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**NAVAL  
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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**ACTS OF ATROCITY: EFFECTS ON PUBLIC OPINION  
SUPPORT DURING WAR OR CONFLICT**

by

Christopher L. Corley

December 2007

Co-Advisors:

Jeffrey W. Knopf  
Michael E. Freeman

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**ACTS OF ATROCITY: EFFECTS ON PUBLIC OPINION SUPPORT DURING  
WAR OR CONFLICT**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Acts of atrocity are an unfortunate, yet recurring theme of warfare. Committed by both professional and unprofessional militaries alike, these acts flagrantly violate common standards of competence, morality, ethics, and military professionalism. Commonly, these incidents result in the death of innocent civilians or fellow military members; involve cover-ups which are later exposed; and lead to attempts by senior leadership to deflect the blame elsewhere. These incidents are serious matters, capturing public attention because they are representative of abuses of power or unauthorized uses of force.

Examination of the My Lai massacre and Abu Ghraib prison scandal offers an excellent opportunity to better understand how these incidents affect public opinion. Although results for the My Lai incident were inconclusive, it appears the Abu Ghraib affected public opinion support for the Iraq War, at least in the short-term. If presidents and military leaders can understand and predict the shift of public opinion support following an act of atrocity, they may be able to take decisive action to mitigate potential negative effects.



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.....</b>	<b>1</b>
A.	PURPOSE.....	1
B.	IMPORTANCE.....	2
C.	PUBLIC OPINION IN CONTEXT.....	2
D.	LITERATURE REVIEW .....	3
E.	RALLY ‘ROUND THE FLAG EFFECT .....	4
F.	THE EFFECT OF TIME AND WAR-WEARINESS .....	6
G.	CASUALTIES AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS .....	7
H.	METHODOLOGY .....	11
<b>II.</b>	<b>THE MY LAI MASSACRE.....</b>	<b>15</b>
A.	BACKGROUND: PUBLIC OPINION, VIETNAM, AND MY LAI .....	15
B.	THE HAMLET AND THE ORDERS GIVEN .....	15
C.	THE MASSACRE.....	17
D.	THE COVER-UP .....	19
E.	THE UNCOVERING .....	21
F.	MEDIA PRIMING AND THE INITIAL PUBLIC RESPONSE .....	23
G.	ELITE INFLUENCE.....	23
H.	THE MY LAI POLL AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS .....	24
I.	OPTIONS FOR EXAMINING PUBLIC OPINION SUPPORT FOR VIETNAM .....	29
J.	THE “MISTAKE QUESTION” .....	30
K.	USING THE MISTAKE QUESTION TO ANALYZE THE EFFECT OF MY LAI.....	32
L.	CONCLUSIONS .....	38
<b>III.</b>	<b>THE ABU GHRAIB PRISON SCANDAL.....</b>	<b>45</b>
A.	BACKGROUND ON THE PRISON.....	45
B.	THE 800TH MILITARY POLICE BRIGADE .....	47
C.	PRECURSORS CONTRIBUTING TO AN ABUSIVE ENVIRONMENT.....	49
D.	THE ABUSE.....	50
E.	THE UNCOVERING .....	52
F.	SLOW ROLL OR COVER-UP? .....	52
G.	THE INVESTIGATIONS .....	53
H.	THE “BAD APPLES” AND THEIR PUNISHMENTS .....	56
I.	MEDIA PRIMING AND INITIAL PUBLIC RESPONSE.....	58
J.	ELITE INFLUENCE.....	60
K.	THE ABU GHRAIB POLLS .....	62
L.	OPTIONS FOR EXAMINING PUBLIC OPINION SUPPORT FOR IRAQ.....	64
M.	THE GALLUP “MISTAKE QUESTION” .....	66
N.	THE PEW “RIGHT/WRONG QUESTION” .....	69

O.	THE GALLUP “WORTH IT” QUESTION .....	70
P.	CONCLUSIONS .....	72
IV.	COMPARISON OF CASES .....	79
A.	LACK OF MEASUREMENT POINTS .....	79
B.	CIVILIAN CASUALTY SENSITIVITY—A MORE RECENT PHENOMENON? .....	81
C.	HEIGHTENED SENSITIVITY TO TORTURE.....	82
D.	DIFFERENCES IN ACCOUNTABILITY.....	84
E.	WHAT THE IMAGES SHOWED .....	86
F.	TIMING .....	91
G.	CONCLUSION .....	95
V.	CONCLUSION .....	97
A.	ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	97
B.	POLICY IMPLICATIONS.....	99
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	101
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	115

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4-1.	The My Lai Massacre. ....	87
Figure 4-2.	Abu Ghraib Graner. ....	89
Figure 4-3.	Abu Ghraib England. ....	90
Figure 4-4.	Abu Ghraib Frederick. ....	90

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## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1.	Summary of Gallup Mistake Question Vietnam (Corley Recalculated). .....	33
Table 2-2.	Gallup Mistake Question Vietnam (Corley Recalculated) .....	40
Table 2-3.	Gallup Mistake Question Vietnam (Gallup Provided).....	41
Table 2-4.	Gallup Mistake Question Vietnam (Gallup Brain) .....	42
Table 2-5.	Gallup Mistake Question Vietnam (Gallup Opinion Index).....	43
Table 3-1.	Summary of Gallup “Mistake Question” Iraq. ....	67
Table 3-2.	Summary of Pew “Right/Wrong Question” Iraq. ....	69
Table 3-3.	Summary of Gallup “Worth It Question” Iraq.....	71
Table 3-4.	Gallup “Mistake Question” Iraq. ....	75
Table 3-5.	Pew “Right/Wrong Question” Iraq. ....	76
Table 3-6.	Gallup “Worth It Question” Iraq.....	77

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# I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

## A. PURPOSE

This thesis will examine acts of atrocity in times of war or conflict to determine their effect(s) on public opinion support. For the purposes of this study, acts of atrocity are defined as illegal, immoral, or unethical acts, offenses, or mistakes, punishable under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. To qualify as an act of atrocity, these acts or offenses must extraordinarily and flagrantly violate acceptable standards of competence, morality, ethics, or military professionalism. Acts of atrocity are serious matters, capturing public attention because they are representative of an abuse of power or unauthorized use of force by America's most respected institution.<sup>1</sup> These acts violate the very foundations of freedom and democracy, create a moral crisis, and cast a negative shadow on the legitimacy and reputation of the United States. Commonly, these incidents result in the death of innocent civilians or fellow military members; involve cover-ups that are later exposed; and lead to attempts by senior leadership to deflect the blame elsewhere. Examples of acts of atrocity include the My Lai massacre, the Pat Tillman friendly fire incident, and the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. The objective of this thesis is to identify the relationship between acts of atrocity and their effect(s) if any on public opinion support for a war or conflict.

The overall question this thesis seeks to answer is: Do acts of atrocity cause a negative effect on public support for the war or conflict? A subset of related questions includes:

- Do these acts of atrocity effectively “finish off” public opinion about a war or conflict, or are they merely “bumps and wiggles” in the public support timeline?
- Can we predict the extremity of the shift in public opinion support following one of these incidents?

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<sup>1</sup> According to a Jun 1-4, 2006, Gallup Poll on confidence in institutions. See <http://www.galluppoll.com/content/default.aspx?ci=1597> (accessed 24 May 2007).

- Are certain types of military misconduct more prone to cause a negative effect on public support?

## **B. IMPORTANCE**

The effect of acts of atrocity during times of war or conflict has applications for presidents as well as military leaders. A lack of public opinion support can be a powerful constraint to a president's foreign policy agenda, especially during times of war or conflict.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, military officers have a responsibility to understand the effects of acts of atrocity on public opinion support, because they are responsible for the execution of war or conflict in support of the country's foreign policy initiatives. Acts of atrocity perpetrated by the military may undermine the country's ability to accomplish its foreign policy objectives. This is especially important when fighting an unpopular war, when public opinion support is already fragile. If presidents can understand and predict the extremity of a possible public opinion shift from acts of atrocity, they may be able to take decisive action to mitigate potential negative effects. Likewise, military commanders should have a good understanding of these effects and should take every possible step to prevent such acts from occurring or reoccurring in their theaters of operations. If an incident does occur, they should take swift and appropriate action to mitigate damage to public opinion support for the military operation.

## **C. PUBLIC OPINION IN CONTEXT**

Over three thousand American casualties<sup>3</sup> and over four years of conflict have had a significant influence on public support for the war in Iraq. The media response to the climbing casualty rate, the November 2006 mid-term election results, and recent elite political rhetoric demanding withdrawal are important indicators that public support for this conflict has deteriorated. Favorable public opinion is an essential element to any administration's ability to prosecute war. This is because public opinion can constrain an

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander L. George, "Domestic Constraints on Regime Change in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Need for Policy Legitimacy," in *Changes in the International System*, Ole R. Holsti, Randolph M. Siverson, and Alexander L. George, eds, (Boulder: The Westview Press, 1980): 233-235.

<sup>3</sup> "Forces: U.S. & Coalition Casualties," <http://cnn.com/SPECIALS/2003/iraq/forces/casualties/> (accessed February 15, 2007).

administration's ability to carry out its foreign policy goals, especially if the boundaries of what is acceptable to the public are breached. If the war drags on, casualties are sustained, the principal foreign policy objectives are considered illegitimate or the public perceives that the policy is not being successful, it may "push back" against or punish an administration by voting against it in the next election. A good example of this is the public's response to the Bush administration's Iraq policy in the November 2006 election. In fact, "public opinion, the support and mobilization of which is required for sustaining an extended conflict, plays a critical role in resolution, especially when government preferences diverge from majority opinion."<sup>4</sup> So important is public opinion that it may be America's Achilles Heel.<sup>5</sup> As Robert Cassidy observed with respect to the Vietnam War:

Even though the United States dropped more than 7 million tons of bombs on Indochina—more than 300 times the impact of the atomic bombs that fell on Japan—North Vietnam's will was resolute, but the United States' will wavered. Lacking the military means to destroy the United States' ability to wage war, Ho Chi Minh and General Vo Nguyen Giap correctly focused on U.S. domestic political resolve to continue to support the war.<sup>6</sup>

#### **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The importance of public opinion support has been widely recognized and studied extensively by political scientists since the Vietnam War. These studies have yielded important conclusions about public opinion in times of war and conflict. Of particular relevance is the scholarly research on the effects of "rallies"; time or war-weariness; casualties; and perceptions of success or failure. From this research we can conclude that the American public is actually "pretty prudent"<sup>7</sup> with regard to its support for war or

---

<sup>4</sup> Ben D. Mor, "Peace Initiatives and Public Opinion: The Domestic Context of Conflict Resolution," *Journal of Peace Research* 34, no. 2, (1997): 197.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen K. Haddock, "On Words: Clauswitz, Bin Laden, and Public Support," *National War College (U.S.)*, (01-01-2002) and Ollen R. Richey, "Public Support for the War on Terrorism: America's Achilles Heel," *National War College (U.S.)*, (01-01-2002).

<sup>6</sup> Robert M. Cassidy, "Why Great Powers Fight Small Wars Badly," *Military Review*, (September-October 2000): 48.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce W. Jentleson, "The Pretty Prudent Public: Post Post-Vietnam American Opinion on the Use of Military Force," *International Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1, (March 1992): 49-73 and Bruce W. Jentleson and Rebecca L. Britton, "Still Pretty Prudent: Post-Cold War American Public Opinion on the Use of Military Force," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42, no. 4, (August 1998) 395-417.

conflict. While many of these studies are essential to our understanding public opinion during wartime or conflict, none so far have addressed the question of how acts of atrocity affect public opinion support.

### **E. RALLY ‘ROUND THE FLAG EFFECT**

John Mueller’s Vietnam-era work on presidential popularity laid the groundwork for most modern theories seeking to offer explanations for public support of foreign policy.<sup>8</sup> Consideration of Mueller’s “rally ‘round the flag variable”<sup>9</sup> is important to any analysis of public opinion. According to Baker and O’Neil:

[Rallies occur] In times of an international event or crisis, when the American public sets aside its disagreements with the president’s policies or performance in office to present a united front to the international community.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, Mueller concluded that for an event to qualify as a rally, the event:

Must be international; directly involve the United States and the president; and be specific, dramatic, and sharply focused in order to ensure the public’s attention. This excludes events that transpire gradually...because their impact on public attitudes [are] likely to be diffused.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, according to Mueller’s definition, initiation of war or conflict qualifies as a potential rally point. An extensive review of the literature on rallies reveals that rallies do exist; are correlated with public approval; and will result in an adjustment of support for

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<sup>8</sup> John E. Mueller, “Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson,” *American Political Science Review* 64, no.1, (March, 1970): 18-34; John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1973): 1-300; William D. Baker and John R. O’Neal, “Patriotism or Opinion Leadership?: The Nature and Origins of the ‘Rally ‘Round the Flag’ Effect,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 5, (October 2001): 664; Scott S. Gartner, Gary M. Segura, and Michael Wilkening, “All Politics Are Local: Local Losses and Individual Attitudes Towards the Vietnam War,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 5, (October 1997): 690.

<sup>9</sup> Muller, “Presidential Popularity,” 21.

<sup>10</sup> Baker and O’Neal, “Patriotism or Opinion Leadership,” 664.

<sup>11</sup> Mueller, “Presidential Popularity,” 21.

the president.<sup>12</sup> However, rallies are not a long-term phenomenon. They usually last only two to three months. Nor are they responsible for large increases in presidential approval ratings, on average boosting presidential approval by only 3.5 percentage points.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, rallies may or may not appear depending on the level of media priming and whether political elites support or criticize the administration's crisis response.<sup>14</sup> The rally literature reveals that specific incidents, perceived favorably by the public, do matter because they create "positive rallies" that are powerful enough to boost presidential popularity. Although it would be logical to assume the converse is also true, not much is known about the effect of "negative rallies" or specific incidents perceived unfavorably by the public, which is the focus of this thesis study. Nevertheless, rallies are important because they do provide a short-term boost in public approval support for

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<sup>12</sup> Kernell, "Explaining Presidential Popularity," 506-522; Baker and O'Neal, "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership," 661-687; Jon Hurwitz, Mark Peffley, and Paul Raymond, "Presidential Support During the Iran-Contra Affair," *American Politics Quarterly* 17, no. 4, (October 1989): 359-385; Tom W. Smith, Kenneth A. Rasinski, and Marianna Toce, "America Rebounds: A National Study of Public Response to the September 11<sup>th</sup> Terrorist Attacks," National Organization for Research: The University of Chicago, (October 25, 2001): 1-21.

<sup>13</sup> Kernell, "Explaining Presidential Popularity," 513; Richard A. Brody and Catherine R. Shapiro, "Policy Failure and Public Support: The Iran-Contra Affair and Public Assessment of President Reagan," *Political Behavior* 11, no. 4, (December 1989): 360.

<sup>14</sup> Jon A. Krosnick and Donald R. Kinder, "Altering the Foundations of Support for the President Through Priming," *The American Political Science Review* 84, no. 2, (June 1990); Philip J. Powlick and Andrew Z. Katz, "Defining the American Public Opinion/Foreign Policy Nexus," *Mershon International Studies Review* 42, no. 1, (May 1998): 29; Warren P. Strobel, "The CNN Effect: Myth or Reality?" as cited in *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence*, Eugene R. Wittkopf and James M. McCormick, eds., (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc, 1999): 85-93; Baker and O'Neal, "Patriotism or Opinion Leadership,"; Benjamin I. Page, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Glenn R. Dempsey, "What Moves Public Opinion," *The American Political Science Review* 81, no. 1, (March 1987); Louis J. Klarevas, Christopher Gelpi, and Jason Reifler, "Correspondence: Casualties, Polls, and the Iraq War," *International Security* 31, no. 2, (Fall 2006); Thomas Knecht and M. Stephen Weatherford, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: The Stages of Presidential Decision Making," *International Studies Quarterly* 50, (2006); James Meernik and Chelsea Brown, "The Short Path and the Long Road: Explaining the Duration of U.S. Military Operations," *Journal of Peace Research* 44, no. 1, (2007); Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, "The Rise of Presidential Polling: The Nixon White House in Historical Perspective," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 59, no. 2, (Summer 1995); Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, "Presidential Manipulation of Polls and Public Opinion: The Nixon Administration and the Pollsters," *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 4, (Winter, 1995-1996); Shmuel T. Lock, Robert W. Shapiro, and Lawrence R. Jacobs, "The Impact of Political Debate on Government Trust: Reminding the Public What the Federal Government Does," *Political Behavior* 21, no. 3, (September 1999); Erik P. Bucy, "Audience Responses to Traumatic News: Processing the World Trade Center Attacks," Harvard Symposium: Restless Searchlight: The Media and Terrorism, (Harvard University: 2002); Michael Koch and Scott Sigmund Gartner, "Casualties and Constituencies: Democratic Accountability, Electoral Institutions, and Costly Conflicts," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 6, (December 2005); William M. Darley, "War Policy, Public Support, and the Media," *Parameters* 35, no. 2, (Summer 2005).

the president. (For the rally variable, support for the president is the dependent variable.) However, support for the president, does not necessarily constitute the same thing as support for a war or conflict. Presidents cannot count on “positive rallies” to last the duration of the war or conflict. If an act of atrocity occurs after the initial “positive rally” period, as is the case with the two case studies presented in this thesis, then it is more likely that the incident will be used by the public to help form opinions about support for the war or conflict. When the incident occurs may become increasingly more important as the war or conflict drags on and is perceived to be taking too long in the public’s estimation. The next section will further explore the importance of time and war-weariness on public opinion.

## **F. THE EFFECT OF TIME AND WAR-WEARINESS**

Following the Vietnam War, political scientists generally believed that Americans were tired of war. This assumption was based on the understanding that the Vietnam War had captured the attention of the American public for over a decade, dragging on, until ultimately culminating in what was generally perceived to be a defeat for the United States military. This phenomenon would eventually become known as the “war-weariness” hypothesis where “a state’s involvement in war and particularly a long and destructive war, reduces the likelihood of its involvement in subsequent wars for a period of time.”<sup>15</sup> Belief in war-weariness from the Vietnam War led to a “Vietnam Syndrome,” “a term coined by conservatives to refer to the popular refusal on the part of the American public to support major military interventions in third world countries following the defeat in Vietnam.”<sup>16</sup> Placed into context with the current war in Iraq, some political leaders fear that:

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<sup>15</sup> Jack S. Levy and Morgan T. Clifton, “The War Weariness Hypothesis: An Empirical Test,” *American Journal of Political Science* 30, no. 1, (February 1986): 46.

<sup>16</sup> Anonymous, “Is Iraq Another Vietnam?” *Monthly Review* 56, no. 2, (June 2004): 5.

Anything that would appear to be a defeat would bring back the ‘Vietnam Syndrome.’ The Iraq War was supposed to have marked the final recovery from the ‘Vietnam Syndrome’ and full restoration of U.S. imperial power.<sup>17</sup>

Although seemingly plausible, the war-weariness hypothesis did not hold up well to empirical testing. Levy and Clifton’s study concluded that “the probability of [future] war was independent of the period of time since the last war.”<sup>18</sup> However, as Pickering later suggested, “a state’s past war record should be considered when policy makers attempt to gauge [public support] for use of military force.”<sup>19</sup> While the duration of the war or conflict and degree of war-weariness are not particularly strong stand-alone variables, they cannot be completely discounted either. This is because war has a sunk cost in terms of time, treasure, and troops expended. The longer the duration of the war or conflict, the greater is its cost. This relationship suggests a threshold for what the public will and will not tolerate. Wars expend an administration’s social capital with the American people, especially as these conflicts drag on. When an administration’s social capital is already low because of a lengthy war or conflict, acts of atrocity cannot help but further undermine public opinion support by expending already depleted social capital resources. This can be especially costly for an administration if the duration of the war or conflict has resulted in significant casualties. The next section will explore the effect of military and civilian casualties on public opinion support.

## **G. CASUALTIES AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS**

Mueller examined the Korean and Vietnam Wars and concluded that:

Support for each war, high at first, declined as a logarithmic function of American casualties—quickly at first, then more slowly. [This is known as the cumulative casualties hypothesis,] where support drops some fifteen percentage points whenever the casualties increase tenfold—for example, from one thousand to ten thousand or from ten thousand to a hundred thousand.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Anonymous, “Is Iraq Another Vietnam?” 5.

<sup>18</sup> Levy and Morgan, “The War-Weariness Hypothesis,” 46.

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Pickering, “War-Weariness and Cumulative Effects: Victors, Vanquished, and Subsequent Interstate Intervention,” *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 3, (May 2002): 334.

<sup>20</sup> Mueller, “Presidential Popularity,” 29.



Mueller also predicted a similar pattern for the Gulf War, but was unable to validate his theory because of the Gulf War's short duration.<sup>21</sup> Follow-up studies have strengthened our understanding of the effect of casualties, revealing the American public's strong sensitivity to but not intolerance for casualties, with slight variations in attitudes across groups, geographic regions, and by other characterizations. The effects are largely dependent on how quickly casualties accumulate, the perceived rightness of the war or conflict, what issues are at stake, and the public's perceptions of success or failure.<sup>22</sup> Of these factors, the expectation of success appears to be most crucial in times of war.<sup>23</sup> These studies put away once and for all any myths that the American public is anything less than capable making rational decisions based on logical conclusions drawn from available information about the costs and benefits of American actions. This suggests that the American public is actually "pretty prudent" in its decision-making about war or conflict.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John E. Muller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994): 77.

<sup>22</sup> William A. Boettcher III and Michael D. Cobb, "Echoes of Vietnam? Casualty Framing and Public Perceptions of Success and Failure in Iraq," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 6, (December 2006), 832; Gartner, Segura, and Wilkening, "All Politics are Local: Local Losses and Individual Attitudes Towards the Vietnam War," 691; Christopher Gelpi, Peter D. Feaver, and Jason Reifler, "Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq," *International Security* 30, no. 3, (Winter 2005/2006): 44-45; Klarevas, Gelpi, and Reifler, "Correspondence: Casualties, Polls, and the Iraq War," 196-198; Eric Larson and Bogdan Savych, "Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for U.S. Military Operations," (Santa Monica, Ca: Rand, 1996), [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR726/index.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR726/index.html) (accessed April 27, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler, "Success Matters," 8; Gartner and Segura, "War, Casualties, and Public Opinion," 298; and Klarevas, Gelpi, and Reifler, "Correspondence: Casualties, Polls, and the Iraq War," 186.

