich province even though Iran's Arabs are mostly Shias. She also stated that the Iranian Kurds and Turkomans under the Islamic Republic "did not achieve everything they expected from the revolution"; and even "the Persian Shia Muslims have suffered from more jailing and executions since the revolution than any other combination of groups, mostly on political or moral charges" (p. 106). This shows that the 'Islamic' Republic of Iran is non-democratic and practises discriminatory policy. Furthermore, Gordon and Shapiro (2004) and Tumber and Palmer (2004) mentioned that the US labeling of Iran as a rogue state is because of Iran's interference in the Middle East and in post-Saddam Iraq.

Iran's interference in Iraq is also raised by the local media as suggested here. On 7 September 2006, both private TV *al-Sharqiya* and state TV *al-Iraqiya* reported the Deputy-Prime Minister's visit to Iran and stated that Dr. Berham Saleh met Iran's Foreign Minister, Mutaqi to raise economic, political and security concerns as well as to prepare for al-Maliki's forthcoming visit. *Al-Iraqiya* added that "al-Maliki will visit Iran if Saleh's visit is successful".

On 17 November 2006, on *al-Iraqiya*, the Ministry of Interior declared that there are two neighbouring countries involved in violence and insecurity in Iraq. Then on 1 December 2006, the state TV reported that a Saudi Arabian security official announced in November 2006 that "Saudi Arabia will back the Sunnis by arming them with arms, money, and oil to stop the Iranians' interventions". The Saudi call was angrily condemned by Sunni and Shia imams during Friday prayers as well as by Iraqi parliament members. The Minister of