<sup>24</sup> Kernell, "Explaining Presidential Popularity,"; Alexander L. George, "Domestic Constraints on Regime Change in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Need for Policy Legitimacy," as cited in *Changes in the International System*, Ole R. Holsti, Randolph M Siverson, and Alexander L. George, eds., (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980); Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, "Changes in American's Policy Preferences, 1935-1979," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 46, no. 1, (Spring 1982); Robert Y. Shapiro and Benjamin I. Page, "Foreign Policy and the Rational Public," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 32, no. 2, (June 1988); Jentleson, "The Pretty Prudent Public"; Jentleson and Britton, "Still Pretty Prudent"; Robert Y. Shapiro and Lawrence R. Jacobs, "Who Leads and Who Follows? U.S. Presidents, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy," as cited in *Decisionmaking in a Glass House: Mass Media, Public Opinion, and American and European Foreign Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2000); Alfonso J. Damico, M. Margaret Conway, and Sandra Bowman Damico, "Patterns of Political Trust and Mistrust: Three Moments in the Lives of Democratic Citizens," *Polity* 32, no. 3, (Spring 2000); Scott R. Meinke and William D. Anderson, "Influencing from Impaired Administrations: Presidents, White House Scandals, and Legislative Leadership," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 4, (November 2001); Erik Voeten and Paul R. Brewer, "Public Opinion, the War in Iraq, and Presidential Accountability," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 5, (October 2006).

Gartner and Segura criticized Mueller for his use of cumulative casualties as the exclusive predictor of public opinion support, arguing instead for the importance of marginal casualties. They concluded that:

[Cumulative casualties] cannot help but be correlated with time; [as cumulative casualties] homogenize conflicts with very different patterns of accumulation; and the exclusive use of cumulative casualties underestimates the importance of turning points, decisive events, and exogenous shocks to opinion.<sup>25</sup>

Their findings are particularly relevant to this study of significant military misconduct because of their suggestion that public opinion can be affected by turning points, decisive events, or shocks. Logically, acts of atrocity could fall into one if not all of these three categories. Similarly, the recent studies of Boettcher and Cobb and Eichenberg, Stoll, and Lebo also highlight the importance of dramatic events during wartime and their effect on public approval.<sup>26</sup>

Also important is Burk's application of Mueller's casualties hypothesis to peacekeeping operations. Burk's study is useful because it helps provide insight into public opinion support for military operations that are not quite war. He found that:

The public will not support [peacekeeping] deployments that result in U.S. casualties; support for an operation will be abruptly withdrawn if casualties unexpectedly occur; and public opinion is so powerful that it constrains the use of force by great powers.<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly, he also concluded that public opinion support for these types of operations was usually already formed before any casualties were taken; that the public is pretty rational about casualties and what to expect from use of military force; and that the public will support [limited] casualties during humanitarian missions as long as the objectives are clear.<sup>28</sup> Burk's conclusions about peacekeeping operations are broadly consistent

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<sup>25</sup> Gartner and Segura, "War, Casualties, and Public Opinion," 280.

<sup>26</sup> Boettcher and Cobb, "Echoes of Vietnam?" 850 and Richard C. Eichenberg, Richard J. Stoll, and Matthew Lebo, "War President: The Approval Ratings of George W. Bush," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 6, (December 2006): 783.

<sup>27</sup> James Burk, "Public Support for Peacekeeping in Lebanon and Somalia: Assessing the Casualties Hypothesis," *Political Science Quarterly* 114, no. 1, (Spring 1999): 77-78.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

with what is known about public opinion support during wartime. Although public support for peacekeeping operations is a little different from regular war, the public's sensitivity to casualties in both cases appears to hinge more on what is at stake during the operation and whether the objectives are clear.

Recently, Mueller applied his cumulative casualties hypothesis to the Iraq War, noting that public support has:

Declined far more quickly; [suggesting the development of an] 'Iraq syndrome,' [which means] Americans will have a strong aversion to embarking on such ventures again.<sup>29</sup>

Gelpi publicly disputed Mueller's "Iraq syndrome" theory, arguing instead that:

As the likelihood of obtaining benefits diminishes, the human cost of war becomes less tolerable, and subsequent casualties further reduce support for the operation...similarly, when the public is optimistic about a successful outcome, it is far more willing to bear the human cost of war.<sup>30</sup>

He attributes the "advance of technology as the catalyst for changing the level of necessary casualties the public believes success requires."<sup>31</sup> Mueller and Gelpi's recent studies on Iraq are useful because they again emphasize the strong relationship between the public's perceptions of success or failure and its subsequent tolerance for casualties. Their conclusions about the Iraq War show that public perceptions of success or failure have held up quite consistently across wars and conflicts.

The most recent study on the effect of casualties during wartime and conflict came from Larson and Savych. They evaluated the public's reaction to civilian casualties as opposed to military casualties in wartime and conflict, finding that "sensitivity to civilian casualties has varied somewhat across past U.S. military operations."<sup>32</sup> Three of their seven conclusions are particularly relevant: "the public does understand the reality

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<sup>29</sup> John Mueller, "The Iraq Syndrome," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 6, (November/December 2005): 44.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Gelpi and John Mueller, "The Cost of War," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 1, (January/February 2006): 139.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Eric V. Larson and Bogdan Savych, "Misfortunes of War: Press and Public Reactions to Civilian Deaths in Wartime," (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, Project Air Force, 2006), [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND\\_MG441.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG441.pdf) (accessed April 22, 2007) xix-xii.

of civilian casualties in wartime; the press will report heavily on incidents involving civilian casualties; and finally, it is as important to get the story right as it is to get the story out when civilian casualties occur.”<sup>33</sup> Also significant was their finding of a high level of trust or social capital between the military and the American people.<sup>34</sup> They conclude “the high level of trust Americans have that the U.S. military is trying to avoid civilian deaths may in part be accountable to the high levels of confidence that most Americans express in the U.S. military and its leadership and the high level credibility that serving military officers have with the U.S. public.”<sup>35</sup> Their findings about public reaction to civilian casualties are interesting in that they are similar to the effect of military casualties on public opinion support, especially when understood in the context of a rational public capable of drawing logical conclusions. This study also has some direct application in the sense that the accidental or intentional killing of innocent civilians could easily qualify as an act of atrocity. However, perhaps of greatest significance is Larson and Savych’s suggestion of a unique relationship built on trust between the military and the American public. What is missing here is how much of an effect acts of atrocity may have on this relationship and how this relates to public opinion support for the war or conflict.

## **H. METHODOLOGY**

The thirty-seven years of exhaustive research following Mueller’s Vietnam-era study on public opinion have corrected problems of logic and data, while validating and improving upon his original findings. The scholarly literature goes far in identifying and explaining the effects of rallies, time and war-weariness, casualties, and perceptions of success from the “pretty prudent public,” and its subsequent level of support for a war or conflict. One potentially important independent variable not yet evaluated is the effect of acts of atrocity on public opinion support during wartime or conflict. Do these acts of atrocity affect public opinion in a significant manner or are they merely “bumps and

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<sup>33</sup> Larson and Savych, “Misfortunes of War,” 209-210.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-211.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 209-210.

wiggles”<sup>36</sup> in the public support line? Are breaches of trust by the military useful for explaining the larger phenomenon of public opinion support?

To address these important questions, this thesis undertook a controlled comparison case study using two famous acts of atrocity to examine their subsequent effect(s) on public opinion support during the war or conflict in which they occurred. The two cases are the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War and the Abu Ghraib prison scandal during the Iraq War. The independent variables (IV) are the acts of atrocity that are believed to lower public opinion support (the dependent variable or DV) during times of war or conflict. These case studies were chosen for their differing types of misconduct and because the incidents occurred during separate conflicts, late enough for the “rally ‘round the flag” effect to have subsided, and, finally, because both were subject to elite framing and widespread media coverage that captured the attention of most American citizens, who likely formed opinions about these incidents. Utilizing pre-existing public opinion timelines, I will attempt to identify causal relationships between acts of atrocity and public opinion support. For analysis of the case studies, a controlled comparison study using Mill’s “method of difference” is most appropriate to account for the effects of the other variables already proven to affect public opinion. I hypothesize that acts of atrocity perpetrated by the military during times of war or conflict undermine public opinion support, at least in the short-term. Analysis of available polling data from sources such as the Pew Foundation and Gallup are used to examine whether there is a causal relationship between these types of incidents and a subsequent drop in public opinion support during the timeframes in question. Analysis of the available data should offer a better understanding of public opinion support during war.

Examination of both cases revealed that the hypothesis receives greater support in the Abu Ghraib case than for the My Lai case, although data limitations in the My Lai case make it difficult to be sure that this incident did not have a negative effect on public opinion support for the Vietnam War. Together, both cases suggest that the negative impact of atrocities on public opinion is likely to be modest and short-lived. Nevertheless, the potential loss of public support over the short-term appears to be

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<sup>36</sup> Mueller, “Presidential Popularity,” 22.

significant enough that military and civilian leaders should do whatever they can to prevent U.S. military personnel from committing such regrettable acts.

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## **II. THE MY LAI MASSACRE**

### **A. BACKGROUND: PUBLIC OPINION, VIETNAM, AND MY LAI**

Thirty-five years have passed since the end of the war, yet public opinion about Vietnam remains divided, complex, and confusing. Political scientists have struggled to explain the complexities of this conflict by developing a series of modern public opinion theories that enhance our understanding of the Vietnam conflict as well as those that we are currently waging. These theories are useful, but less than perfect. None are truly stand-alone theories, capable of explaining all of the intricacies of public opinion in a complex wartime or conflict environment. When synthesized they can take us most of the way towards explaining why the public chose to support or not support conflicts, yet almost always they fall short, leaving many questions unanswered. Such is the case for an examination of the My Lai massacre. The modern theories take us part of the way towards understanding America's response to this incident, but they fall short in explaining how it affected public opinion support for the larger war. In an effort to analyze this incident and its subsequent effects, modern theories must be analyzed with the historical record and the sparse public opinion polling data we have available for this period. An analysis of this sort helps explain My Lai's effect on the war effort; nevertheless, some subjectivity is required to draw any conclusions. Unfortunately, the results were rather disappointing, because for My Lai, there are simply not enough polling questions asked at the right times with the right consistency to draw the kind of irrefutable conclusions about the effect this incident had on the war as a whole. However, this case study is important because it allows us to begin to develop a framework necessary for analyzing future cases of atrocities in combat and how they may affect public opinion support for the larger war or conflict.

### **B. THE HAMLET AND THE ORDERS GIVEN**

My Lai-4 was actually a sub-hamlet of the Tu Chung hamlet, Son My Village, Son Tinh District, Quang Ngai Province, in the former Republic of South Vietnam. At the time of the massacre, Son My Village was comprised of four hamlets, Tu Cung, My



Lai, My Khe, and Co Luy, each with their respective sub-hamlets.<sup>37</sup> Although the sub-hamlets of Son My Village were numbered on U.S. military maps, village and hamlet boundaries did not necessarily correspond with names of sub-hamlets located within their boundaries, and most had other Vietnamese names, which frequently caused confusion for occupying forces. During the Vietnam War, U.S. Army Corps of Engineer maps marked areas of high population density with a pink shading. The Son My Village area was affectionately known to U.S. GIs as “Pinkville” for its high population density and history of strong Viet Cong resistance.<sup>38</sup> This mountainous region, located on the northeast coast of South Vietnam, along the South China Sea, had long been a hotspot of insurgent activity dating back as early as the sixteenth century.<sup>39</sup> Previous U.S. efforts to free this region from Viet Cong control had failed miserably, so ultimately the province was declared a “free fire zone,” where “all civilians were automatically suspected of being Viet Cong or Viet Cong sympathizers. [Subsequently,] U.S. Forces did not need to get approval from Saigon or local officials before staging bombing missions and artillery attacks.”<sup>40</sup>

In January 1968, an Army task force (TF) was formed to occupy this region and quell Viet Cong activity. Named TF Barker after its commander, Lt. Colonel Frank Barker, the task force consisted of three companies: Company A, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry; Company B, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry; and Company C, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry.<sup>41</sup> During the period of March 16-18, 1968, TF Barker planned to conduct a three day “search and destroy” operation in the Son My area to locate, trap, and destroy the 48<sup>th</sup> Viet Cong Local Force Battalion that was using area as its base of operations.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Joseph Goldstein, Burke Marshall, and Jack Schwartz, *The My Lai Massacre and Its Cover-up: Beyond the Reach of the Law?* (New York: The Free Press, 1976), 59; Lieutenant General William R. Peers, United States Army (Retired), *The My Lai Inquiry* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979), 41; and David L. Anderson, *Facing My Lai: Moving Beyond the Massacre*, (Lawrence, Kansas: The University of Kansas Press, 1998), 2-3.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Seymour M. Hersh *My Lai-4: A Report on the Massacre and Its Aftermath* (New York: Random House, 1970), 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>41</sup> Goldstein, Marshall, and Schwartz, *The My Lai Massacre and Its Cover-up*, 80; Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry*, 39; Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim *Four Hours in My Lai* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 65.

<sup>42</sup> Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry*, 87-88.

According to the intelligence given by the task force intelligence officer, all village inhabitants (non-combatants) would depart for the markets of Quang Ngai City by no later than 7:00 a.m., leaving only the 48<sup>th</sup> Viet Cong Local Force Battalion in the village. Strong enemy resistance was expected.<sup>43</sup>

Charlie Company was commanded by Captain Ernest Medina, with Second Lieutenants William L. Calley, Stephen K. Brooks, and Jeffery U. LaCross, serving as 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon Leaders respectively.<sup>44</sup> On the first day of the operation, Charlie Company was to conduct a combat air assault from a landing zone west of My Lai-4, attacking enemy forces located in the sub-hamlet and pushing any enemy stragglers east towards Bravo Company, which was to form a blocking force, preventing the enemy from escaping.<sup>45</sup> According to the official U.S. Army inquiry conducted by Lieutenant General William Peers, Captain Medina told his men that they were to “burn the houses, kill the livestock, and destroy the crops and foodstuffs. By telling [Charlie Company] that no civilians would be present in strength, and by not issuing any instructions as to how to deal with civilians, he created the impression in the minds of many men in his company that they were to destroy everything in the area.”<sup>46</sup>

### **C. THE MASSACRE**

The assault on My Lai-4 on March 16, 1968, began with a brief artillery attack to soften the landing zone and western portion of the hamlet in preparation for the arrival of the assault force. Following the artillery barrage, helicopter gunships rocketed and strafed the landing zone. Subsequently, the first portion of Charlie Company landed and found a “cold” landing zone (LZ) completely free of enemy fire.<sup>47</sup> Over the course of a four hour period, the men of Charlie Company swept through My Lai-4, shooting and bayoneting numerous Vietnamese civilians attempting to flee the area; throwing hand

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<sup>43</sup> Goldstein, Marshall, and Schwartz, *The My Lai Massacre and Its Cover-up*, 90; Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry*, 166-167 and Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, 91.

<sup>44</sup> Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry*, 97.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>47</sup> Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, 107; Goldstein, Marshall, and Schwartz, *The My Lai Massacre and Its Cover-up*, 101; Hersh, *My Lai-4*, 45; and Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry*, 172.

grenades indiscriminately into houses and bunkers full of women, children, and old people; destroying livestock, crops, and the village water supply; raping several women; burning houses; and committing numerous other atrocities.<sup>48</sup> One conscientious soldier named Thomas Partsch recorded the following entry in his journal, capturing the morning's events:

We started to move slowly through the village, shooting everything in sight, children, men, women, and animals. Some [of it] was sickening. Their legs were shot off and they were still moving. They were just hanging there. I think their bodies were made of rubber. I didn't fire a single round and didn't kill anybody, not even a chicken. I couldn't.<sup>49</sup>

Soon, Lieutenant Calley's 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon found itself standing guard over a large group of about sixty Vietnamese civilians.<sup>50</sup> Impatient about the platoon's slow progress through the hamlet, Captain Medina called for a situation report. Calley radioed that a large group of civilians was slowing down the platoon. Medina told Calley to "get rid of them." Calley then ordered two of his men, Paul Meadlo and Dennis Conti to "take care of them." The men replied that they were taking care of them by "watching over them." Calley then clarified: "No, I want them killed. Fire when I say fire." Calley and Meadlo then opened fire on the civilians, killing all sixty of them.<sup>51</sup> Continuing to push their way through the village, Calley's platoon rounded up more Vietnamese civilians, eventually herding them into a large irrigation ditch at the end of the village. Calley, Meadlo, and others opened fire, killing dozens of unarmed civilians. Witnesses would later report that those killed in the ditch numbered between seventy-five to one hundred fifty civilians.<sup>52</sup>

Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson Jr., orbiting the village by helicopter, observed dozens of Vietnamese bodies in the bottom of the drainage ditch. Landing his helicopter, Thompson made contact with Calley to ask him what was going on. Apparently frustrated with the answers he received, Thompson took off again and several minutes

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<sup>48</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, *Cover-up: The Army's Secret Investigation of the Massacre at My Lai* (New York: Random House, 1972), 3 and Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry*, 173.

<sup>49</sup> Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, 116.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 119-121.

<sup>52</sup> Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry*, 175.

later observed Calley's platoon shooting people in the ditch. At the same time, he observed a small group of Vietnamese attempting to seek shelter in a bunker, being chased by members of Brooks' 2nd platoon. Again landing his helicopter, Thompson, his crew chief Glenn Andreotta, and his door gunner Lawrence Colburn, made contact with Lieutenant Brooks telling him that they wanted to evacuate the civilians. Brooks told him that the only way that this was possible was by using hand grenades. Thompson then managed to coax the Vietnamese out of the bunker and load them onto several waiting helicopter gunships that had landed to assist with the rescue. Departing the area to refuel, Thompson made another pass over the irrigation ditch, when his crew observed movement. Landing for the third time, he ordered his crew to check the ditch. They returned with a three-year old Vietnamese child, covered in blood but otherwise uninjured. Evacuating the child to a hospital in Quang Ngai, Thompson returned to base and reported Charlie Company's actions to his commander, Major Fred Watke. Major Watke reported Thompson's allegations to Lt. Col Barker, who contacted his Operations Officer Major Charles Calhoun. Calhoun then contacted Medina and ordered Charlie Company to cease fire.<sup>53</sup>

#### **D. THE COVER-UP**

Efforts to conceal the My Lai massacre occurred at all levels of the chain of command, starting at the individual soldier level of Charlie Company and extending up the chain to the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). According to the Peers Inquiry:

[Some] did it deliberately, others unknowingly. Some actively suppressed information, others withheld it, and still others were responsible by merely not wanting to become involved. Many commanders were aware of at least some of the troubling aspects of the operation.<sup>54</sup>

After completion of the operation, Captain Medina informed his men at base camp that the incident at My Lai was under investigation and they were not to talk about

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<sup>53</sup> Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours at My Lai*, 136-141; Goldstein, Marshall, and Schwartz, *The My Lai Massacre and Its Cover-up*, 137-143; Hersh, *My Lai-4*, 58-66; Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry*, 57, 70-72.

<sup>54</sup> Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry*, 199.

it. Perhaps most egregious were his instructions to Private First Class Michael Bernhardt, who was told not to write his congressman until after the investigation was completed.<sup>55</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Barker's sterilized after-action report failed to mention the extensive number of civilian casualties, giving the impression that nothing abnormal had occurred. Several members of Barker's staff heard the radio traffic initiated by Thompson and the other helicopter pilots during the massacre but failed to do anything about it. They also doctored the civilian casualty logs and changed the location where a substantial number of VC were killed during the opening artillery barrage to make it appear that the artillery fire killed the civilians.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, the Americal Division commander, Major General Koster, who was flying over the village in his command helicopter during the assault, and his staff failed to report the civilian casualties they were aware of, even after they received a letter from the South Vietnamese officials alleging the deaths of between 400-500 civilians.<sup>57</sup> The official U.S. Army inquiry into the matter would later confirm that General Koster and his deputy, Brigadier General Young, were in fact informed of Warrant Officer Thompson's accusations by as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> of March. Neither reported the allegations of war crimes up the chain of command as required and, instead, inappropriately appointed the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade commander, Colonel Henderson, to conduct an informal inquiry into the matter. Later, Colonel Henderson provided an oral report to Generals Young and Koster, giving the impression that he had conducted a thorough investigation when in fact he had not. When questioned during the inquiry, Colonel Henderson claimed that General Young directed him to have the task force commander, Lt. Colonel Barker, conduct an official inquiry, a claim that General Young denied. No copies of Lt. Colonel Barker's official report were ever found, and witnesses who Colonel Henderson claimed were interviewed by Lt. Colonel Barker denied having ever

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<sup>55</sup> Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry*, 201.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry*, 206 and Hersh, *My Lai-4*, 99.

made statements. Numerous other officers at different levels of the chain of command all the way up to Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) also failed to act upon information in their possession.<sup>58</sup>

## **E. THE UNCOVERING**

The story of the My Lai massacre would have remained forever buried if not for the efforts of a young Vietnam veteran named Ronald Ridenhour. Ridenhour had heard about the massacre from former members of Charlie Company who were present at My Lai-4. Concerned about what he had been told, he returned to the United States and within a year wrote letters detailing the massacre to the president, several members of Congress, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Pentagon.<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, Ridenhour's letter prompted the Army's official investigation into the matter. Army Chief of Staff General William Westmoreland appointed Lieutenant General William Peers to head an official inquiry into the matter, while the Army's Criminal Investigation Division (CID) opened a criminal case. According to Bilton and Sim:

CID looked at the crimes committed during the actual combat mission—murder, rape, and assault. Peers examined the aftermath, possible cover-up, and charges of negligence and dereliction of duty.<sup>60</sup>

CID uncovered enough evidence to charge thirty men with specific crimes.<sup>61</sup> However, taking a conservative approach, the Department of the Army decided to pursue charges only against those soldiers who were still serving on active duty. This amounted to four officers and nine enlisted men.<sup>62</sup> The two Captains—Kotouc, the brigade intelligence officer, and Medina, the Charlie Company commander—were court-martialed and found not guilty. Lieutenant Calley was eventually found guilty of premeditated murder during his trial by court-martial, and sentenced to life imprisonment. His sentence was later reduced to twenty years by the reviewing

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<sup>58</sup> Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry*, 201-209.

<sup>59</sup> Hersh, *My Lai-4*, 109.

<sup>60</sup> Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, 322.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

authority, and then to ten years by the Secretary of the Army. President Nixon freed him from confinement, ordering him to be placed under house arrest in his own quarters until his appeal was finalized. Eventually, he was paroled after serving approximately four and a half months.<sup>63</sup> The remaining enlisted men were found not guilty during court-martials or had their charges dismissed before trial. The other members of Charlie Company, who were no longer on active duty, were excused from prosecution.<sup>64</sup>

Fourteen officers were formally charged following the Peers Inquiry. Lt. Col Barker had been killed in a helicopter crash in June of 1968, so although he could not face prosecution, his role in the massacre was investigated. With the exception of Colonel Henderson, who was acquitted during a trial by court-martial, all charges were eventually dropped against the other officers. Major General Koster was removed from his post as Superintendent of West Point, demoted to Brigadier General, and lost his Distinguished Service Medal from Vietnam. Brigadier General Young was issued a letter of censure and also lost his Distinguished Service Medal from Vietnam.<sup>65</sup>

Interestingly, the American public was first made aware of the massacre at My Lai almost twenty months after the incident occurred. Although a short news release had been issued to the press on September 5, 1969, announcing Calley's court-martial, it contained no details of the atrocities at My Lai.<sup>66</sup> Revelation of the massacre occurred on November 13, 1969, when Seymour Hersh's story of the incident was published by thirty major newspapers in the United States.<sup>67</sup> Press reporting, initially heavy during November 1969-March 1970, continued sporadically until Calley's petition to the Supreme Court was made final in October 1975.

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<sup>63</sup> Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours at My Lai*, 330-357, and Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry*, 221-222, 227.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry*, 221-222.

<sup>66</sup> Hersh, *My Lai-4*, 128, Goldstein, Marshall, and Schwartz, *The My Lai Massacre and Its Cover-up*, ix; and Associated Press Release, "Army Accuses Lieutenant in Vietnam Deaths in 1968," *The New York Times*, September 7, 1969.

<sup>67</sup> Goldstein, Marshall, and Schwartz, *The My Lai Massacre and Its Cover-up*, ix.

## **F. MEDIA PRIMING AND THE INITIAL PUBLIC RESPONSE**

Public opinion response to My Lai is interesting yet puzzling at the same time. Informal polling conducted by *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Minneapolis Tribune*, and *Time* magazine revealed that many Americans either:

Refused to believe the mass killings had taken place; wondered why the incident was attracting so much attention; or believed that such incidents were bound to take place during war.<sup>68</sup>

Rather than direct their anger towards Calley or the other perpetrators of the incident, much of America's anger was directed instead at the news media who were reporting it.<sup>69</sup> Following his television interview with Paul Meadlo, who admitted to shooting innocent Vietnamese civilians alongside Calley, CBS News correspondent Mike Wallace received over a hundred angry telephone calls from upset viewers.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, major newspapers such as the *Washington Star* and *Cleveland Plain Dealer* received numerous complaints for publishing pictures of the massacre.<sup>71</sup>

## **G. ELITE INFLUENCE**

Protests over the press's revelation of the incident came to a head in mid-December when congressional hawks passed a House resolution "praising each serviceman and veteran of Vietnam for his individual sacrifice, bravery, dedication, initiative, and devotion to duty."<sup>72</sup> There was equally strong rhetoric from congressional doves, such as Senator George McGovern, a liberal South Dakota Democrat who remarked:

I think for the first time millions of Americans are realizing that we have stumbled into a conflict where we not only of necessity commit horrible atrocities against the people of Vietnam, but where in a sense we brutalize

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<sup>68</sup> Hersh, *My Lai-4*, 151, 153.

<sup>69</sup> Hersh, *My Lai-4*, 152 and "Most Back Calley in a Poll for Time," *The New York Times*, January 5, 1970.

<sup>70</sup> Hersh, *My Lai-4*, 152.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.



our own people and our own nation. I think it's more than Lieutenant Calley involved here. I think a national policy is on trial.<sup>73</sup>

President Nixon made his first formal statement about the My Lai incident during an official press conference held on December 8, 1969. He stated:

What appears was certainly a massacre, under no circumstances was it justified... We cannot condone or use atrocities against civilians to achieve the United States goal of preventing the Vietnamese people from having imposed upon them a government which has atrocity against civilians as one of its policies.<sup>74</sup>

While publicly denouncing the incident, Nixon privately believed that the news media had effectively turned the American public against the war in Vietnam. Later, in his memoirs he would comment:

From the time it first became public, the whole tragic episode was used by the media and the antiwar forces to chip away at our efforts to build public support for our Vietnam objectives and policies.<sup>75</sup>

Privately, Nixon did what he could to minimize his administration's involvement in the incident, directing his press secretary to remind the public that the incident occurred under President Johnson's watch.<sup>76</sup>

## **H. THE MY LAI POLL AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS**

Unfortunately, there is little useful public opinion polling data that can be directly applied to the My Lai incident. Gallup Poll #795, conducted over a three-day period from 12/12/1969-12/15/1969, is the only public opinion data available that directly measures how Americans felt about the massacre. Although it does not tell us how the incident impacted public opinion about the war, it is, nevertheless, important, because in order to understand the massacre's broader impact on public opinion support for the war, it is first necessary to understand America's feelings about the massacre itself. The poll,

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<sup>73</sup> Hersh, *My Lai-4*, 157-158.

<sup>74</sup> Hersh, *My Lai-4*, 165, and "Rivers Differs With Nixon on Songmy," *The New York Times*, December 10, 1969.

<sup>75</sup> Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1978), 500.

<sup>76</sup> Michael R. Belknap, *The Vietnam War on Trial: The My Lai Massacre and the Court-Martial of Lieutenant Calley*, (Lawrence, Kansas: The University of Kansas Press, 2002), 135.

conducted roughly one month after the incident was made public, allowed enough time for opinions about My Lai to crystallize. A three-part question was used to poll a random sample of 3,265 Americans regarding My Lai. Specific questions were:

- 2a. Have you heard or read about the report of the shooting of women and children by U.S. soldiers in the Vietnam village of Song My or My Lai?";  
"2b. Should the soldiers who took part in the shooting be punished or not?"; and 2c) "Why do you feel this way?"<sup>77</sup>

Of the 3,265 who answered the first and second questions, 91 percent had heard or read about the incident, but only 22 percent believed the soldiers should be punished, while 45 percent believed they should not. Roughly 27 percent chose to answer "no opinion" on the matter. Only those respondents answering yes or no (2,195) were asked the third part of the question: "Why do you feel this way?" Of those who answered no, the most popular explanations from roughly 15 percent was "They did as they were told," followed by 12 percent who remarked, "It is war," and 9 percent who said "They are there to do a job."<sup>78</sup>

Based on the high number of respondents who were aware of the incident at My Lai, one can safely conclude that the majority of Americans was at least paying attention to the events surrounding the massacre. At a minimum, the incident was important enough to capture and hold the attention of the American public for almost a month after its initial revelation. No doubt much of this was because of the high level of media reporting on My Lai and the elite influence from congressional leaders and President Nixon himself. Knowledge of the incident grew as more and more veterans of the massacre came forward to tell their stories in the newspapers and on television.

Explaining the sample's response to the second part of the question is more problematic. While it may appear that Americans were insensitive, callous, or even lacking in terms of their moral outrage for the massacre of innocent Vietnamese women and children, this explanation is not quite adequate. Rolling forward in time to the verdict of Calley's court-martial, other clues can be found to help decipher this seemingly

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<sup>77</sup> Gallup Brian, Gallup Poll #795, <http://institution.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=AIPO0795> (accessed July 15, 2007).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

puzzling response. Following Calley's conviction on March 29, 1971, and his formal sentencing on the 30<sup>th</sup>,<sup>79</sup> two public opinion surveys were conducted for President Nixon on behalf of the Opinion Research Corporation, first on April 1, 1971, and again on April 5-6<sup>th</sup>.<sup>80</sup> Although a small sample size, 1,090 and 973 respectively,<sup>81</sup> 78 percent disagreed with the decision of the court to convict Calley and 51 percent believed Nixon should free Calley.<sup>82</sup> Twenty-eight percent believed his sentence should be reduced substantially, while only 9 percent wanted Nixon to uphold Calley's life imprisonment sentence.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, a public opinion poll by Louis Harris Associates, also in April, 1971, revealed that 65 percent of Americans disagreed with the court's decision; 77 percent believed that Calley and the soldiers at My Lai were just following orders from their higher ups; and 77 percent believed Calley was being singled out as a scapegoat.<sup>84</sup> Finally, Gallup Poll #7145, conducted April 1, 1971 to April 30, 1971, found that for 1,566 who answered the first part of the question, 79 percent of Americans disagreed with the court's decision; of the 1,236 who answered the second part of the question, 70 percent believed others besides Calley shared responsibility for what happened; and of 1,566 who answered the third part of the question, 70 percent believed Calley was being made the scapegoat for the actions of others above him.<sup>85</sup> Citizens of Georgia, an Atlanta-based organization supporting Calley, even went so far as to send President Nixon a live billy goat dressed in a red, white, and blue Eisenhower jacket labeled "SCAPEGOAT."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> My Lai Chronology, [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning\\_history/vietnam/my-lai\\_chronology.cfm](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning_history/vietnam/my-lai_chronology.cfm) (accessed July 13, 2007).

<sup>80</sup> Calley Court-Martial Survey Results, <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/mylai/SurveyResults.html> (accessed July 12, 2007).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> S. Mintz. Public Opinion Polls, My Lai. *Digital History*. Retrieved July 13, 2007 from [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning\\_history/vietnam/survey\\_q4.cfm](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning_history/vietnam/survey_q4.cfm).

<sup>85</sup> Gallup Brain, Gallup Survey #7145, <http://institution.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=NEWSWEEK7145> (accessed July 13, 2007).

<sup>86</sup> Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, 345.

In general terms, public opinion on My Lai had polarized towards one of two camps, Hawk or Dove. As Bilton and Sim point out, both camps thought Calley had been treated unfairly:

On the political left, [the Doves] against the war saw Calley as a victim caught up in an immoral war. They wanted the generals and politicians put on trial for war crimes. Those on the right [the Hawks] thought the verdict insulted all American troops fighting in Vietnam and were appalled at what their government was doing.<sup>87</sup>

Interestingly, both groups found common ground on their response to Calley's conviction. Although based on differing opinions, both saw his conviction as an injustice.<sup>88</sup> This is certainly not the response that the researcher would have predicted; however, we must remember that the military is one of America's most trusted institutions and remained so even during this troublesome period.

Several observations are in order here. First, some of this response is, no doubt, the public's reaction to the military and government's failure to hold higher-ups in the chain of command responsible for the massacre. The public did not buy the idea that Calley was the sole perpetrator of this incident. As noted previously, Calley was the only officer to be formally convicted during trial by court-martial, and one of only two officers who actually faced a full trial by court-martial.<sup>89</sup> Also, prior to the release of Hersh's book Cover-Up: The Army's Secret Investigation of the Massacre at My Lai-4, the partial release of the Peers report on November 13, 1974, and the eventual release of Peer's book The My Lai Inquiry in 1979, many of the details of senior officer accountability were unknown to the public as most of these sessions and their results were kept private.<sup>90</sup> The rightness or wrongness of what happened to those senior officers notwithstanding, the secrecy surrounding the disposition of their charges seems to have done little in terms of satisfying accountability to the American public. Second, some Americans were obviously angered about the press's reporting of the incident and the

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<sup>87</sup> Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, 340.

<sup>88</sup> Leo Bogart, *Silent Politics: Polls and the Awareness of Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1972), 94.

<sup>89</sup> Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours at My Lai*, 330-357 and Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry*, 221-222, 227.

<sup>90</sup> Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours at My Lai*, 326.

subsequent implications these reports had for Calley's ability to receive a fair trial.<sup>91</sup> Finally, this was a highly emotionally charged incident from the very beginning. The poor perceptions created by how the issue was handled did little to diffuse this emotionalism. One cannot fault the senior level Army officials if their true reasons for downplaying the My Lai incident were because of a desire to protect the morale, good order, and discipline of those still serving in Vietnam. Nevertheless, contributing to the poor public perception about the massacre was the fact that the Army had known about the massacre since 1968 but had not made it known to the public until November 1969; the subsequent rumors and reports of a cover-up; the allegations of soldiers being ordered by their leadership not to speak about My Lai; the refusal to give details about the charges against fourteen accused as a result of the Peers inquiry; the scant details and heavy censorship provided to the press once the Peers report was released; and, finally, the evasiveness of military officials at official Pentagon news releases.<sup>92</sup> Major Harvey Brown, one of Calley's court-martial jurors, would later comment:

People are not stopping to think, they are letting their emotions rule their minds at this point. They have not sat through four and a half months of a trial and heard the facts. When you conjure up a mental picture of men, old men, women, children and babies—that was a rather harsh treatment, and a rather final treatment.<sup>93</sup>

Finally, turning to the third polling question about My Lai, some general observations are in order. First, it would be unfair and inaccurate to conclude that Americans had no regard for the lives of innocent Vietnamese civilians. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that they had certain expectations and understandings of the types of horrible things that occur during wartime.<sup>94</sup> While inexcusable, the incident was understandable, especially in the context of a confusing counter-insurgency style conflict where it was

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<sup>91</sup> E.W. Kenworthy, "Song My 1: Questions for the Conscience of a Nation," *The New York Times*, November 30, 1969, and "Most Back Calley in a Poll for Time," *The New York Times*, January 5, 1970.

<sup>92</sup> Douglas Robinson, "Sergeant Asserts He Was Told Not to Reveal Alleged Massacre," *The New York Times*, November 21, 1969, and Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours at My Lai*, 257-258, 308-309.

<sup>93</sup> Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours at My Lai*, *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>94</sup> "Song My-1: American Troops Are Accused of a Massacre," *The New York Times*, November 23, 1969, "Most Back Calley in a Poll for Time," *The New York Times*, January 5, 1970, and William Beecher, "Questions on Songmy: G.I.'s are Seen Facing Moral Dilemmas in Deciding Whether to Shoot and Kill," *The New York Times*, January 1, 1970.

difficult to determine friend from foe while attempting to successfully combat a particularly brutal opponent—an opponent that commonly used women and children as combatants. Additionally, by late 1969, America had suffered 47,768 casualties; 1968 and 1969 were particularly costly years, with 16,592 and 11,616 casualties respectively.<sup>95</sup> The high casualty numbers and the high numbers of Americans who had served in Vietnam by this period (over a million<sup>96</sup>) made the war “up close and personal” for many. According to Lau:

The war intruded directly and tangibly into the personal lives of a substantial number of Americans...by 1968 almost 30 percent of the population had relatives or friends who had served in Vietnam.<sup>97</sup>

It is highly possible then, that by the end of 1969, roughly four years into the conflict, Americans were weary of the war in Vietnam and questioning its associated costs. By this time, a majority of Americans was asking if the war in Vietnam was a mistake.

## **I. OPTIONS FOR EXAMINING PUBLIC OPINION SUPPORT FOR VIETNAM**

There are several different options available for examining public opinion support for the Vietnam War. Support and opposition can be examined by looking at both the level and intensity of university protest activity as well as public opinion surveys designed to poll a representative cross-section of society.<sup>98</sup> Herein lies a problem—although both are tangible measures of opposition or support, they are not based on the same things. The university protest activity can best be described as opposition to the war based on:

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<sup>95</sup> The National Archives, Statistical Information About Casualties of the Vietnam Conflict, <http://www.archives.gov/research/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.html#year> (accessed July 17, 2007).

<sup>96</sup> Vietnam War Troop Numbers, <http://members.aol.com/warlibrary/vwatl.htm> (accessed July 17, 2007), and The History Place, The Vietnam War: The Jungle War 1965-1968, <http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/vietnam/index-1965.html> (accessed July 19, 2007).

<sup>97</sup> Richard R. Lau, “Self-Interest and Civilian Attitudes Towards the Vietnam War,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 42, no 4, (Winter 1978) 465.

<sup>98</sup> Howard Schuman, “Two Sources of Antiwar Sentiment in America,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 3 (November, 1972): 513.

Moral objections to the use of American military power in Vietnam, [while] general public disenchantment, however, seems to have been largely practical, springing from the failure of our substantial military investments to yield victory [or lack of measurable success despite of elite promises at key junctures and the effect of cumulative casualties over time].<sup>99</sup>

Subsequently, both measures have received a considerable amount of attention from political scientists attempting to understand the Vietnam War. For the purposes of this study, I chose to discount the university protest activity as the general consensus of scholars is that these protests were focused on the moral critique of the United States involvement in Vietnam, and thus are not related to those influences we already know to have a stronger effect on public opinion support such as perceptions of success or failure, casualties, rallies, elite priming, etc. Additionally, although scholars disagree on its interpretation, there is some evidence to suggest that these protests had little if any effect on public opinion support for the war; may have had the unintended consequence of lengthening rather than shortening the war because of the blowback they created by targeting the military as an institution, rather than the government's foreign policy objectives; and are representative of only a small subsection of society, and not society as a whole.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, there is a link here to understanding public opinion response to My Lai, so I will return to the subject of the university protests later.

## J. THE "MISTAKE QUESTION"

Perhaps the best public opinion polling question available for analysis of support for the Vietnam War was "In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in

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<sup>99</sup> Schuman, "Two Sources of Antiwar Sentiment in America," 513, 519.

<sup>100</sup> William R. Berkowitz, "The Impact of Anti-Vietnam Demonstrations Upon National Public Opinion and Military Indicators," *Social Science Research* 2, no. 1 (1973): 1-14, E.M. Schreiber, "Anti-War Demonstrations and American Public Opinion on the War in Vietnam," *British Journal of Sociology* 27, no. 2 (June 1976): 225-236, Adam Garfinkle, "No Discharge from That War: Aftermyths of the Anti-War Movement," *Orbis* 39, no. 4 (Fall, 1995): 503-516, John P. Robinson, "Balance Theory and Vietnam Related Attitudes," *Social Science Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (December, 1970): 610-616, Harry G. Summers Jr., "The Vietnam Syndrome and the American People," *Journal of American Culture* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 53, and Sidney Verba and Richard Brody, "Participation, Policy Preferences, and the War in Vietnam," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (Fall, 1970): 325-332.

Vietnam, do you think the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?”<sup>101</sup> Commonly known as the “mistake question,” this question is useful because it measures generalized war support and was asked repeatedly throughout the duration of the war.<sup>102</sup> The problem with this question is its frequency of appearance. Specifically, it was asked at differing and unpredictable intervals, probably as Mueller suggests, in response to key events driving newsworthiness.<sup>103</sup>

For My Lai, I was particularly interested in two periods of time: First, the initial revelation of the massacre as reported on November 13, 1969, and continuing as the story developed throughout November and December 1969 until reporting tapered off in March 1970, after fourteen officers were charged with offenses related to My Lai. Second, the period of time immediately following Calley’s court-martial conviction on March 29, 1971.<sup>104</sup> The results are rather discouraging as there are simply not enough mistake question data points available to get a precise picture of what effect My Lai may have had on public opinion support for Vietnam. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn about the effect of My Lai from the available data and historical record.

Gallup first asked the mistake question in the American Institute of Public Opinion (AIPO) poll #0716, conducted August 27, 1965 to September 1, 1965,<sup>105</sup> possibly in response to the first major U.S. ground operation, Operation Starlite, conducted August 18-24, 1965.<sup>106</sup> Following the predictable rally ’round the flag pattern, support was initially fairly high, with 60.38% of 3,525 polled stating the Vietnam

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<sup>101</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. August 27-September 1, 1965, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>>.

<sup>102</sup> Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*, 43-44, 53-55, and Frank Newport and Joseph Carroll, “Iraq Versus Vietnam: A Comparison of Public Opinion,” as cited in *The Gallup Poll Tuesday Briefing: Government and Politics*, (August, 2005): 29.

<sup>103</sup> Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*, 17.

<sup>104</sup> Chronology of Events Relating to the Massacre at My Lai, <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/mylai/mylaichron.htm> (accessed July 19,2007).

<sup>105</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. August 27-September 1, 1965, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>>.

<sup>106</sup> The History Place, The Vietnam War: The Jungle War 1965-1968, <http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/vietnam/index-1965.html> (accessed July 19, 2007).



War was not a mistake.<sup>107</sup> Support continued until May, 1966, when it dropped below 50 percent to 48.52%,<sup>108</sup> possibly as a result of the Fulbright hearings conducted in February and March, 1966.<sup>109</sup> By the end of 1966, American casualties had climbed to 6,000.<sup>110</sup> Beginning in April 1967, support began a steady decline from which it would never recover, consistently falling below a 50 percent majority, until it reached an all-time low of 28.59% in January 1973 when Gallup stopped asking this question.<sup>111</sup> It is important to mention that several significant events occurred in 1967 and 1968 but failed to have significant impact on public opinion support for the war as measured by the “mistake question,” specifically, the March on the Pentagon anti-war protest, the Battle of Dak To, Secretary of Defense McNamara’s resignation over President Johnson’s Vietnam strategy, the siege at Khe Sahn, the Tet Offensive, President Johnson’s decision not to run for re-election, the stalled Paris peace talks, etc.<sup>112</sup>

#### **K. USING THE MISTAKE QUESTION TO ANALYZE THE EFFECT OF MY LAI**

While preparing the Vietnam “mistake question” data for analysis, I noticed that the different sources reporting Gallup’s polling numbers from this era did not always match. Specifically, I found rounding inconsistencies, polling dates that did not line up, and differing numbers, depending on whether the missing data/no code columns were

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<sup>107</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. August 27-September 1, 1965, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>>.

<sup>108</sup> The Vietnam “mistake question” charts were built using data recorded at two places past the decimal point. This is useful because it allows for the detection of even the slightest changes in public opinion support, which is necessary for the My Lai case study and its few data points. However, Gallup’s official position is that this gives a false sense of precision to the data which inherently has a plus or minus 3 percent margin of error built in. Survey by Gallup Organization. May 5-10, 1966, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>>.

<sup>109</sup> Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*, 53.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>111</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. January 12-15, 1973, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>>.

<sup>112</sup> Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion*, 57, and The History Place, The Vietnam War: The Jungle War 1965-1968, <http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/vietnam/index-1965.html> (accessed July 19, 2007).

included in the calculations. The compilations of the different data sources are included at the end of the chapter. Using Roper reports, I recalculated all of the mistake question data to ensure consistency. I removed the missing data/no code information from the results by subtracting it from the sample size and then recalculating the percentages. The results are a more accurate representation of the actual opinion that could be measured. Those answering yes to the mistake question were placed in the opposition column while those answering no were placed in the support column. A summary of the re-calculated results of the Gallup “mistake question” for the My Lai period is included in Table 2-1 below. A table of the re-calculated results of the Gallup “mistake question” for the entire Vietnam War period is included at the end of the chapter.

Date	Day #	# Days Between	Support	Oppose	No Opinion	% Change in Support	Rate of Decline
Sep 26-Oct 1, 1968	25112	50	37.33	53.46	9.2	0.9	0.54
Jan 23-28, 1969	25231	119	39.65	51.16	9.18	2.32	0.5848
Sep 17-22, 1969	25468	237	32.21	57.85	9.92	-7.44	-0.9417
Jan 15-20, 1970	25588	120	32.62	57.42	9.94	0.41	0.1025
Apr 2-7, 1970	25665	77	34.55	51.12	14.31	1.93	0.7519
May 21-26, 1970	25714	49	34.85	56.72	8.41	0.3	0.1836
Jan 8-11, 1971	25944	230	31.3	59.73	8.96	-3.55	-0.463
May 14-17, 1971	26070	126	28.03	61.97	9.99	-3.27	-0.7785
Jan 12-15, 1973	26679	609	28.59	61.71	9.68	0.56	0.0275
Entire War		2693				-31.79	-0.3541
Before My Lai		1482				-28.17	-0.5702
My Lai Period		197				2.34	0.3563
After My Lai		1091				-4.03	-0.0998

Table 2-1. Summary of Gallup Mistake Question Vietnam (Corley Recalculated).<sup>113</sup>

The data for the mistake question reveals a significant drop in war support from Gallup’s first data point in August 1965, until September 1969, the last polling point before the release of the My Lai story in November. During this period, support for the Vietnam

<sup>113</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. August 27-September 1, 1965, March 3-8, 1966, May 5-10, 1966, September 8-13, 1966, November 10-15, 1966, January 26-31, 1967, April 19-24, 1967, July 13-18, 1967, October 6-11, 1967, December 7-12, 1967, February 2-6, 1968, February 22-27, 1968, August 7-12, 1968, April 4-9, 1968, September 26-October 1, 1968, January 23-28, 1969, September 17-22, 1969, January 15-20, 1970, April 2-7, 1970, May 21-26, 1970, January 8-11, 1971, May 14-17, 1971, January 12-15, 1973, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>> and Gallup Brain, Gallup Poll #725, <http://institution.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=AIPO0725> (accessed July 15, 2007).

War fell 28.17% over a four year period.<sup>114</sup> Similarly, the net drop in support for the entire war period (from August 1965 to January 1973) was 31.79%.<sup>115</sup> Although war support declined gradually over time, by September 1969, the rate of opposition had slowed considerably. This was likely a result of Nixon's Vietnamization plan and subsequent troop withdrawals as America's involvement in the war was beginning to wind down.

Turning to the mistake question for the first period (November 1969-March 1970), by September 1969, we find that support for the war was sitting at 32.21%, while opposition to the war was at 57.85%.<sup>116</sup> By the January 1970 poll, support had actually increased .41% to 32.62%, while at the same time, opposition fell .41% to 57.42%.<sup>117</sup> By April 1970, our last polling date bracketing the My Lai incident, support had increased by 1.93% to 34.55% and opposition had fallen 6.3% to 51.12%.<sup>118</sup>

The results were exactly opposite from what I expected. We should have seen a negative effect on war support for this period in response to My Lai, if the atrocity hypothesis held true. Instead, the data show that support actually increased during this timeframe. However, this slight increase in support is well within Gallup's plus or minus 3 percent margin of error for this poll, so it is possible that the results are of little to no significance. On the other hand, if the fluctuation is due to an actual increase in support,

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<sup>114</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. August 27-September 1, 1965, March 3-8, 1966, May 5-10, 1966, September 8-13, 1966, November 10-15, 1966, January 26-31, 1967, April 19-24, 1967, July 13-18, 1967, October 6-11, 1967, December 7-12, 1967, February 2-6, 1968, February 22-27, 1968, August 7-12, 1968, April 4-9, 1968, September 26-October 1, 1968, January 23-28, 1969, September 17-22, 1969, January 15-20, 1970, April 2-7, 1970, May 21-26, 1970, January 8-11, 1971, May 14-17, 1971, January 12-15, 1973, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>> and Gallup Brain, Gallup Poll #725, <http://institution.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=AIP00725> (accessed July 15, 2007).

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. September 17-22, 1969, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>>

<sup>117</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. January 15-20, 1970, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>>

<sup>118</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. April 2-7, 1970, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>>

as opposed to polling error, then the slightly positive change between the September 1969 and January 1970 polls could be explained by Nixon's famous "Silent Majority" speech, entitled "The President's Pursuit of Peace," given on November 3, 1969. Nixon's speech could have created a mini-rally at the about same time as the My Lai revelation. There is good historical evidence to support this conclusion. Specifically, the vocal opposition of the anti-war movement had captured the president's attention by the fall of 1969. According to Belknap, "[Nixon] believed the more divided the country seemed, the less willing the enemy would be to negotiate an end to the war."<sup>119</sup> As a result, the administration launched a national unity campaign, including pro-war demonstrations, speeches by supportive legislators, celebrity appearances, newspaper ads, letter writing campaigns, etc.<sup>120</sup> This effort, designed to rally the country behind the president's Vietnamization and gradual withdrawal strategies, may have been successful, at least as a mini-rally. The evidence to support this conclusion is found in the slight increase in public opinion support for the war between the September 1969 and January 1970 polls asking the "mistake question," and a similar increase in public approval for Nixon's handling of the situation in Vietnam, as shown by an increase of a six percentage points between the two Gallup polls asking the "Nixon's handling of the war" questions, conducted October 17-20, 1969 and November 14-17, 1969.<sup>121</sup> Schuman came to a similar conclusion about the likelihood of a mini-rally during this period, adding that the war protest demonstration held in Washington during the middle of November 1969 probably generated more support for the president than increased opposition for the war.<sup>122</sup> If so, then the anti-war effort helped give Nixon a boost during the same time he was attempting to rally the public. Although Nixon secretly feared the massacre would ruin his unity campaign successes,<sup>123</sup> it is likely that his efforts to minimize the public reaction to the massacre by reminding the public that it occurred under Johnson's tenure

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<sup>119</sup> Belknap, *The Vietnam War on Trial*, 132.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> *The Gallup Opinion Index: Political, Social, and Economic Trends 54*, Gallup International Inc., (December, 1969): 2, and Schuman, "Two Sources of Anti-War Sentiment in America," 516.

<sup>122</sup> Schuman, "Two Sources of Anti-War Sentiment in America," 516.

<sup>123</sup> Belknap, *The Vietnam War on Trial*, 135.

and by returning the onus to the Department of Defense were successful. Therefore, at least for the initial timeframe of the revelation of the massacre, public opinion support for the war appears to have already been in a mini-rally period as a result of Nixon's national unity strategy, possibly fueled by the 250,000 person anti-war demonstration held in Washington D.C. during the middle of November.<sup>124</sup> An interesting question at this junction is whether the My Lai incident could have limited the overall effect of the president's rally by slowing or even countering some of its impact? If so, this would mean that the atrocity variable does affect public opinion support, but is less powerful than the president's ability to rally the public. In this scenario, the effect of My Lai would have been hidden by the rally. Of course the only way to prove this would be to run some kind of multivariate analysis to account for the different variables, which was not possible with the available data.

Interestingly, following a short boost in support of 1.93% in April 1970, likely the result of Vietnamization, opposition quickly returned to its previous pattern of steady decline, although at a slower rate, with the May 1970 "mistake question" poll showing 56.72% of Americans opposed to the war.<sup>125</sup> This drop is probably best explained by Nixon's Cambodian invasion announcement in late April 1970, which proved to be extremely unpopular. Many Americans believed the Cambodian invasion would lengthen rather than shorten the war effort at a time when Nixon had promised to continue U.S. withdrawal.<sup>126</sup> It was this announcement that set off the violent opposition to the war's escalation on college campuses across the nation, ultimately culminating with the Kent State massacre. Opposition to the war increased from 51.12% to 56.72% between the April 1970 and May 1970 polls asking the "mistake question."<sup>127</sup> War

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<sup>124</sup> Schuman, "Two Sources of Anti-War Sentiment in America," 516, and *The Vietnam War: 1960-1975: The Bitter End*, at <http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/vietnam/index-1969.html> (accessed July 20, 2007).

<sup>125</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. April 2-7, 1970 and May 21-26, 1970, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>>

<sup>126</sup> Leo Bogart, *Silent Politics*,: 93.

<sup>127</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. April 2-7, 1970 and May 21-26, 1970, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>>

support actually increased from 34.55% to 34.85% percent at the same time.<sup>128</sup> However, the increase in opposition appears to have come from those previously in the undecided category, which dropped from 14.31% to 8.41% between the April and May polls.<sup>129</sup> Some of the loss of support may be explained by the South Vietnamese failure to capitalize on the invasion, achieving little to no measurable success in the campaign by allowing the North Vietnamese forces to escape by retreating further into Cambodia. Thus, at least for the initial revelation of the massacre period, Nixon's efforts to rally the public were successful or the revelation of the massacre was lost to the public during the rally period and subsequent events in the spring of 1970.

Evaluation of the second My Lai event period (January 1971-May 1971) is even more problematic because of the availability of only two data points five months apart. By the January 1971 poll, opposition had climbed to 59.73%.<sup>130</sup> By May, it had climbed another 2.24% to 61.97%.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, war support fell 3.27% from 31.30% to 28.03% during the same period.<sup>132</sup> The only significant events during this period were Operation Lam Son, a failed South Vietnamese effort to sever the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, and Lieutenant Calley's court martial conviction. The failed offensive may have been perceived by the public as failure of Nixon's Vietnamization plan, as the South Vietnamese relied heavily on American airpower and artillery, but still could not maintain the necessary momentum to cripple the North Vietnamese regulars.<sup>133</sup> Therefore, the failed offensive is somewhat useful as an explanation for the public's

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<sup>128</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. April 2-7, 1970 and May 21-26, 1970, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>>

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. January 8-11, 1971, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>>

<sup>131</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. May 14-17, 1971, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>>

<sup>132</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. May 14-17, 1971, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>>

<sup>133</sup> The History Place, "The Vietnam War: The Bitter End 1969-1975," located at <http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/vietnam/index-1969.html> (accessed July 15, 2007).

perceptions of success or failure, and in this case failure, during this timeframe. Similarly, Mueller's "war weariness" and casualties hypotheses seem to hold true for this period. Calley's court-martial conviction falls almost directly in the middle of the two polling dates. We already know from the historical record that the conviction was extremely unpopular with the public. The question is did it hurt war support? Without additional polling data, it would be a stretch to prove that it directly contributed to the drop in support. In reality, it was probably a wash. True, both Hawks and Doves alike were angered by the conviction, but it is unlikely that it did anything more than solidify how they already felt about the war. By February 1971, approximately one month prior to Calley's conviction, 69 percent of Americans believed the Nixon administration was not telling them everything they needed to know about the Vietnam War.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, the administration's lack of credibility on its Vietnam policy, the failure of South Vietnamese forces to sever the Ho Chi Minh Trail, war weariness, and casualties are stronger explanations for the drop in support during this period.

## **L. CONCLUSIONS**

What does the available data suggest about the effect of My Lai on public opinion support for the Vietnam War? There is little evidence to be found in the polling data, historical record, or scholarly research to suggest that the My Lai massacre had any discernable effect on public opinion support for the war. By September 1969, public opinion support had already fallen 89 percent of its total drop for the entire war. Nevertheless, during the initial release of the My Lai incident in November 1969, it appears that the nation was in the middle of a successful albeit short presidential effort to rally support for Vietnam. In March 1971, Lieutenant William Calley's court-martial conviction prompted widespread public outrage. But by the spring of 1971, the public was tired of the war, tired of casualties, skeptical of the administration's Vietnamization policy, and had seen little in the way of progress to contribute to its perceptions of success.

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<sup>134</sup> The Gallup Opinion Index: Political, Social, and Economic Trends, Report No. 71, May 1971, 3.

At best, My Lai could represent a bump or wiggle in the public support timeline, but again, insufficient data contributes to our inability to identify any shifts caused by the incident. Also problematic is the rally occurring in November and December 1969, which may have masked any slight fluctuations in war support. Logically, any shift would have been small and relatively short lived, likely occurring during the initial release of the story and not as a result of Calley's court-martial.

For My Lai, the combined effect of perceptions of success or failure, the costs of war in terms of time and casualties expended, as well as the lesser effect of elite priming, in the form of Nixon's National Unity Campaign, appear to be much stronger variables for explaining fluctuations in public opinion support during this timeframe. Also important are the conditions that appeared to have lessened the impact of the massacre—the length of time elapsed from when the incident occurred until its release in the press almost twenty months later, as well as the public's perception of Lieutenant Calley as a scapegoat rather than a war criminal.

Nevertheless, My Lai did capture the public's attention. It did generate much media coverage followed by healthy debate and discussion as the nation attempted to sort out the moral consequences of how something like this could happen as well as what was the right thing to do about it. It did give momentum to the anti-war protest movement founded upon the basis of moral opposition to the war. It *did not* have much effect on the majority of Americans focused on more practical measures for determining their support or opposition for the Vietnam War. Although much "passion and discussion were aroused by unexpected episodes of human drama like...My Lai, [and although] out of such discussion comes changes of opinion,"<sup>135</sup> this particular episode does not appear to have impacted public opinion about the Vietnam War very much.

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<sup>135</sup> Bogart, *Silent Politics*, 96.



Date	Day #	# Days Between	Support	Oppose	No Opinion	% Change in Support	Rate of Decline
Aug 27-Sep 1, 1965	23986	0	60.38	24.14	15.47	0	0
Mar 3-8, 1966	24174	188	58.62	25.5	15.86	-1.76	-0.2808
May 5-10, 1966	24237	63	48.52	36.18	15.29	-10.1	-4.8095
Sep 8-13, 1966	24363	126	48.04	35.04	16.91	-0.48	-28.8
Nov 10-15, 1966	24426	63	51.55	30.89	17.54	3.51	1.6714
Jan 26-31, 1967	24503	77	52.33	31.96	15.69	0.78	0.3038
Apr 19-24, 1967	24586	83	49.81	36.77	13.41	-2.52	-0.9108
Jul 13-18, 1967	24671	85	47.82	41.23	10.93	-1.99	-0.7023
Oct 6-11, 1967	24756	85	43.8	46.64	9.54	-4.02	-1.4188
Dec 7-12, 1967	24818	62	45.69	45.23	9.07	1.89	0.9145
Feb 2-6, 1968	24874	56	42.8	45.4	11.8	-2.89	-1.5482
Feb 22-27, 1968	24895	21	41.8	49.86	8.33	-1	-1.4285
Apr 4-9, 1968	24937	42	39.96	49.33	10.7	-1.84	-1.3142
Aug 7-12, 1968	25062	125	36.43	52.16	11.4	-3.53	-0.8472
Sep 26-Oct 1, 1968	25112	50	37.33	53.46	9.2	0.9	0.54
Jan 23-28, 1969	25231	119	39.65	51.16	9.18	2.32	0.5848
Sep 17-22, 1969	25468	237	32.21	57.85	9.92	-7.44	-0.9417
Jan 15-20, 1970	25588	120	32.62	57.42	9.94	0.41	0.1025
Apr 2-7, 1970	25665	77	34.55	51.12	14.31	1.93	0.7519
May 21-26, 1970	25714	49	34.85	56.72	8.41	0.3	0.1836
Jan 8-11, 1971	25944	230	31.3	59.73	8.96	-3.55	-0.463
May 14-17, 1971	26070	126	28.03	61.97	9.99	-3.27	-0.7785
Jan 12-15, 1973	26679	609	28.59	61.71	9.68	0.56	0.0275
Entire War		2693				-31.79	-0.3541
Before My Lai		1482				-28.17	-0.5702
My Lai Period		197				2.34	0.3563
After My Lai		1091				-4.03	-0.0998

Table 2-2. Gallup Mistake Question Vietnam (Corley Recalculated)<sup>136</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. August 27-September 1, 1965, March 3-8, 1966, May 5-10, 1966, September 8-13, 1966, November 10-15, 1966, January 26-31, 1967, April 19-24, 1967, July 13-18, 1967, October 6-11, 1967, December 7-12, 1967, February 2-6, 1968, February 22-27, 1968, August 7-12, 1968, April 4-9, 1968, September 26-October 1, 1968, January 23-28, 1969, September 17-22, 1969, January 15-20, 1970, April 2-7, 1970, May 21-26, 1970, January 8-11, 1971, May 14-17, 1971, January 12-15, 1973, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>> and Gallup Brain, Gallup Poll #725, <http://institution.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=AIPO0725>, (accessed July 15, 2007).

Date	Yes	No	No Opinion
1973 Jan 12-15	60	29	11
1971 May 14-17	61	28	11
1971 Jan 8-11	60	31	9
1970 May 21-26	56	36	8
1970 Apr 2-7	51	34	15
1970 Jan 15-20	57	32	11
1969 Sep 17-22	58	32	10
1969 Jan 23-28	52	39	9
1968 Sep 26-Oct 1	54	37	9
1968 Aug 7-12	53	35	12
1968 Apr 4-9	48	40	12
1968 Feb 22-27	49	42	9
1968 Feb 1-6	46	42	12
1967 Dec 7-12	45	46	9
1967 Oct 6-11	47	44	9
1967 Jul 13-18	41	48	11
1967 Apr 19-24	37	50	13
1967 Jan 26-31	32	52	16
1966 Nov 10-15	31	52	17
1966 Sep 8-13	35	48	17
1966 May 5-10	36	49	15
1966 Mar 3-8	26	59	15
1965 Aug 27-Sep 1	24	60	16

Table 2-3. Gallup Mistake Question Vietnam (Gallup Provided)<sup>137</sup>

<sup>137</sup> The Gallup Organization, email message to author, August 20, 2007.

Date	Yes	No	No Opinion	No Code/Data
1973 Jan 9	59.87	29.35	10.78	0
1971 May 14-17	49.67	22.85	8.56	18.92
1971 Jan 8-11	59.39	30.9	9.36	0.34
1970 May 22-25	56.07	35.57	8.36	0
1970 Apr 2-7	50.75	34.13	15.12	0
1970 Jan 15-20	51.99	29.38	9.31	9.31
1969 Sep 17-22	55.02	29.96	9.25	5.76
1969 Jan 23-28	51.6	39.32	9.08	0
1968 Sep 26-Oct 1	53.58	37.38	9.04	0
1968 Aug 7-12	53.46	34.87	11.68	0
1968 Apr 4-9	48.17	40.17	11.66	0
1968 Feb 22-27	48.92	41.83	9.19	0.06
1968 Feb 2-6	45.77	41.88	12.35	0
1967 Dec 7-12	43.85	44.73	9	2.42
1967 Oct 6-11	46.56	43.72	9.53	0.19
1967 Jul 13-18	41.24	47.83	10.94	0
1967 Apr 19-24	36.77	49.82	13.41	0
1967 Jan 26-31	31.97	52.33	15.7	0
1966 Nov 10-15	30.67	51.18	17.42	0.74
?	?	?	?	?
1966 May 5-10	36.18	48.51	15.29	0.03
1966 Mar 1-30	25.51	58.62	15.87	0
1965 Aug 27-Sep 1	24.06	60.37	15.46	0.11

Table 2-4. Gallup Mistake Question Vietnam (Gallup Brain)<sup>138</sup>

<sup>138</sup> The Gallup Brain, [http://institution.gallup.com/search/results.aspx?SearchTypeAll="In%20view%20of%20the%20developments%20since%20we%20entered%20the%20fighting%20in%20Vietnam,%20do%20you%20think%20the%20U.S.%20made%20a%20mistake%20sending%20troops%20to%20fight%20in%20Vietnam?"](http://institution.gallup.com/search/results.aspx?SearchTypeAll=)&SearchConType=1&Place=H, (accessed July 15, 2007).

Date	Yes	No	No Opinion
1973 Jan	60	29	11
1971 May	61	28	11
1971 Jan	59	31	10
1970 May	56	36	8
1970 Apr	51	34	15
*1970 Mar?	58	32	10
1970 Jan	57	33	10
*1969 Oct?	58	32	10
1969 Sep	58	32	10
*Mar 1969?	52	39	9
*1969 Feb?	52	39	9
1968 Early Oct	54	37	9
1968 Aug	53	35	12
*1968 Jul ?	48	40	12
1968 Apr	48	40	12
*1968 Mar?	49	41	10
1968 Early Feb	46	42	12
1967 Dec	45	46	9
1967 Oct	46	44	10
1967 Jul	41	48	11
*1967 May?	37	50	13
*1967 Early Feb?	32	52	16
1966 Nov	31	51	18
1966 Sep	35	48	17
1966 May	36	49	15
1966 Mar	25	59	16
1965 Aug	24	61	15

Table 2-5. Gallup Mistake Question Vietnam (Gallup Opinion Index)<sup>139</sup>

<sup>139</sup> The Gallup Opinion Index: Political Social, and Economic Trends, Report No. 73, July 1971 and Report No. 92, February, 1973.

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### III. THE ABU GHRAIB PRISON SCANDAL

A building or a place is not evil...the men who run it make it evil<sup>140</sup>

#### A. BACKGROUND ON THE PRISON

Located approximately twenty miles west of Baghdad,<sup>141</sup> Abu Ghraib was a notorious political prison used by Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and his two sons Uday and Qusay. Originally designed in the 1950s to replace the crumbling Ottoman-era prison system in Baghdad, Abu Ghraib was completed by British contractors in 1969, coinciding with the takeover of Saddam's Baathist party.<sup>142</sup> During Saddam's rule, Abu Ghraib was a large complex housing a diverse mix of prisoners:

[Consisting of almost] three miles of 20-foot high cinder block walls and 24 watchtowers, Abu Ghraib was divided into five sections, each with its own walled security perimeter: long-term criminal; short-term criminal; the Arabs and foreigners section; the death house; and the political section.<sup>143</sup>

It was a place where Saddam's enemies, both real and perceived, were tortured, executed, and crammed like cattle into the vilest of living conditions.

According to Hersh:

As many as fifty thousand men and women—no accurate count is possible—were jammed into Abu Ghraib at one time, in twelve-foot-by-twelve-foot cells that were little more than human holding pits.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Abdul Kareem Hani, Former Minister of Labor and Social Affairs for Iraq, as cited in Peter Finn, "Shedding the Light On a Symbol of Iraqi Terror: Ex-Prisoners Describe Horrors, Call for Justice," *washingtonpost.com*, October 6, 2003, The Washington Post Foreign News Service, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A49223Oct5?language=printer> (accessed November 3, 2007).

<sup>141</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004): 20, Finn, "Shedding the Light On a Symbol of Iraqi Terror," and GlobalSecurity.org, "Intelligence: Abu Ghraib Prison," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/iraq/abu-ghurayb-prison.htm> (accessed November 3, 2007).

<sup>142</sup> Finn, "Shedding the Light On a Symbol of Iraqi Terror."

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Hersh, *Chain of Command*, 20-21.

Similarly, Brigadier General Janis Karpinski, former commander of the 800<sup>th</sup> Military Police Battalion, commented that “cells built for twelve to fourteen prisoners held more than 100 in Saddam’s day.”<sup>145</sup> To correct the problems of overcrowding and make room for more prisoners, Uday would routinely sign execution orders for hundreds at a time.<sup>146</sup> U.S. officials estimate that 30,000 Iraqis were executed at Abu Ghraib during Saddam’s reign.<sup>147</sup> For Iraqis, Abu Ghraib was synonymous with death, having all of the macabre instruments of a modern chamber of horrors, including torture rooms with hooks to hang prisoners from the ceiling; hanging rooms, complete with pre-made nooses and iron trap doors; and gas chambers for those who survived the noose.<sup>148</sup>

Before the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Saddam ordered all political prisoners executed and then opened the doors to the prison, allowing thousands of hardened criminals to escape. Iraqi looters quickly descended on the facility, dismantling and carrying away anything of value, including the copper wiring, plumbing, doors, glass windows, and even bricks from the prison walls.<sup>149</sup> When U.S. forces arrived at Abu Ghraib in March 2003, they found an almost unusable pile of rubble and debris. Nevertheless, the twenty foot high outer wall was still mostly intact, so minor improvements were made and the facility began to be used as a temporary holding area for prisoners awaiting shipment to the main prisoner of war facility located at Camp Bucca near the Kuwait border.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> General Janis Karpinski with Steven Strasser, *One Woman’s Army: The Commanding General of Abu Ghraib Tells Her Story* (New York: Miramax Books, 2005): 28.

<sup>146</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman’s Army*, 29.

<sup>147</sup> Finn, “Shedding the Light On a Symbol of Iraqi Terror.”

<sup>148</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman’s Army*, 29, Finn, “Shedding the Light On a Symbol of Iraqi Terror,” and Susan Taylor Martin, “Her Job: Lock Up Iraq’s Bad Guys: Army Brig. General Janis Karpinski, the Lone Female Commander in Iraq, Runs the Prison System that was Once an Apparatus of Terror,” *St. Petersburg Times Online Tampa Bay*, December 14, 2003, [http://www.sptimes.com/2003/12/14/Worldandnation/Her\\_job\\_Lock\\_up\\_Iraq.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2003/12/14/Worldandnation/Her_job_Lock_up_Iraq.shtml) (accessed November 3, 2007).

<sup>149</sup> Hersh, *Chain of Command*, 21, Karpinski, *One Woman’s Army*, 30, and Martin, “Her Job.”

<sup>150</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman’s Army*, 31.

Although the high outer wall separated the sixty-acre prison compound from the small Iraq town of Abu Ghraib, anti-U.S. sentiment ran high, so small arms fire, mortar, and rocket attacks were commonplace.<sup>151</sup> According to Karpinski, it was not a favorable location for a prison:

[While] prisoners are ideally held in safe areas, far behind the lines, Abu Ghraib, by contrast, sat in a hot zone, along a dangerous road between Baghdad and the rebellious Sunni Triangle.<sup>152</sup>

In July 2003, U.S. Ambassador Paul Bremer toured Abu Ghraib and consented to its use on an interim basis until a newer facility could be constructed.<sup>153</sup> A major effort was launched to reclaim eight crumbling cellblocks, restoring and modernizing them to corrections-system standards. Ultimately, two of the renovated cellblocks would be named 1A and 1B, and once taken over by the military intelligence, would become the site of torture and human degradation.<sup>154</sup>

## **B. THE 800TH MILITARY POLICE BRIGADE**

The 800<sup>th</sup> Military Police Brigade was normally manned by 1,000,000,700 reserve soldiers from a two-state region, but at the time of their January 2003 deployment, manpower shortages required the unit to be patched together from separate reserve units mobilized from New York, Maryland, Indiana, and Georgia.<sup>155</sup> As a result, fewer than 500 soldiers of the brigade had ever worked together; even less had ever performed correctional duties.<sup>156</sup> According to Karpinski:

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<sup>151</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman's Army*, 32-33.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-35.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

<sup>155</sup> GlobalSecurity.org, "800<sup>th</sup> Military Police Brigade (EPW) (USAR)," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/army/800mp-bde.htm> (accessed November 3, 2007), and "Karpinski, *One Woman's Army*, 149.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*



Most of the MP's had some basic training in police duties, including the brigade's mission of running Iraqi prisoner-of-war camps. Exactly how well they were trained and how well they would work together was impossible to say.<sup>157</sup>

Post incident, the Taguba Report would note that "the 800<sup>th</sup> MP units did not receive Internment/Resettlement and corrections specific training during their mobilization period."<sup>158</sup>

The 372<sup>nd</sup> Military Police (MP) Company, originally from Maryland, were the main perpetrators of the prisoner abuse.<sup>159</sup> They had deployed to Iraq in April 2003, despite numerous disciplinary problems.<sup>160</sup> For example, Specialist Charles Graner, one of the ringleaders of the abuse, had been cross-trained from military policeman to vehicle mechanic because of allegations of spousal abuse. Nevertheless, because he worked in a civilian prison, he was brought to the 372<sup>nd</sup> because they badly needed his corrections expertise.<sup>161</sup> Interestingly, Graner and his mistress, Private Lynndie England, who was also caught abusing prisoners, were involved in a precursory incident before their deployment.

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<sup>157</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman's Army*, 149.

<sup>158</sup> The Taguba Report: Article 15-6 Investigation of the 800<sup>th</sup> Military Police Brigade, as cited in *The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib*, Karen J. Greenberg and Joshua L. Dratel, eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 411, 419.

<sup>159</sup> The Taguba Report, *The Torture Papers*, 416.

<sup>160</sup> Kate Zernike, and Tim Golden, "The Struggle for Iraq: The Guards; Three Accused Soldiers Had Records of Unruliness That Went Unpunished," *The New York Times*, *nytimes.com*, May 27, 2004, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F04E7D123EF934A15756C0A9629C8B63&n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/People/G/Graner%20Charles%20A.%20Jr> (accessed November 3, 2007).

<sup>161</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman's Army*, 149-150, Paul Von Zielbauer and James Dao, "The Struggle for Iraq: The Jailer; Guard Left Troubled Life for Duty in Iraq," *The New York Times*, May 14, 2004, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C00E1DD1F3CF937A25756C0A9629C8B63> (accessed November 3, 2007), Graner's Ex-Wife Details Stormy Marriage," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 15, 2005, <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/05074/471794-100stm> (accessed November 3, 2007), and the Taguba Report, *The Torture Papers*, 433.

Karpinski notes:

During a night out in Virginia Beach before they deployed, the couple played a trick on a drunken soldier who had passed out. England posed nude with the man while Graner took pictures, an eerie hint of behavior to come.<sup>162</sup>

### C. PRECURSORS CONTRIBUTING TO AN ABUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Within a month after the new cellblocks were opened, the 205 Military Intelligence Brigade took over 1A and 1B to use them for interrogating security detainees. Security detainees are prisoners held for their potential intelligence value. Strangely, General Karpinski agreed to military intelligence's (MI's) exclusive use of the two recently renovated cellblocks, with an arrangement that left her MP's in-place to feed, account for, and sign out detainees to MI interrogators. The result of this arrangement was a confusing and somewhat dysfunctional corrections facility system of oversight where Iraqi prisons personnel controlled the physical infrastructure, MP's were responsible for guarding the prisoners, and MI controlled the more sensitive detainees.<sup>163</sup> This arrangement would become further complicated when Combined Joint Task Force Seven (CJTF-7) Commander, Lieutenant General Richardo Sanchez, ordered the 205 MI Brigade to take tactical control of all Abu Ghraib. Subsequently, the chain of command became murky and no memoranda of agreement were developed to clarify responsibilities.<sup>164</sup>

By the fall of 2003, Abu Ghraib's population had grown to several thousand detainees. Major General Geoffrey Miller, commander of the terrorist detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, was sent to Abu Ghraib to review MI procedures, to assess detention operations, and to make suggestions for acquiring more actionable intelligence.<sup>165</sup> Ultimately, Miller would recommend much harsher methods for prisoner

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<sup>162</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman's Army*, 150. See also Kate Zernike, "Behind Failed Abu Ghraib Plea, a Tangle of Bonds and Betrayals," *The New York Times*, *nytimes.com*, May 10, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/10/national/10graner.html?n=Top/Reference/TimesTopics/People/G/Graner,%20Charles%20A.%20Jr> (accessed November 3, 2007).

<sup>163</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman's Army*, 186.

<sup>164</sup> The Taguba Report, *The Torture Papers*, 434, and Karpinski, *One Woman's Army*, 186, 199-200.

<sup>165</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman's Army*, 196-197.

Although the high outer wall separated the sixty-acre prison compound from the small Iraq town of Abu Ghraib, anti-U.S. sentiment ran high, so small arms fire, mortar, and rocket attacks were commonplace.<sup>151</sup> According to Karpinski, it was not a favorable location for a prison:

[While] prisoners are ideally held in safe areas, far behind the lines, Abu Ghraib, by contrast, sat in a hot zone, along a dangerous road between Baghdad and the rebellious Sunni Triangle.<sup>152</sup>

In July 2003, U.S. Ambassador Paul Bremer toured Abu Ghraib and consented to its use on an interim basis until a newer facility could be constructed.<sup>153</sup> A major effort was launched to reclaim eight crumbling cellblocks, restoring and modernizing them to corrections-system standards. Ultimately, two of the renovated cellblocks would be named 1A and 1B, and once taken over by the military intelligence, would become the site of torture and human degradation.<sup>154</sup>

## **B. THE 800TH MILITARY POLICE BRIGADE**

The 800<sup>th</sup> Military Police Brigade was normally manned by 1,700 reserve soldiers from a two-state region, but at the time of their January 2003 deployment, manpower shortages required the unit to be patched together from separate reserve units mobilized from New York, Maryland, Indiana, and Georgia.<sup>155</sup> As a result, fewer than 500 soldiers of the brigade had ever worked together; even less had ever performed correctional duties.<sup>156</sup> According to Karpinski:

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<sup>151</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman's Army*, 32-33.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-35.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

<sup>155</sup> GlobalSecurity.org, "800<sup>th</sup> Military Police Brigade (EPW) (USAR)," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/army/800mp-bde.htm> (accessed November 3, 2007), and "Karpinski, *One Woman's Army*, 149.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

“sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses on several detainees.”<sup>171</sup> According to the Taguba Report, MG Anthony Taguba’s informal investigation into the 800<sup>th</sup> MP Brigade’s detention and interment operations, these acts were “substantiated by detailed witness statements and extremely graphic photographic evidence.”<sup>172</sup> These acts of abuse included:

Punching, slapping, and kicking detainees; jumping on their naked feet; videotaping and photographing naked male and female detainees; forcibly arranging detainees in various sexually explicit positions for photographing; forcing detainees to remove their clothing and keeping them naked for several days at a time; forcing naked male detainees to wear women’s underwear; forcing groups of male detainees to masturbate while being photographed and videotaped; arranging naked male detainees in a pile and then jumping on them; positioning a naked detainee on a MRE box with a sandbag on his head, and attaching wires to his fingers, toes, and penis to simulate electric torture; writing ‘I am a rapist’ on the leg of a detainee alleged to have forcibly raped a 15-year old fellow detainee and then photographing him naked; placing a dog chain or strap around a naked detainee’s neck and having a female soldier pose for a picture; a male MP guard having sex with a female detainee; using military working dogs (without muzzles) to intimidate and frighten detainees, and in at least one case, biting and severely injuring a detainee; and taking photographs of dead Iraqi detainees.<sup>173</sup>

Other allegations of abuse from detainee witnesses that were deemed credible included:

Breaking chemical lights and pouring the phosphoric liquid on detainees; threatening detainees with a charged 9mm pistol; pouring cold water on naked detainees; beating detainees with a broom handle and a chair; threatening male detainees with rape; allowing a military police guard to stitch the wound of a detainee who was injured after being slammed against the wall in his cell; sodomizing a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broomstick; using military working dogs to frighten and intimidate detainees with threats of attack; and in one instance, actually biting a detainee.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> The Taguba Report, *The Torture Papers*, 416.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

## **E. THE UNCOVERING**

Sometime in December 2003, Specialist Joseph Darby, a fellow MP assigned to the 372<sup>nd</sup>, entered cellblock 1A to drop off some paperwork, and observed several naked detainees that he would later comment “gave him a bad feeling.”<sup>175</sup> Darby had been given the task of putting together a photographic record of the company’s deployment, and subsequently had asked Graner for pictures. As he reviewed the photos on a diskette Graner gave him, Darby came across the startling photos.<sup>176</sup> Ultimately, the photos would prompt Darby to give Criminal Investigation Division (CID) officials a copy on January 13, 2004.<sup>177</sup>

## **F. SLOW ROLL OR COVER-UP?**

The CID officials who saw the photos the next day did not immediately recommend they be shown to senior officials in the chain of command. Nevertheless, over the next couple of days, military leadership from CJTF-7 and CENTCOM were informed of their existence and the allegations of abuse. On January 16, 2004, a brief CENTCOM press release announced that an investigation had been opened to look into reported incidents of detainee abuse at an undisclosed detention facility.<sup>178</sup>

By March 2004, CJTF-7 and CENTCOM leaders were provided with an interim report of investigation, but they did not send the photos to more senior officials. Lieutenant General Sanchez would later tell the Schlesinger Panel that:

He did not request the photos be disseminated beyond the criminal investigative process because commanders are prohibited from interfering with, or influencing, active investigations.<sup>179</sup>

By April, the report of investigation had made it through Army channels but had not made its way to the Secretary of Defense.<sup>180</sup> Subsequently, when Chairman of the Joint

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<sup>175</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman’s Army*, 216.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> The Schlesinger Report, *The Torture Papers*, 926.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers, learned of CBS news' planned release of the photos, sometime in April 2004, he was caught completely by surprise. Myers feared that the planned release of the photos might further endanger the lives of coalition forces who were engaged in the fierce fighting in progress in the Iraqi cities of Fallujah and Najaf.<sup>181</sup> Subsequently, he was able to convince CBS news to delay the release of the photos because the story of abuse had already been made public in the January CENTCOM news release.<sup>182</sup> At the same time, Seymour Hersh learned of the existence of the photos from the producers of *60 Minutes II*, the CBS news show. His publisher, *The New Yorker*, decided to publish immediately, as they were reasonably confident of the accuracy of the story. This, in turn, caused CBS to put pressure on the Pentagon to cooperate with the report, as release of the photos by the press was inevitable within the next couple of days. Ultimately, the Pentagon conceded.

On April 28, 2004, Dan Rather announced the existence of the photos on the *CBS Evening News*. On April 30<sup>th</sup>, Hersh's story of Abu Ghraib, complete with photos, was placed on *The New Yorker* website. Hersh wrote three stories over the next three weeks, with every major newspaper in the U.S. relying heavily on his work for follow-up reporting.<sup>183</sup>

## **G. THE INVESTIGATIONS**

There were a number of key investigations into the allegations of abuse at Abu Ghraib. In addition to the criminal case opened by CID as a result of Specialist Darby's exposure of the photographs, on January 19, 2004, CJTF-7 Commander, Lieutenant General Sanchez requested that the Commander, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) appoint an investigating officer, Major General or higher, to evaluate the detention and internment operations conducted by the 800<sup>th</sup> MP Brigade from November 2003 to January 2004. On January 24, 2004, CENTCOM directed the Commander, Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), Lieutenant General David McKiernan to

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<sup>181</sup> The Schlesinger Report, *The Torture Papers*, 927.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> David Remnick, Introduction to *Chain of Command*, as cited in Hersh, *Chain of Command*, xviii.

conduct the investigation. McKiernan, in turn, directed Major General Antonio M. Taguba to conduct a full investigation into the circumstances surrounding the allegations of detainee abuse, detainee escapes, and accountability lapses, as well as an overall assessment of the fitness and performance of the 800<sup>th</sup> MP Brigade.<sup>184</sup> In March 2004, the Taguba Report was published. Taguba found:

[A pattern] of systemic and illegal abuse of detainees, intentionally perpetrated by several members of the military police guard force (372<sup>nd</sup> MP Company, 320<sup>th</sup> MP Battalion, 800<sup>th</sup> MP Brigade) in Tier 1A of the Abu Ghraib Prison.<sup>185</sup>

He also concluded that Brigadier General Karpinski, 800<sup>th</sup> MP Brigade Commander, had “not properly trained or monitored her troops and had allowed lax discipline.”<sup>186</sup> Taguba would go on to recommend that Karpinski and seven MP officers and enlisted soldiers be relieved of command or duty and receive formal reprimands.<sup>187</sup> The Taguba report was the first investigatory report on Abu Ghraib. It was routed through Department of Army channels and somehow leaked to Seymour Hersh in April 2004. The report became a key source of information for Hersh’s stories, providing much of the information about the abuses at Abu Ghraib that we know about today. It also served as the baseline for a series of corrective actions that the Army would take to correct problems of abuse theater-wide.

The Taguba report was followed by the Mikolashek Report in July 2004. The Mikolashek Report was the official record of an assessment of detainee operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, conducted by the Department of the Army Inspector General (IG) and released in July 2004. The Army IG found that:

The overwhelming majority of our leaders and soldiers understood the requirement to treat detainees humanely and were doing so; these incidents of abuse resulted from the failure of individuals to follow known

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<sup>184</sup> The Taguba Report, *The Torture Papers*, 407.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 416.

<sup>186</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman’s Army*, 226.

<sup>187</sup> Hersh, *Chain of Command*, 41.

standards of discipline and Army Values and, in some cases, the failure of a few leaders to enforce those standards of value.<sup>188</sup>

The Department of Defense (DoD) also formed an independent panel to review DoD detainee operations and specifically the 300 incidents of alleged detainee abuse across the Joint Operations Areas of Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>189</sup> The panel concluded that the abuses at Abu Ghraib:

Would have been avoided with proper training, leadership, and oversight. [Subsequently,] those [abuses] in cell block 1 had a unique nature, fostered by the predilections of the non-commissioned officers in charge...<sup>190</sup>

The panel also determined that:

The impact of Abu Ghraib was magnified by the fact that the shocking photographs were aired throughout the world in April 2004. Consequently, the highest levels of command and leadership in the DoD were not adequately informed nor prepared to respond to the Congress and the American public when copies were released by the press.<sup>191</sup>

Also worthy of mention is the Fay-Jones Report, released in August 2004. This report was generated by Lieutenant General Anthony R. Jones and Major General George R. Fay. General Fay's orders were to determine whether the members of the 205<sup>th</sup> MI Battalion had "requested, encouraged, condoned, or solicited" the MP's at Abu Ghraib to abuse detainees as well as whether MI personnel had followed the rules for proper interrogation procedures.<sup>192</sup> General Fay concluded that in several instances, MI personnel did solicit the MP abuse and did participate directly in the abuse. He also found that MI did not follow the rules and regulations for detainee interrogations.

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<sup>188</sup> The Mikolashek Report, as cited in *The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib*, Karen J. Greenberg and Joshua L. Dratel, eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 632.

<sup>189</sup> The Schlesinger Report, *The Torture Papers*, 908-914.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 914.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> The Fay-Jones Report, "Investigation of Intelligence Activities at Abu Ghraib/Investigation of the Abu Ghraib Detention Facility and 205<sup>th</sup> Military Intelligence Brigade, MG George Fay," as cited in *The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib*, Karen J. Greenberg and Joshua L. Dratel, eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 987.



Finally, he determined that leaders at Abu Ghraib did not properly supervise interrogation operations and failed to take action when allegations of abuse were reported.<sup>193</sup>

General Jones was directed to determine whether personnel higher in the chain of command than the 205<sup>th</sup> MI Brigade had played a role in the detainee abuse at the prison.<sup>194</sup> Jones found that some of the incidents at Abu Ghraib were the result of intentional acts committed with the intent to:

Cause bodily harm using unlawful force as well as sexual offenses including, but not limited to rape, sodomy, and indecent assault; [while others] were actions taken based on misinterpretations of or confusion about law or policy.<sup>195</sup>

Nevertheless, he reported that “the chain of command directly above the 205<sup>th</sup> MI Brigade was not directly involved in the abuses at Abu Ghraib.”<sup>196</sup>

#### **H. THE “BAD APPLES” AND THEIR PUNISHMENTS**

Brigadier General Janis Karpinski was the highest ranking officer punished in light of the abuses at Abu Ghraib. She was formally relieved from command of the 800<sup>th</sup> MP Brigade, received a letter of reprimand, and ultimately had her promotion to Brigadier General vacated by President Bush, which effectively demoted her to Colonel. She officially retired in 2005.<sup>197</sup> Colonel Thomas Pappas, Commander of the 205<sup>th</sup> MI Brigade, was also relieved of command, given a letter of reprimand for dereliction of duty, and fined \$8,000.<sup>198</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Jerry Phillabaum, Commander of the 320<sup>th</sup> MI Brigade, was removed from the promotion list and subsequently retired.<sup>199</sup> Staff Sergeant Ivan Frederick, the night shift supervisor, was court-martialed, reduced in rank

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<sup>193</sup> The Fay-Jones Report, *The Torture Papers*, 1022.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 992.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 993.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman’s Army*, 227-228, 236, Hersh, *Chain of Command*, 21, and Prosecutions and Convictions, [http://www.salon.com/news/abu\\_ghraib/2006/03/14/prosecutions\\_convictions/index.html](http://www.salon.com/news/abu_ghraib/2006/03/14/prosecutions_convictions/index.html) (accessed July 29, 2007).

<sup>198</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman’s Army*, 227-228, 236, Hersh, *Chain of Command*, 21, and Prosecutions and Convictions, [http://www.salon.com/news/abu\\_ghraib/2006/03/14/prosecutions\\_convictions/index.html](http://www.salon.com/news/abu_ghraib/2006/03/14/prosecutions_convictions/index.html) (accessed July 29, 2007).

<sup>199</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman’s Army*, 231.

to private, ordered to forfeit all pay and allowances, was sentenced to eight and a half years prison time; he will receive a dishonorable discharge upon completion of his sentence.<sup>200</sup> Sergeant Javal Davis was court-martialed, reduced in rank, and received a six month prison sentence. He received a bad-conduct discharge upon completion of his prison sentence.<sup>201</sup> Corporal Charles Graner was court-martialed, reduced in rank to private, sentenced to ten years prison time; he will be dishonorably discharged from the Army upon completion of his sentence.<sup>202</sup> Specialist Jeremy Sivits was court-martialed, reduced in rank, sentenced to one year in prison, and received a bad-conduct discharge upon completion of his sentence.<sup>203</sup> Specialist Sabrina Harman was court-martialed, sentenced to six months imprisonment, and given a bad-conduct discharge upon completion of her sentence.<sup>204</sup> Specialist Megan Ambuhl was reduced in rank to private, lost half a month's pay, and was discharged from the Army without serving prison time.<sup>205</sup> Specialist Armin Cruz was court-martialed, reduced in rank to private, sentenced to eight months in prison, and received a bad conduct discharge upon completion of his prison sentence.<sup>206</sup> Specialist Roman Krol was court-martialed, reduced in rank to private, sentenced to ten months in prison, and received a bad conduct discharge upon completion of his sentence.<sup>207</sup> Finally, Private First Class Lynndie England was court-martialed, sentenced to three years imprisonment; she will receive a dishonorable discharge upon completion of her sentence.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Karpinski, *One Woman's Army*, 227-228, Prosecutions and Convictions, located at [http://www.salon.com/news/abu\\_ghraib/2006/03/14/prosecutions\\_convictions/index.html](http://www.salon.com/news/abu_ghraib/2006/03/14/prosecutions_convictions/index.html) (accessed July 29, 2007), Fast Facts: Abu Ghraib Convictions, Fox News.Com (September 27, 2005), located at <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,170603,00.html> (accessed July 29, 2007), and Who's Who on the Abu Ghraib Conviction List, The Associated Press, MSNBC.com (May 4, 2005), located at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7709487/> (accessed July 29, 2007).

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

## I. MEDIA PRIMING AND INITIAL PUBLIC RESPONSE

America's response to the release of the Abu Ghraib photos can best be described as "outright anger, humiliation, and shame."<sup>209</sup> Americans were offended and even angry about the photos.<sup>210</sup> Not surprisingly, some conservative hawks argued that the media was making too much of the photographs, endangering the lives of Americans serving overseas, while liberal doves demanded the resignation of Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and a full accounting of what happened.<sup>211</sup> In general though, Americans followed the story pretty closely, not liking what they saw. Ultimately, they would conclude that the incidents were isolated, not indicative of the military as a whole. Unlike My Lai, this time America wanted the offenders punished. The public would hold the soldiers mostly responsible but were critical of President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld as well.<sup>212</sup> Public outrage over the photos might have been more intense had it not been for the government's efforts to prevent the release of the remaining photos for their graphic and inflammatory contents.

Although not unanimously supported by both parties in Congress, efforts to suppress the release of additional photos were eventually successful. It was argued that the photos might further endanger U.S. servicemen and servicewomen serving in the Middle East.<sup>213</sup> After Congress saw a presentation containing eight hundred Abu Ghraib abuse photos, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John Warner, one of the White House's early antagonists over the Abu Ghraib affair, concluded that "the pictures should not be made public. 'I feel that they could possibly endanger the men and women

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<sup>209</sup> James B. Wilson, "The Gold Standard: Major Sherwood Moran and the Interrogation of Prisoners of War," *Leatherneck* 90, no. 2, (February 2007): 44.

<sup>210</sup> Matt Welch, "The Pentagon's Secret Stash," *Reason* 36, no 11 (April 2005) and Erin Madigan, "The Cost of War and A Thousand Words," *National Journal* 37, no. 20, (May 14, 2005), "My Deepest Apology From Rumsfeld; 'Nothing Less Than Tragic,' Says Top General," *The New York Times Late Edition*, (May 8, 2004), Fred Hiatt, "Why Hawks Should Be Angry," *The Washington Post*, (May 31, 2004), and Linda Feldmann, "Abuse Photos Harden U.S. War Divide; As Democrats Demand Rumsfeld's Resignation and Cheney Backs Him Up, Few Americans Are Altering Their Views," *The Christian Science Monitor*, (May 10, 2004).

<sup>211</sup> Hiatt, "Why Hawks Should be Angry," Hersh, *Chain of Command*, 43, and Feldman, "Abuse Photos Harden U.S. War Divide."

<sup>212</sup> American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, "Public Opinion on the War with Iraq," (January 11, 2007): 27-32, located at <http://www.aei.org/publicopinion2> (accessed January 27, 2007).

<sup>213</sup> Welch, "The Pentagon's Secret Stash," 19.

of the armed forces as they are serving and at great risk.”<sup>214</sup> DoD officials offered two additional reasons for withholding additional images of abuse. Specifically, they argued that the photos amounted to an “unwarranted invasions of privacy and [that they could have a] potential impact on law enforcement efforts [because they could deprive the accused of a fair trial.]”<sup>215</sup> Critics would offer two additional explanations for the successful suppression of additional Abu Ghraib images. First was a desire to protect a classified special access program or SAP, directed at generating human intelligence or HUMINT about the insurgency in Iraq. Hersh reported that the SAP actually encouraged the use of physical coercion and sexual humiliation of Iraqi prisoners with the intent of producing actionable intelligence.<sup>216</sup> Subsequently, knowledge of the SAP may have been what convinced Senator John Warner to conclude his probing into the matter.<sup>217</sup> Second was the obvious political impact of the scandal during an election year. There is some evidence to suggest that pressure was put on the Department of the Army to have all Abu Ghraib investigations completed by August of 2004, before the Republican National Convention, for fear of its impact on the president’s re-election potential.<sup>218</sup> Whether the result of a single reason or a combination of the above mentioned arguments, efforts to stop the further release of photographs have so far been successful.

The CBS news show, *60 Minutes II*, had originally televised four of the photos during its first Abu Ghraib broadcast on April 28, 2004.<sup>219</sup> *The New Yorker* followed this report, publishing approximately ten more photos on May 4, 2004.<sup>220</sup> Other news media outlets, including ABC News and *The Washington Post*, published additional photos

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<sup>214</sup> Welch, “The Pentagon’s Secret Stash,” 19, and Hersh, *Chain of Command*, 66-67.

<sup>215</sup> Welch, “The Pentagon’s Secret Stash,” 18.

<sup>216</sup> Hersh, *Chain of Command*, 46-47 and Anonymous, “Orders to Torture,” *The Nation* 278, no. 22 (June 7, 2004).

<sup>217</sup> Hersh, *Chain of Command*, 66-69.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>219</sup> “Abuse of Iraqi POWs By GIs Probed,” (April 28, 2004), and 60 Minutes II Excerpt video, at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/04/27/60II/main614063.shtml> (accessed August 4, 2007).

<sup>220</sup> Abu Ghraib Photos, located at [http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/05/03/slideshow\\_040503?viewall=true#showHeader](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/05/03/slideshow_040503?viewall=true#showHeader) (accessed August 4, 2007).

throughout the month of May 2004 and one in June.<sup>221</sup> After that, publication of the photos consisted primarily of recycled images until the American Civil Liberties Union pressed the issue in federal court, ultimately winning the release of eighty-seven more photographs and four videos.<sup>222</sup> By then, the impact of the story had mostly subsided, and the attention of the American public had moved on to other matters.

## J. ELITE INFLUENCE

Certainly there was ample elite rhetoric about the shocking revelation of the photos. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in early May 2004, following the initial release of the story. Rumsfeld's opening statement, recorded by the Federal News Service, included the following comments:

It is important for the American people and the world to know that while these terrible acts were perpetrated by a small number of U.S. military, they were also brought to light by the honorable and responsible actions of other military personnel. There are many who did their duty professionally...<sup>223</sup>

Similarly, General Myers remarked:

One of our greatest strengths comes from the fact that we hold our servicemen and women accountable for their actions... I have complete confidence in our military justice system. The accused will receive due process. Those found guilty will receive punishments based on their offenses.<sup>224</sup>

Identical comments about the abuse being limited to a few "bad apples," along with apologies to the Arab World and American people, were made by Secretary of State

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<sup>221</sup> Welch, "The Pentagon's Secret Stash."

<sup>222</sup> Julia Preston, "Officials See Risk in the Release of Photos and Videotapes of Iraqi Prisoner Abuse," *The New York Times*, Late Edition, (August 12, 2005), William Fisher, "Fearing Riots, U.S. Government Holds Back Abu Ghraib Photos," *Global Information Network* (August 17, 2005), "Pentagon Blocks Release of Abu Ghraib Images," *The Quill* 93, no. 7, (September 2005), Demetri Sevastopulo and Sundeep Tucker, "More Images of Abuse at Abu Ghraib Shown on T.V.," *Financial Times*, (February 16, 2006), and Frank Rich, "On Television, Torture Takes a Holiday," *The New York Times*, Late Edition, (January 23, 2005).

<sup>223</sup> "My Deepest Apology From Rumsfeld; Nothing Less Than Tragic, Says Top General," *The New York Times*, Late Edition, (May 8, 2004).

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

Colin Powell, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan, and senior DoD officials throughout the month of May 2004.<sup>225</sup>

President Bush reacted to the story of abuse by condemning the maltreatment of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. soldiers. He appeared on Arab television shortly after the Abu Ghraib story broke in an attempt to limit the impact of the photographs and to convince the Arab people that the mistreatment was not representative of America as a whole.<sup>226</sup> Immediately, critics in the Arab world, the international community, the press, and Congress accused the president of not offering a direct apology, so on May 7, 2004, in the White House Rose Garden, Bush expressed his regrets and offered a formal apology to visiting King Abdullah II of Jordan, who seemed to be symbolically representing the Arab people.<sup>227</sup> However, it was not until late May 2004, that the president formally addressed the American people about the Abu Ghraib scandal. Addressing the nation on 24 May, President Bush called for demolishing the Abu Ghraib prison. He remarked:

A new Iraq will need a humane, well-supervised prison system. Under the dictator, prisons like Abu Ghraib were symbols of death and torture. That same prison became a symbol of disgraceful conduct by a few American troops who dishonored our country and disregarded our values. America will fund the construction of a modern, maximum security prison. When that prison is completed, detainees at Abu Ghraib will be relocated. Then, with the approval of the Iraqi government, we will demolish the Abu Ghraib prison, as a fitting symbol of Iraq's new beginning.<sup>228</sup>

Many critics picked up on the Bush Administration's united position on the abuse being perpetrated by a "few bad apples." Some argue that this was done to take pressure off the

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<sup>225</sup> Robin Wright, "Top U.S. Officials Apologize to Arabs for Prisoner Abuse," *The Washington Post*, (May 5, 2004), and Oliver North, "Politicizing Abu Ghraib Incidents Disserves Troops," *Human Events* 60, no. 16, (May 10, 2004).

<sup>226</sup> Richard W. Stevenson and Steven R. Weisman, "Bush On Arab TV, Denounces Abuse of Iraqi Captives," *The New York Times*, Late Edition, (May 6, 2004).

<sup>227</sup> Elizabeth Bumiller and Eric Schmitt, "President Sorry for Iraq Abuse: Backs Rumsfeld," *The New York Times*, Late Edition, (May 7, 2004), Esther Schrader and Patrick J. McDonnell, "The World: Bush Denounces Troops' Treatment of Prisoners; Images of Americans Posing With Detainees, First Shown On CBS, Outrage Arab Viewers," *Los Angeles Times*, (May 1, 2004), Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "Prisoner Abuse Scandal Puts McCain in Spotlight Once Again," *The New York Times*, Late Edition, (May 10, 2004).

<sup>228</sup> Remarks by the President on Iraq and the War on Terror, United States Army War College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, transcript located at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/05/20040524-10.html> (accessed August 8, 2007), and Dana Milbank, "Bush Seeks to Reassure Nation on Iraq; President Talks of Razing Abu Ghraib Prison to Mark 'New Beginning,'" *The Washington Post*, (May 25, 2004).

administration for its policies on torture that may have ultimately contributed to the conditions that led to the abuse.<sup>229</sup> Although not lost on the American people, this belief does not seem to have taken hold as support for the president and the war fell during this period, but revived after a short time.

## **K. THE ABU GHRAIB POLLS**

The Pew Research Center For The People & The Press specifically asked several questions about Abu Ghraib in its May 2004 Political/Believability Survey. Two of these questions are especially useful. They are:

- 1) How much, if anything have you heard about reports of mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. troops...a lot, a little, or nothing at all?
- 2) Did you happen to see any of the pictures on which the reports of mistreatment are based or not?<sup>230</sup>

Pew found that 58 percent of those polled had heard a lot about the story, while 34 percent had heard a little and only 8 percent reported not hearing anything.<sup>231</sup> Of those polled, 76 percent of Americans reported that they had seen the pictures, while only 24 percent had not.<sup>232</sup> Pew's polling data suggests that the Abu Ghraib prison abuse story and pictures did capture the attention of Americans, having received quite a bit of media exposure within the first few days of their release. Pew later reported that the Abu Ghraib scandal was the twelfth most closely followed news story of 2004.<sup>233</sup> This is also consistent with Pew's other findings on the percentage of Americans paying attention to the news about Iraq during 2004. In a December 2004 report, Pew's analysts reported

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<sup>229</sup> Anonymous, "Twisting American Values," *Los Angeles Times*, (June 9, 2004), Eric Alterman, "Hawks Eating Crow," *The Nation* 278, no. 22, (June 7, 2004), and Michael Hirsh and John Barry, "The Abu Ghraib Scandal Cover-Up?," *Newsweek* 143, no. 23, (June 7, 2004).

<sup>230</sup> The Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, "76% Have Seen Prison Pictures; Bush Approval Slips: Iraq Prison Scandal Hits Home, But Most Reject Troop Pullout," Released Wednesday, May 12, 2004, located at <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/213.pdf> (accessed August 6, 2007), 20.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> The Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, "76% Have Seen Prison Pictures; Bush Approval Slips: Iraq Prison Scandal Hits Home, But Most Reject Troop Pullout," Released Wednesday, May 12, 2004, located at <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/213.pdf> (accessed August 6, 2007), 20.

<sup>233</sup> Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, Survey Reports, Summary of Findings, "Public Opinion Little Changed by Presidential Election: Familiar Divides, Post-Election Disengagement," Released December 20, 2004, located at <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=234> (accessed July 30, 2007).

that news about Iraq “ranked second only to news about high gasoline prices in terms of the year’s most closely followed stories.”<sup>234</sup> Moreover, Pew’s December analysis shows that the percentage of Americans following the news in Iraq spiked, beginning at 47 percent in March 2004 and traveling to the highest point for the year to 54 percent by April, before declining throughout the month of May, and reaching a low of 39 percent by June.<sup>235</sup> This increased attention in April is probably due to the heavy fighting by U.S. troops in Fallujah and the subsequent heavy American casualty rate suffered during this period. Conversely, the truce between the U.S. forces and the Al-Sadr militia in Najaf after seven weeks of fighting, as well as preparations for the transfer of sovereignty in June, may have marked a beginning of the loss of interest by the American public.<sup>236</sup> Other available data would seem to support this as Pew analysts recorded a ten percent increase in Americans becoming less emotionally involved in the war from May to August 2004.<sup>237</sup>

During this same period, Gallup asked a similar question about how closely Americans were following the story of abuse of Iraqi prisoners. Specifically, Gallup asked:

How closely have you been following the news about evidence of U.S. soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners, including incidents that involve photographs of the abuse—very closely, somewhat closely, not too closely, or not at all?<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, Survey Reports, Summary of Findings, “Public Opinion Little Changed by Presidential Election: Familiar Divides, Post-Election Disengagement,” Released December 20, 2004, located at <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=234> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>235</sup> Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, Survey Reports, Summary of Findings, “Public Opinion Little Changed by Presidential Election: Familiar Divides, Post-Election Disengagement,” Released December 20, 2004, located at <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=234> (accessed August 30, 2007), and Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, Survey Reports, Summary of Findings, “Public Support for War Resilient: Bush’s Standing Improves,” Released June 17, 2004, located at <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=216> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>236</sup> American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, “Public Opinion on the War with Iraq,” (January 11, 2007), located at <http://www.aei.org/publicopinion2> (accessed January 27, 2007): 156.

<sup>237</sup> Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, Survey Reports, Summary of Findings, “Iraq News Increases Calls for Troop Withdrawal: Guantanamo Prisoner Mistreatment Seen as Isolated Incidents,” located at <http://people-press.org/reports/print.php3?PageID=913> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>238</sup> Gallup Brian, May Wave 1 5/7/2004-5/9/2004, located at <http://institution.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=P0405017> (accessed August 6, 2007).



Of the 1003 Americans Gallup polled, 41 percent had been following the news very closely, 39 percent somewhat closely, 15 percent not too closely, and 5 percent not closely at all.<sup>239</sup> Interestingly, when the first two categories of the Gallup data are combined, we find that a total of 80 percent of Americans were following the story fairly closely.

During the same poll, Gallup asked, “Would you say the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. soldiers bothers you—a great deal, a fair amount, not much, or not at all?”<sup>240</sup> Of the random sample of 1003 Americans, 54 percent said the abuse bothered them a great deal, 25 percent said it bothered them a fair amount, 11 percent said it bothered them not much, and 9 percent said it did not bother them at all.<sup>241</sup> Gallup asked the same question roughly a year later, with 39 percent reporting being bothered a great deal by the abuse, 24 percent a fair amount, 17 percent not much, and 19 percent not at all.<sup>242</sup> Although the percentage of Americans who were bothered by the abuse dropped as almost a year transpired, we see that a solid majority of more than 60 percent of Americans was still bothered by the stories of abuse, even a year later. The conclusions we can draw from the Pew and Gallup polling during this timeframe are: 1) Americans were closely following the Iraq War during this timeframe; 2) A significant number of Americans were aware of the abuse photographs and followed the Abu Ghraib scandal in the news during this period; and 3) A substantial majority of Americans were bothered quite a bit by the stories of abuse even a year later.

#### **L. OPTIONS FOR EXAMINING PUBLIC OPINION SUPPORT FOR IRAQ**

Fortunately, for the Abu Ghraib case study, there are several good public opinion polling questions designed to measure generalized war support from two credible polling sources. These questions were asked with greater frequency, so analysis, though still

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<sup>239</sup> Gallup Brian, May Wave 1 5/7/2004-5/9/2004, located at <http://institution.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=P0405017> (accessed August 6, 2007).

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Gallup Brian, April Wave 2 (4/29/2005-5/1/2005), located at <http://insitution.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=P0504021> (accessed July 30, 2007), and CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll (April 29-May 1, 2005), MoE +/- 3, located at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq11.htm> (accessed August 6, 2007).

complicated, can be accomplished with greater confidence than in the My Lai case, because the reference points are more numerous, and the data can be cross-referenced against other sources. Certainly it would have been better if the polling organizations had asked a question directly about how the Abu Ghraib incident affected the respondent's support for the Iraq War. Unfortunately, no polling organization asked that question, so I was left with the more general questions regarding war support.

For the purposes of consistency, the Iraq War “mistake question” is included in this analysis as well as several other relevant questions. Questions to be analyzed include: 1) Gallup's “mistake question”—“In view of the developments since we first sent our troops to Iraq, do you think the United States made a mistake in sending troops to Iraq or not?”<sup>243</sup> 2) Pew's “right/wrong decision question”—“Do you think the U.S. made the right decision or the wrong decision in using military force against Iraq?”<sup>244</sup> 3) Gallup's “worth it question”—“All in all, do you think it was worth going to war in Iraq, or not?”<sup>245</sup> These questions were chosen for their generalized nature, which is best suited to help us understand how Abu Ghraib affected the overall support for the Iraq War.

As Mueller noted, the most interesting thing about the Iraq War is how quickly the support evaporated.<sup>246</sup> According to the data available for the “mistake question,” support fell below 50 percent for the first time in June 2004.<sup>247</sup> Although not a large shift in public opinion, with 44 percent continuing to support the war and only 54 percent against it,<sup>248</sup> it is interesting that this shift occurred during the timeframe right after Abu

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<sup>243</sup> Gallup Brain, located at [http://institution.gallup.com/search/results.aspx?SearchTypeAll="do%20you%20think%20the%20United%20States%20made%20a%20mistake%20in%20sending%20troops%20to%20Iraq,%20or%20not?""&SearchConType=1](http://institution.gallup.com/search/results.aspx?SearchTypeAll=) (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>244</sup> The Pew Research Center For People & The Press, “36% Think Surge Will Work: Solid Majority Favors Congressional Troop Deadline,” Released: Monday, March 26, 2007, located at <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=313> (accessed July 30, 2007)

<sup>245</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, “War Support Unchanged: Forty-Five Percent of Americans Say War Worth It; 52% Disagree,” located at <http://institution.gallup.com/content/default.aspx?ci=11821> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>246</sup> Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome,” 44.

<sup>247</sup> Chronological Polls Listing, located at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq2.htm> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

Ghraib, the intense fighting in Najaf, and the on-going and sometimes very bloody fighting in Fallujah, and just before the transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqis.

For the Abu Ghraib case study, I was particularly interested in the period of time from the end of April 2004 through May 2004, at the height of media reporting on the story. I decided not to attempt to track the effect of the individual trials of the “bad apples” as there were simply too many of them spread over a long period. Also, although Corporal Charles Graner appears to have been the central figure in the abuse scandal, his role as the main perpetrator does not appear to have caught hold with the public as it did for Lieutenant William Calley.

#### **M. THE GALLUP “MISTAKE QUESTION”**

Gallup asked its “mistake question” for the Iraq War with greater frequency and consistency than it did for Vietnam. Moreover, a cross-check of several sources reporting Gallup’s data revealed no obvious conflicts or discrepancies like those appearing for the Vietnam era. The lack of such problems as well as the ease of detecting the more obvious changes in the support for the war during the initial release period of the Abu Ghraib story make it reasonable to work with whole numbers, as there was no need to go two places beyond the decimal point to interpret the data. Also convenient for this particular case study is the fact that Gallup conducted polling on April 16-18, 2004, just before the Abu Ghraib news release on April 28th, and then again on May 7-9, at the height of reporting on the incident. The results of the Gallup “mistake question” for the Abu Ghraib period are included in Table 3-1 below. The results of the Gallup “mistake question” polling for the entire Iraq War to date are located at the end of the chapter. Once again, those answering “yes” to the “mistake question” were placed in the opposition column while those answering “no” were placed in the support column.

Date	# Days Between	Support	Oppose	Unsure	% Change in Support	Rate of Decline
3-5 Nov 03	28	60	39	1	1	1.0714
12-15 Jan 04	70	56	42	2	-4	-1.7143
16-18 Apr 04	95	57	42	1	1	0.3158
7-9 May 04	21	54	44	2	-3	-4.2857
3-6 Jun 04	27	58	41	1	4	4.4444
21-23 Jun 04	18	44	54	2	-14	-23.3333
8-11 Jul 04	17	45	54	1	1	1.7647
19-21 Jul 04	11	47	50	3	2	5.4545
30 Jul-1 Aug 04	11	51	47	2	4	10.9091
Entire War	1565				-39	-0.7476
Before Abu Ghraib	389				-18	-1.3882
Abu Ghraib	21				-3	-4.2857
After Abu Ghraib	1155				-18	-0.4675

Table 3-1. Summary of Gallup “Mistake Question” Iraq.<sup>249</sup>

For the April 16-18 poll, 1003 Americans were asked the “mistake question,” with 42 percent responding that the U.S. had made a mistake (indicating opposition for the war), and 57 percent responding that the U.S. had not (indicating support for the war); only 1 percent were unsure.<sup>250</sup> In the May 7-9, poll, 44 percent responded that the U.S. made a mistake, 54 percent responded that the U.S. had not, and 2 percent were unsure.<sup>251</sup> The difference between the two polling points is a drop in support of approximately 3 percent. (Gallup reported no lost code or data for this polling period.) While not a big drop in support, and still within the plus or minus 3 percent margin of error, the change appears to be significant, considering the average presidential rally is generally an increase in approval of between 3 to 6 percentage points. By using Gallup’s polling data on the “mistake question” to calculate the average drop in support per month over the course of the war, we find that the average is a .75% drop in support per month for this particular polling question. When compared to the 3 percent drop in support during the Abu Ghraib timeframe, the change in support starts to look much more significant because it is more than four times the average drop in support per month over the course of the war. Nevertheless, this effect was extremely short-lived as indicated by the June 3-6 Gallup poll where 41 percent responded that the U.S. had made a mistake, 58 percent reported

<sup>249</sup> USA Today/Gallup Polls 3/24-25/2003 to 7/6-8/2007, MoE +/- 3, located at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq2.htm> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>250</sup> Gallup Brain, located at <http://institution.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=P0404015> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>251</sup> Gallup Brain, located at <http://institution.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=P0405017> accessed 7/30/2007.

that the U.S. had not, and 1 percent were unsure.<sup>252</sup> Thus by June, support had rebounded approximately 4 percentage points. The scholarly research on rallies generally concludes that they normally last for short periods of time (between one to three months). It is interesting that the negative impact of Abu Ghraib would affect public opinion for a similar amount of time—approximately one month. We will further refine this effect period when we analyze the additional polling data for the Gallup “worth it question.”

Also important to mention here is the possibility that President Bush interrupted the negative consequence period for Abu Ghraib when he held his “Steps to Help Iraq Achieve Democracy and Freedom” speech on the night of May 24, 2004.<sup>253</sup> His speech may have prompted a mini-rally that helped bring public opinion out of its Abu Ghraib doldrums and returned it to an almost normal course for the war. The ABC News and *The Washington Post* polls on April 15-18, May 20-23, and June 17-20, would seem to support this conclusion. Specifically, ABC News and *The Washington Post* asked the public “Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush is handling the situation in Iraq?”<sup>254</sup> Bush’s approval was at 45 percent in April, fell to 40 percent by May, and then returned to 44 percent by June.<sup>255</sup> Interestingly, Pew also asked this question April 21-25 but not again until June 3-13. The results conflict with the ABC News and *The Washington Post* polls, as Pew’s data reveals a drop in approval from 44 percent in April to 42 percent in June.<sup>256</sup> Of course the problem with this question is that one can support the war in general but not how the president is handling it. Nevertheless, the ABC News and *The Washington Post* polling seems to indicate a rally during this period.

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<sup>252</sup> Gallup Brain, located at <http://institution.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=P0406019> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>253</sup> Remarks by the President on Iraq and the War on Terror, United States Army War College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, transcript located at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/05/20040524-10.html> (accessed August 8, 2007).

<sup>254</sup> ABC News/Washington Post Poll, N=1,125 adults nationwide. MoE +/- 3, Fieldwork by TNS, at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq.htm> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>255</sup> Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, Survey Conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, N-1,056 adults nationwide, MoE +/- 3, located at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq4.htm> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

## N. THE PEW “RIGHT/WRONG QUESTION”

Moving to Pew’s question “Do you think the U.S. made the right decision or the wrong decision in using military force against Iraq,”<sup>257</sup> we find a similar effect on public opinion support during the late April 2004 to early June 2004 Abu Ghraib timeframe. Those answering that the U.S. made the “right” decision were added to the support column while those answering the U.S. made the “wrong” decision were placed in the opposition column. The results for the Abu Ghraib period are included in Table 3.2 below. The results of the Pew “right/wrong” question for the entire period of the Iraq War are included in a table located at the end of the chapter.

Date	# Days Between	Support	Oppose	Unsure	% Change in Support	Rate of Decline
Jan 6-11/04	18	65	30	5	3	5
Feb 11-16/04	36	56	39	5	-9	-7.5
Feb 24-29/04	13	60	32	8	4	9.2308
Mar 17-21/04	22	55	39	6	-5	-6.8182
Apr 1-4/04	15	57	35	8	2	4
Apr 21-25/04	20	54	37	9	-3	-4.5
May 3-9/04	12	51	42	7	-3	-7.5
Jun 3-13/04	31	55	38	7	4	3.871
Jul 8-18/04	35	52	43	5	-3	-2.5714
Aug 5-10/04	28	53	41	6	1	1.0714
Sep 8-13/04	34	53	39	8	0	0
Oct 1-3/04	23	50	39	11	-3	-3.913
Entire War	1490				-26	-0.5235
Before	398				-17	-1.2814
Abu Ghraib	12				-3	-7.5
After	1080				-6	-0.1667

Table 3-2. Summary of Pew “Right/Wrong Question” Iraq.<sup>258</sup>

Pew’s choice of polling time periods for asking this question are almost as good as Gallup’s. Pew conducted polls on April 21-25, May 3-9, and June 3-13, 2004. Of the 1508 adults polled in April, 54 percent thought the U.S. made the right decision to use military force in Iraq, 37 percent thought the U.S. made the wrong decision, and 9

<sup>257</sup> The Pew Research Center For People & The Press, “36% Think Surge Will Work: Solid Majority Favors Congressional Troop Deadline,” Released: Monday, March 26, 2007, located at <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=313> (accessed July 30, 2007), and Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, Survey Conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, N-1,058 adults nationwide, MoE +/- 3, located at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq4.htm> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>258</sup> Pew Research Center For People & The Press Surveys Conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, 3/20-22/2003 to 4/18-22/2007, located at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq4.htm> (accessed July 30, 2007).

percent said they were unsure.<sup>259</sup> By May, 51 percent said they thought the decision was right, 42 percent said they thought it was wrong, and 7 percent were unsure.<sup>260</sup> In June, 55 percent said it was the right decision, 38 percent said it was the wrong decision, and 7 percent were undecided.<sup>261</sup> Once again, the data shows a 3 percent drop in support from April to May, followed by a 4 percent rebound in June. While still within the plus or minus 3 percent margin of error for the data, the drop in support between the April and May 2004 polls led to the lowest level of support measured by Pew since the war began.<sup>262</sup> The only difference with Pew's polling is that support appears to have started to decline much earlier, as evidenced by the difference between the April 1-4 and April 21-25 polls. This may be an anomaly or public response to perceptions of success or failure over the intense fighting in Fallujah and Najaf. Using all of Pew's data (January 2003-November 2005) for the right/wrong question, the average change in war support per month over the course of the war was .52%, or about half a percentage point decline per month. Again, the change in support for the Abu Ghraib timeframe is significant as it is roughly six times greater than the average drop in support over the course of the war.

#### **O. THE GALLUP “WORTH IT” QUESTION**

The results for the Gallup “worth it or not” question appear much more powerful than the other two questions, but are similar because they reveal a drop in support during the timeframe in question followed by a recovery immediately afterwards. Those answering that the war was “worth it” were placed in the support column and those answering that the war was “not worth it” were converted into the opposition column.

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<sup>259</sup>The Pew Research Center For People & The Press, “36% Think Surge Will Work: Solid Majority Favors Congressional Troop Deadline,” Released: Monday, March 26, 2007, located at <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=313> (accessed July 30, 2007), and Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, Conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, N-1,058 adults nationwide, MoE +/- 3, located at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq4.htm> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> The Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, “76% Have Seen Prison Pictures; Bush Approval Slips: Iraq Prison Scandal Hits Home, But Most Reject Troop Pullout,” Released Wednesday, May 12, 2004, located at <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/213.pdf> (accessed August 6, 2007).

The results for the Abu Ghraib period are included in Table 3-3 below. The results of the Gallup “worth it” question for the entire Iraq War are included in a table at the end of the chapter.

Date	# Days Between	Support	Opposition	No Opinion	% Change in Support	Rate of Decline
Jan 9-11 2004	25	59	38	3	-6	-7.2
Jan 29-Feb 1 2004	20	49	49	2	-10	-15
Mar 5-7 2004	36	55	43	2	6	5
Mar 26-28 2004	21	56	41	3	1	1.4286
Apr 5-8 2004	10	50	47	3	-6	-18
Apr 16-18 2004	11	52	46	2	2	5.4545
May 2-4 2004	16	50	47	3	-2	-3.75
May 7-9 2004	5	44	54	2	-6	-36
May 21-23 2004	14	45	52	3	1	2.1429
Jun 3-6 2004	13	46	53	2	1	2.3077
Jun 21-23 2004	18	46	51	3	0	0
Jul 8-11 2004	17	47	50	3	1	1.7647
Aug 9-11 2004	32	49	47	3	2	1.875
Aug 23-25 2004	14	50	46	3	1	2.1429
Sep 3-5 2004	11	49	48	3	-1	-2.7273
Oct 9-10 2004	36	44	54	2	-5	-4.1667
Entire War	1043				-15	-0.4314
Before Abu Ghraib	469				-1	-0.064
Initial Release	16				-2	-3.75
2 May-7 May 04	5				-6	-36
7 May-21 May 04	14				1	2.1429
21 May-3 Jun 04	13				1	2.3077
After Abu Ghraib	526				-8	-0.4563

Table 3-3. Summary of Gallup “Worth It Question” Iraq.<sup>263</sup>

As of the April 16-18 poll, those polled saying it was worth going to war in Iraq were at 52 percent, with 46 percent saying it was not, and 2 percent answering no opinion.<sup>264</sup> By the May 2-4 poll, 50 percent said it was worth it, 47 percent said it was not, and 3 percent had no opinion.<sup>265</sup> Roughly a week later, during the May 7-9 poll, support had dropped even further with 44 percent saying it was worth it, 54 percent saying it was not, and 2 percent answering no opinion.<sup>266</sup> But by the May 21-23 poll, support was gradually starting to return, with 45 percent saying it was worth it, 52 percent saying it was not, and 3 percent had no opinion.<sup>267</sup> Finally, in the June 3-6 poll, 46 percent said it was worth it,

<sup>263</sup> CNN/USA Today/Gallup Polls, 1/3-5/2003 to 11/11-13/2006, MoE +/- 3, located at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq9.htm> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>264</sup> Jones, “War Support Unchanged,” 4.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.



52 percent said it was not, and 2 percent had no opinion.<sup>268</sup> The data reveals that support dropped 2 percentage points between the April 16-18 poll and the May 2-4 poll then dropped more dramatically by 6 percentage points by the May 7-9 poll, before it began a slow recovery in the May 21-23 and June 3-6 polls. Again, the change in those saying the war was worth it was one of the sharpest drops in support recorded by Gallup over the course of the war.<sup>269</sup> Interestingly, the sharpest drop was between the May 2-4 and May 7-9 polls. This may be explained by the flurry of media activity as the story escalated during the first part of May and as President Bush appeared on Arab television on May 6<sup>th</sup><sup>270</sup> to apologize for the abuse. The total drop between the April 16-18 poll and the May 7-9 polls was 8 percent, the highest for any of the generalized questions used to measure war support. The average drop in support for the “worth it question” was slightly below half of a percentage point at .43%. Therefore, for this question, the drop in support was almost nineteen times more than the monthly average of loss in support over the course of the war. Also notable is that the recovery started sometime between the May 7-9 and May 21-23 polls. The obvious advantage of this particular polling question is that there is an additional reference point between late May and early June that we do not have with the other two questions. Again, it is possible that Bush’s speech on May 24<sup>th</sup> may have created the momentum needed to bring public opinion out of the Abu Ghraib slump. Nevertheless, the pattern indicated here shows a decline in support gradually, then more abruptly, followed by a recovery, although in this instance the recovery takes longer.

## **P. CONCLUSIONS**

The advantage of having more polling questions available at regular frequencies was highly significant for the Abu Ghraib case study. Multiple questions allow for a more accurate assessment of the effect of the incident. Also advantageous is the fact that

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<sup>268</sup> Jones, “War Support Unchanged,” 4.

<sup>269</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, “Half of Americans Continue to Say Iraq War “Worth It,” Gallup Brain, located at <http://institution.gallup.com/content/default.aspx?ci=11605> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>270</sup> American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, “Public Opinion on the War with Iraq,” (January 11, 2007), located at <http://www.aei.org/publicopinion2> (accessed January 27, 2007): 156.

this data comes from more than one polling source. Put simply, for Abu Ghraib, one does not have to guess about what was going on. There is enough good data available to draw conclusions about public opinion response to this issue with a reasonable degree of certainty. The fact that the data all show a similar result also gives the case study more credence.

The three polling questions examined yielded similar but slightly different results. The Gallup “mistake question” and the Pew “right/wrong question” are indicative of a 3 percent drop in support, while Gallup’s “worth it question” was more extreme, with an 8 percent drop. Nevertheless, both are useful for understanding Abu Ghraib because they reveal a decline in support immediately following the media’s release of the story, followed by a slow but steady climb back to a level close to the one just prior to the story’s release. All things being equal, this is what should have happened for a negative incident like Abu Ghraib, given all that we know about public opinion support. As Mueller pointed out:

[For the Iraq War,] increases [in public opinion support], proved to be temporary, more bumps on the road than permanent changes in direction...the same is true for negative occurrences: as drop in support after the disclosure of abuses at Abu Ghraib was in time mostly reversed.<sup>271</sup>

Therefore, the only difference in the data is in the extremity of the drop and in the length of time it took for support to recover, not in the overall pattern of support. It is possible that some of this extremity between the 8 percent and the 3 percent is nothing more than the margin of error indicative of all public opinion polling. Again, these polls all have a plus or minus 3 percent margin of error, so they are less than perfect, but they are nevertheless useful for this analysis of Abu Ghraib. It is also possible that the idiosyncrasies of the individual question wording created a slightly different response among the different samples. Nevertheless, again, this does not change the overall pattern the data reveal.

Of further importance was how the public responded to Abu Ghraib. Unlike My Lai, the public wanted the responsible military members punished for their inappropriate

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<sup>271</sup> Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome,” 44.

behavior. Some of this may have had to do with the lack of a central figure that the public keyed on as the instigator of the atrocity. Although the media focused somewhat on Corporal Charles Graner as the central figure, his role and appearance did not seem to resonate as much with the public as the innocent-looking Lieutenant William Calley. Also, Abu Ghraib may have created a different effect because of the shorter amount of time that transpired before the revelation of the incident. Abu Ghraib hit the press within six months of occurrence, while twenty months elapsed before the public heard about My Lai. Thus the story of inappropriate behavior was still fresh. By the time My Lai had been revealed, many of the perpetrators were already out of the military, with the exception of Lieutenant Calley, who was delayed before separation. Finally, there was never much of a question as to whether the photos were real or fake, or whether the perpetrators were innocent or guilty. It appears that the public accepted that the photos were real, the accused were guilty, and that the military would take appropriate action to punish the accused.

In conclusion, it appears that Abu Ghraib did affect public opinion support for the war, at least in the short term, or as Mueller would say, as a “bump or wiggle” in the overall public opinion support line. It did not have a lasting effect on support for the war, as support returned in less than a month’s time to a pattern indicative of larger opinion trends on the war. Thus, it cannot be linked causally as effectively finishing off overall support for the Iraq War. Rather, it is more likely that the support for Iraq War evaporated as a result of perceptions of success becoming more grim, in lieu of increasing casualties and as the war has dragged on. Although it appears that the president was able to rally the public to bring it out of the doldrums of Abu Ghraib, even he was unable to stop the slow, steady decline of public opinion support for the Iraq War.

Date	# Days Between	Support	Oppose	Unsure	% Change in Support	Rate of Decline
24-25 Mar 03	0	75	23	2	0	0
7-9 Jul 03	105	72	27	1	-3	-0.8571
6-8 Oct 03	91	59	40	1	-13	-4.2857
3-5 Nov 03	28	60	39	1	1	1.0714
12-15 Jan 04	70	56	42	2	-4	-1.7143
16-18 Apr 04	95	57	42	1	1	0.3158
7-9 May 04	21	54	44	2	-3	-4.2857
3-6 Jun 04	27	58	41	1	4	4.4444
21-23 Jun 04	18	44	54	2	-14	-23.3333
8-11 Jul 04	17	45	54	1	1	1.7647
19-21 Jul 04	11	47	50	3	2	5.4545
30 Jul-1 Aug 04	11	51	47	2	4	10.9091
23-25 Aug 04	24	50	48	2	-1	-1.25
3-5 Sep 04	11	57	38	5	7	19.0909
24-26 Sep 04	21	55	42	3	-2	-2.8571
1-3 Oct 04	7	51	48	1	-4	-17.1429
9-10 Oct 04	8	53	46	1	2	7.5
14-16 Oct 04	5	52	47	1	-1	-6
22-24 Oct 04	8	51	47	2	-1	-3.75
29-31 Oct 04	7	52	44	4	1	4.2857
19-21 Nov 04	21	51	47	2	-1	-1.486
7-9 Jan 05	49	48	50	2	-3	-1.8367
14-16 Jan 05	7	47	52	1	-1	-4.2857
4-6 Feb 05	21	55	45	0	8	11.4286
25-27 Feb 05	21	51	47	2	-4	-5.7143
18-20 Mar 05	21	51	46	3	0	0
29 Apr-1 May 05	42	48	49	3	-3	-2.1429
24-26 Jun 05	56	46	53	1	-2	-1.0714
22-24 Jul 05	28	53	46	1	7	7.5
5-7 Aug 05	14	44	54	2	-9	-19.2857
28-30 Aug 05	23	46	53	1	2	2.6087
8-11 Sep 05	11	46	53	1	0	0
16-18 Sep 05	8	39	59	2	-7	-26.25
21-23 Oct 05	35	49	49	2	10	8.5714
28-30 Oct 05	7	45	54	1	-4	-17.1429
11-13 Nov 05	14	45	54	1	0	0
16-18 Dec 05	35	46	52	2	1	0.8571
6-8 Jan 06	21	47	50	3	1	1.4286
20-22 Jan 06	14	46	51	3	-1	-2.1429
9-12 Feb 06	20	42	55	3	-4	-6
28 Feb-1 Mar 06	19	43	55	2	1	1.5789
10-12 Mar 06	10	42	57	1	-1	-3
7-9 Apr 06	28	42	57	1	0	0
9-11 Jun 06	63	46	51	2	4	1.9048
23-25 Jun 06	14	43	55	1	-3	-9.4286
21-23 Jul 06	28	41	56	2	-2	-2.1429
28-30 Jul 06	7	45	54	2	4	17.1429
15-17 Sep 06	49	49	49	2	4	2.449
6-8 Oct 06	21	40	56	4	-9	-12.8571
20-22 Oct 06	14	40	58	2	0	0
2-5 Nov 06	13	40	55	5	0	0
8-10 Dec 06	36	45	53	2	5	4.1667
5-7 Jan 07	28	41	57	2	-4	-4.2857
12-14 Jan 07	7	41	58	2	0	0
9-11 Feb 07	28	42	56	2	1	1.0714
2-4 Mar 07	21	39	59	2	-3	-4.2857
23-25 Mar 07	21	43	56	2	4	5.7143
13-15 Apr 07	21	41	57	2	-2	-2.8571
4-6 May 07	21	40	58	2	-1	-1.4286
1-3 Jun 07	28	40	56	4	0	0
6-8 Jul 07	35	36	62	2	-4	-3.4286
Entire War	1565				-39	-0.7476
Before Abu Ghraib	389				-18	-1.3882
Abu Ghraib	21				-3	-4.2857
After Abu Ghraib	1155				-18	-0.4675

Table 3-4. Gallup "Mistake Question" Iraq.<sup>272</sup>

<sup>272</sup> USA Today/Gallup Polls 3/24-25/2003 to 7/6-8/2007, MoE +/- 3, located at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq2.htm> (accessed July 30, 2007).

Date	# Days Between	Support	Oppose	Unsure	% Change in Support	Rate of Decline
Mar 20-22/03	0	71	22	7	0	0
Mar 23-24/03	3	74	21	5	3	30
Mar 25-27/03	2	74	21	5	0	0
Mar 28-Apr 1/03	3	69	25	6	-5	-50
Apr 2-7/03	5	72	20	8	3	18
Apr 8-9/03	6	74	19	7	2	10
Apr 10-16/03	2	74	19	7	0	0
Jun 20-2 Jul/03	71	67	24	9	-7	-2.9577
Jul 14-Aug 5/03	24	63	30	7	-4	-5
Sep 1/03	49	63	31	6	0	0
Oct 1/03	30	60	33	7	-3	-3
Dec 15-17/03	75	67	26	7	7	2.8
Dec 19-Jan 4/04	4	62	28	10	-5	-37.5
Jan 6-11/04	18	65	30	5	3	5
Feb 11-16/04	36	56	39	5	-9	-7.5
Feb 24-29/04	13	60	32	8	4	9.2308
Mar 17-21/04	22	55	39	6	-5	-6.8182
Apr 1-4/04	15	57	35	8	2	4
Apr 21-25/04	20	54	37	9	-3	-4.5
May 3-9/04	12	51	42	7	-3	-7.5
Jun 3-13/04	31	55	38	7	4	3.871
Jul 8-18/04	35	52	43	5	-3	-2.5714
Aug 5-10/04	28	53	41	6	1	1.0714
Sep 8-13/04	34	53	39	8	0	0
Oct 1-3/04	23	50	39	11	-3	-3.913
Oct 15-19/04	14	46	42	12	-4	-8.5714
Oct 27-30/04	12	48	41	11	2	5
Dec 1-16/04	35	49	44	7	1	0.8571
Jan 5-9/05	35	51	44	5	2	1.7143
Feb 16-21/05	42	47	47	6	-4	-2.8571
Jun 8-12/05	112	47	45	8	0	0
Jul 13-17/05	35	49	44	7	2	1.7143
Sep 8-11/05	57	49	44	7	0	0
Oct 6-10/05	28	44	50	6	-5	-5.3571
Dec 7-11/05	62	47	48	5	3	1.4516
Jan 4-8/06	28	45	47	8	-2	-2.1429
Feb 1-5/06	28	51	44	5	6	6.4286
Mar 8-12/06	35	45	49	6	-6	-5.1429
Apr 7-16	30	47	46	7	2	2
Jun 14-19/06	68	49	44	7	2	0.8824
Sep 21-Oct 4/06	99	45	47	8	-4	-1.2121
Oct 17-22/06	26	43	47	10	-2	-2.3077
Nov 9-12/06	23	41	51	8	-2	-2.6087
Dec 6-10/06	27	42	51	7	1	1.1111
Jan 10-15/07	35	40	51	9	-2	-1.7143
Feb 7-11/07	28	40	54	6	0	0
Mar 21-25/07	42	43	49	8	3	2.1429
Apr 18-22/07	28	45	47	8	2	2.1429
Entire War	1490				-26	-0.5235
Before	398				-17	-1.2814
Abu Ghraib	12				-3	-7.5
After	1080				-6	-0.1667

Table 3-5. Pew “Right/Wrong Question” Iraq.<sup>273</sup>

<sup>273</sup> Pew Research Center For People & The Press Surveys Conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, 3/20-22/2003 to 4/18-22/2007, MoE +/- 3, located at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq4.htm> (accessed July 30, 2007).

Date	# Days Between	Support	Opposition	No Opinion	% Change in Support	Rate of Decline
Jan 3-5 2003	0	53	42	5	0	0
Mar 24-25 2003	80	68	29	3	15	5.625
Apr 7-8 2003	14	67	30	3	-1	-2.1429
Apr 9 2003	2	76	19	5	9	135
Apr 14-16 2003	5	73	23	4	-3	-18
Jun 27-29 2003	74	56	42	2	-17	-6.8919
Jul 18-20 2003	21	63	35	2	7	10
Jul 25-27 2003	7	63	34	3	0	0
Aug 25-26 2003	31	63	35	2	0	0
Sep 8-10 2003	14	58	40	2	-5	-10.7143
Sep 19-21 2003	11	50	48	2	-8	-21.8182
Oct 6-8 2003	17	55	44	1	5	8.8235
Oct 24-26 2003	18	54	44	2	-1	-1.6667
Nov 3-5 2003	10	54	44	2	0	0
Nov 14-16 2003	11	56	42	2	2	5.4545
Dec 5-7 2003	21	59	39	2	3	4.2857
Dec 14 2003	9	62	33	5	3	10
Dec 15-16 2003	1	65	33	2	3	90
Jan 9-11 2004	25	59	38	3	-6	-7.2
Jan 29-Feb 1 2004	20	49	49	2	-10	-15
Mar 5-7 2004	36	55	43	2	6	5
Mar 26-28 2004	21	56	41	3	1	1.4286
Apr 5-8 2004	10	50	47	3	-6	-18
Apr 16-18 2004	11	52	46	2	2	5.4545
May 2-4 2004	16	50	47	3	-2	-3.75
May 7-9 2004	5	44	54	2	-6	-36
May 21-23 2004	14	45	52	3	1	2.1429
Jun 3-6 2004	13	46	53	2	1	2.3077
Jun 21-23 2004	18	46	51	3	0	0
Jul 8-11 2004	17	47	50	3	1	1.7647
Aug 9-11 2004	32	49	47	3	2	1.875
Aug 23-25 2004	14	50	46	3	1	2.1429
Sep 3-5 2004	11	49	48	3	-1	-2.7273
Oct 9-10 2004	36	44	54	2	-5	-4.1667
Jan 3-5 2005	86	46	52	2	2	0.6977
Feb 7-10 2005	35	48	50	2	2	1.7143
Apr 1-2 2005	53	46	53	1	-2	-1.1321
Apr 29-May 1 2005	28	41	57	2	-5	-5.3571
Jun 6-8 2005	38	41	56	2	0	0
Jul 7-10 2005	31	44	53	2	3	2.9032
Aug 5-7 2005	29	44	54	2	0	0
Sep 12-15 2005	38	45	54	1	1	0.7895
Nov 11-13 2005	60	38	60	2	-7	-3.5
Entire War	1043				-15	-0.4314
Before Abu Ghraib	469				-1	-0.064
Initial Release	16				-2	-3.75
2 May-7 May 04	5				-6	-36
7 May-21 May 04	14				1	2.1429
21 May-3 Jun 04	13				1	2.3077
After Abu Ghraib	526				-8	-0.4563

Table 3-6. Gallup “Worth It Question” Iraq.<sup>274</sup>

<sup>274</sup> CNN/USA Today/Gallup Polls, 1/3-5/2003 to 11/11-13/2006, MoE +/- 3, located at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq9.htm> (accessed July 30, 2007).

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## **IV. COMPARISON OF CASES**

Both My Lai and Abu Ghraib are similar incidents because both illustrate the effect of willful acts of atrocity, occurring during times of war or conflict, perpetrated by a few “bad apples.” Their actions, while not indicative of the military as a whole, did capture the attention of the American public as well as create concerns among decision makers that their occurrence would adversely affect public opinion support for the war. Nevertheless, careful examination of public opinion polling data, measuring generalized war support during the timeframes of these incidents, reveals seemingly different effects on public opinion support. While My Lai appears to have had little to no measurable effect whatsoever, Abu Ghraib seems to have adversely affected the public’s support for the Iraq War, at least in the short term. Placing the individual intricacies of My Lai and Abu Ghraib aside, why would these two similar incidents have differing outcomes? Possible explanations may be found in the lack of measurement points for My Lai, the fact that civilian casualty sensitivity may be greater now than it was during the Vietnam era, the fact that Americans seem have a heightened sensitivity to torture, the differences in how the perpetrators were held accountable, what the images actually showed the public, and, finally, the timing of when the incidents occurred during the war.

### **A. LACK OF MEASUREMENT POINTS**

Without belaboring the point, I would like to return briefly to the lack of measurement points for the My Lai case study. As I suggested in Chapter III, the advantage of the Abu Ghraib case study is that there are three separate but similar generalized war-support questions, asked by two different polling organizations, offering us eleven different measurement points only a few weeks apart, as opposed to several months apart, that allow us to effectively bracket the incident. This data helps facilitate a much more comprehensive and credible analysis of Abu Ghraib’s effect on public opinion support for the Iraq War. Abu Ghraib is representative of almost ideal conditions for measuring public opinion support. Exactly the opposite is true for My Lai. For My Lai, we have only one generalized war-support question, asked by one polling



organization, offering us only three measurement points spaced several months apart. Four months elapse between measurement points one and two and three more months go by between measurement points two and three. During wartime, measurement points spread months apart make it almost impossible to fine-tune public opinion trends. For My Lai, there are simply too many variables occurring over too long a period to draw any firm conclusions. As a result of these cumulative disadvantages, I was forced to coax out the effects of My Lai, based on the limited polling data coupled with the historical record. The danger here is the possibility of missing something, and in this case, missing the effect, because the information needed to identify the impact of the atrocity variable is simply not there. Therefore, it is possible that My Lai did affect public opinion support in a way similar to Abu Ghraib, but the lack of measurement points precludes me from being able to identify the drop in support. If My Lai followed a pattern similar to Abu Ghraib, then it is likely that the negative effect on war support would have been short, lasting only a couple of weeks after revelation of the incident on November 13, 1969. The recovery would have begun sometime in early December 1969 and would have been complete, long before our next measurement point on January 15, 1970. As suggested in Chapter II, Nixon's National Unity Campaign may have created a mini-rally during this period, further masking the effect of My Lai, or even shortening the duration of its effect, similar to what appears to have happened during the Abu Ghraib incident, following Bush's "Steps to Help Iraq Achieve Democracy and Freedom" speech in late May 2004. Unfortunately, there is no way to determine whether the My Lai atrocity really changed public opinion support during this timeframe. This is particularly troublesome for our purposes as atrocities of this magnitude do not appear to occur that often. While this is good for America, it is not necessarily good for measuring the effect of these types of incidents.

## **B. CIVILIAN CASUALTY SENSITIVITY—A MORE RECENT PHENOMENON?**

Another possible explanation for the public's apparent lack of response to My Lai is that the public's sensitivity to civilian casualties may be a phenomenon that has developed more recently. The American public may not have been nearly as sensitive to civilian casualties in the Vietnam era as it is in today's conflicts. As Larson and Savych pointed out in their recent study of the effects of civilian casualties on public opinion, America's increasing sensitivity to civilian casualties appears to be a growing phenomenon.<sup>275</sup> Interestingly, they begin their study with the 1991 Gulf War. The Gulf War was the dawn of precision-guided munitions. Americans were shown their military's incredible modern capabilities on national television. Laser-guided munitions were employed with sufficient precision to place them inside a small window or air conditioning duct in order to destroy an entire building, while minimizing collateral damage to other facilities located nearby. With precision comes accuracy, and with accuracy comes the responsibility of fewer mistakes. Therefore, it is possible then that the American public's expectations about civilian casualties were forever changed by its newly-found technological precision. This would seem to track with Gelpi and Feaver's conclusions about technology's ability to change the level of necessary combatant casualties that the public believes are necessary for victory in modern combat operations.<sup>276</sup> Although the United States possessed some limited precision-guided munitions capability during the Vietnam War, accuracy was poor. Precision-guided munitions were greatly improved by the Gulf War. Thus, the military's attempts to improve its post-Vietnam capability through greater precision and accuracy, and subsequent efforts to shed the "Vietnam Syndrome" during the Gulf War by marketing these newly-acquired capabilities on national television, may have had the unintentional consequence of forever changing the American public's expectations of acceptable levels of civilian casualties.

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<sup>275</sup> Larson and Savych, "Misfortunes of War," xxii.

<sup>276</sup> Gelpi and Mueller, "The Cost of War," 139.

Also important is the fact that neither Larson, Savych, nor Eichenberg (the only scholars to directly examine the effect of civilian casualties on public opinion support for a war or conflict) has examined the Vietnam period. Their work has been primarily on conflicts occurring post-1980. An interesting follow-up study would be to try to determine if the modern trend of greater attention to civilian casualties started as a result of the My Lai incident and gained momentum with the dawn of precision-guided munitions in the Gulf War. A related question would be whether My Lai could have caused military leaders, governmental elites, and the media to follow more closely civilian casualties because of their perceived effect on public opinion support? Although civilian casualties during war or conflict appear to have been mentioned more often by governmental elites in official briefings and press conferences since 1985<sup>277</sup> (Larson and Savych's first data point), we are not offered any evidence as to when this phenomenon began. This is potentially important as it may offer clues as to why the public responded differently to My Lai. Although My Lai may not have had a measurable impact on public opinion support for the Vietnam War, it may have had the indirect effect of creating perceptions about what effect these type of incidents have on support for the war or conflict. Nevertheless, what we do know for sure is that at some point in recent history, civilian casualties during wartime became highly "mediagenic" events.<sup>278</sup>

### **C. HEIGHTENED SENSITIVITY TO TORTURE**

While the beginnings of the public's sensitivity to civilian casualties are not clear, we do know that Americans do not like torture or maltreatment. In July 2004, a short two months following the Abu Ghraib revelations, the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) and Knowledge Networks conducted a random survey of 892 Americans nationwide to determine how Americans viewed the issues of detention and torture, especially within the context of the war on terrorism:

Of those surveyed, the largest majority (66 percent) said 'governments should never use physical torture,' while 30 percent believed this was 'too restrictive.' Similarly, 55 percent said 'governments should never use

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<sup>277</sup> Larson and Savych, "Misfortunes of War," 206.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, xx.

mental torture (such as making someone think that they or their family members will be killed),’ while 41 percent indicated that this was ‘too restrictive.’ Finally, 52 percent answered that ‘governments should never use humiliating or degrading treatment,’ with 42 percent commenting that this was ‘too restrictive.’<sup>279</sup>

Similarly, PIPA questioned those polled about torture within the context of the war on terrorism:

Seventy-five percent found convincing the argument that torture and abuse is ‘morally wrong,’ and that ‘the United States as a great nation, and as a moral leader in the world, should not set a bad example by engaging in torture or cruel or degrading treatment.’<sup>280</sup>

PIPA then went further beyond these generalized questions to probe respondents’ feelings about scenarios where detainees are believed to have information that could be useful in fighting terrorism. Using a high certainty of obtaining information in a high-consequences “ticking bomb” scenario, respondents were presented with 14 different coercive methods. “Of these methods, the most widely rejected was the use of sexual humiliation, which was approved by just 7-11 percent of the sample.”<sup>281</sup> PIPA’s survey is especially useful as it was conducted a scant two months following Abu Ghraib, and because it reveals that a clear majority of Americans do not like torture, especially the use of sexual humiliation as a coercive method, even in a high-consequences scenario. Many of the visual images we have of Abu Ghraib convey naked prisoners in suggestive poses indicative of attempts at sexual humiliation. Recall as well that Hersh reported that a Special Access Program (SAP) actually encouraged the use of physical coercion and sexual humiliation of Iraqi prisoners with the intent of producing actionable intelligence.<sup>282</sup> Finally, the torture at Abu Ghraib, while occurring primarily in the fall of 2003, came to light at a particularly sensitive time following the graphic photographs of

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<sup>279</sup> The PIPA/Knowledge Networks Poll, *The American Public on International Issues*, “Americans on Detention, Torture, and the War on Terrorism,” (July 22, 2004), located at [http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Terrorism/Torture\\_Jul04/Torture\\_Jul04\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Terrorism/Torture_Jul04/Torture_Jul04_rpt.pdf) (accessed September 28, 2007): 5-6.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>282</sup> Hersh, *Chain of Command*, 46-47 and Anonymous, “Orders to Torture,” *The Nation* 278, no. 22 (June 7, 2004).

American contractors whose bodies were mutilated and hung from a bridge outside Fallujah in March 2004.<sup>283</sup> It is reasonable to conclude the Americans expect more from their professional military than from the insurgents we are trying to defeat. No wonder the maltreatment at Abu Ghraib created such an outcry from the American people.

#### **D. DIFFERENCES IN ACCOUNTABILITY**

Perhaps nowhere are the differences between My Lai and Abu Ghraib more apparent than in terms of accountability. The slaughter of dozens of unarmed civilians at My Lai is quite different from the torture and mistreatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib. On the scale of immoral and unethical activity, the slaughter of hundreds of innocents would seemingly win out as the greater of the two evils, when compared to torture, if only because of its finality. Nevertheless, neither form of atrocity is appropriate behavior for a professional military force, and the American public seemed to recognize that. Strangely though, the public responded more strongly to the maltreatment at Abu Ghraib than it did to the massacre at My Lai. Some of this may be explainable by analyzing who was held accountable and how. Although much of this transpired well after the initial effect of the incident, it is nevertheless important to our understanding of the differences of these two important case studies.

Returning to the “My Lai poll” (Gallup Poll #795 12/12/1969-12/15/1969) for a moment, remember that 45 percent of those polled believed the soldiers should not be punished for their role in the massacre. Another 27 percent indicated that they had no opinion on the matter. When these two categories are combined, we find that 72 percent of those who had heard about My Lai either did not believe the soldiers should be punished, or did not feel strongly repulsed enough by the massacre to offer an opinion on the matter. Furthermore, of those who indicated that the soldiers should not be punished, 15 percent indicated “They did as they were told,” 12 percent stated, “It is war,” and 9 percent said “They are there to do a job.”<sup>284</sup> As I suggested in Chapter II, this response

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<sup>283</sup> Richard Lardner and Mike Baker, Associated Press Release, “Probe Says Contractor Provoked Fallujah Battle,” *The Monterey County Herald*, Friday, September 28, 2007.

<sup>284</sup> Gallup Brian, Gallup Poll #795, <http://institution.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=AIPO0795> (accessed July 15, 2007).

does not necessarily mean that Americans were callous, but rather that My Lai just did not create the widespread outrage at those responsible for the massacre that Abu Ghraib did. This may be because, from the initial release of the story, most of the attention was focused on Calley, probably in response to media and elite cues. Some of the American people reacted initially with disbelief, but others were concerned about the implications the news reports had for Calley's ability to receive a fair trial.<sup>285</sup> While the military seemed to recognize Calley's culpability, the public did not. Years later, following Calley's court-martial, this put the military and the government in further conflict with the public. Of course, by the time of Calley's trial in March 1971, the public was even sicker of hearing about Vietnam than it was in November 1969. Put simply, how My Lai was handled from the beginning apparently did not satisfy the public, who had already indicated as early as one month following the incident that it felt others should also be held accountable.<sup>286</sup>

Abu Ghraib would spark a much different reaction from the American people. According to a Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll held May 7-9, 2004, 73 percent of 1,003 Americans polled felt that under no circumstances was the abuse of prisoners justified.<sup>287</sup> Furthermore, 71 percent of the sample felt that the abuses were serious offenses that deserved criminal punishment.<sup>288</sup> Subsequently, 65 percent blamed the soldiers who carried out the abuse at the prison "a great deal" for their behavior.<sup>289</sup> Public opinion about Abu Ghraib seems to have been more broadly focused on the effect of the incident on America's values and reputation as a country that protects civil liberties.<sup>290</sup> Abu

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<sup>285</sup> E.W. Kenworthy, "Song My 1: Questions for the Conscience of a Nation," *The New York Times*, November 30, 1969, and "Most Back Calley in a Poll for Time," *The New York Times*, January 5, 1970.

<sup>286</sup> S. Mintz. Public Opinion Polls, My Lai. *Digital History*. Retrieved July 13, 2007 from [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning\\_history/vietnam/survey\\_q4.cfm](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning_history/vietnam/survey_q4.cfm).

<sup>287</sup> Survey by Cable News Network, USA Today and Gallup Organization, May 7-May 9, 2004. Retrieved September 30, 2007 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>>

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Survey by Cable News Network, USA Today and Gallup Organization, January 7-January 9, 2005. Retrieved September 30, 2007 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll/html>>.

Ghraib made the public angry because it represented disgraceful behavior by American soldiers, indicative of the kind of government that the United States was trying to replace in Iraq. Also, as mentioned previously, Abu Ghraib did not seem to have a central figure like My Lai. There were no single individuals who became scapegoats in the public's eyes. Instead, the whole barrel of "bad apples" was punished. Punishment also seemed to be more standardized, with almost all of the perpetrators receiving some form of prison sentence. Although far from perfect, perhaps the harsher and more timely military justice following Abu Ghraib better satisfied the American people.

#### **E. WHAT THE IMAGES SHOWED**

Also potentially important are the images of what the American people actually saw at the time these incidents were revealed. Put simply, the photographs of the scenes of the wrongdoings convey a different message based on what they show or fail to show the public. Although Hersh and others credit the *CBS Evening News* interview of Paul Meadlo on the night of November 24, 1969 as the event that really made My Lai "big for America," the Haeberle photographs, which show numerous dead Vietnamese civilians, had already been published by several major newspapers including *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* and *The Washington Star*.<sup>291</sup> CBS had even shown several of the photographs on television four days prior to its interview with Meadlo.<sup>292</sup>

Perhaps the most iconic photograph from My Lai is the famous irrigation ditch scene, depicting the site of Lieutenant Calley's slaughter of numerous unarmed Vietnamese civilians in a drainage ditch just outside the village. One of the most frequently published photographs of the massacre, it appears in almost every on-line search for pictures of this incident.

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<sup>291</sup> Hersh, *My Lai-4*, 152, and Belknap, *The Vietnam War on Trial*, 120.

<sup>292</sup> Belknap, *The Vietnam War on Trial*, 120.



Figure 4-1. The My Lai Massacre.<sup>293</sup>

While I would not attempt to downplay the significance or horror depicted by this scene from My Lai, I cannot help but wonder why Americans of the 1960s responded to this photo in the way they did. Hersh notes that it was this very photo that appeared on the front page of *The Washington Star* sparking outrage among its readers.<sup>294</sup> Moreover, other complaints about the content of this photograph, published in major newspapers across the United States, described its publication as “anti-American, inappropriate, or even obscene.”<sup>295</sup> Some *Washington Star* subscribers indicated that their offense to this photograph came from the fact that several of the dead victims were unclothed.<sup>296</sup> Strangely, this would seem to indicate that the *Washington Star* readers were more disturbed by the nudity depicted in the photographs than they were about the dead bodies. Perhaps this is because of the symbolic sexual humiliation that pictures of unclothed and dead Vietnamese lying in a ditch portrays. (I will return to the discussion of the importance of sexual humiliation in the subsequent discussion of the photos of the Abu Ghraib incident.) Subsequently, Hersh records that following release of the photos, a *Time* magazine poll of 1600 households revealed that “65 percent of Americans believed

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<sup>293</sup> Google.com. “My Lai Massacre Photos.”  
<http://images.google.com/images?q=The+My+Lai+Massacre+Photos&ndsp=20&svnum=10&um=1&hl=en&rls=DKUS,DKUS:2006-27,DKUS:en&start=100&sa=N> (accessed November 6, 2007).

<sup>294</sup> Hersh, *My Lai-4*, 152.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.



such incidents were bound to happen in any war.”<sup>297</sup> Also potentially important is the fact that the photograph depicts the aftermath of the incident, failing to capture Americans in the process of committing the massacre. There are no images of American soldiers in the photograph, which does not elicit the same emotional outcry as those that capture American soldiers clearly engaging in wrongdoing.

Moreover, the photograph portrays a scene of dead Vietnamese wearing the standard black pajamas of those living in the region. As a reminder, Americans were told by the media, their elite leaders, and those present at My Lai that U.S. soldiers were responsible for the massacre at the time of the photographs release. Nevertheless, many Americans refused to believe that their military was capable of this kind of unjustifiable slaughter.<sup>298</sup> This begs the question as to whether the American public somehow could accept that in the fog and friction of the difficult and dangerous counter-insurgency style of warfare conducted in Vietnam, in an atmosphere where the enemy was clothed in the same black pajamas as the civilian population, that mistakes were bound to happen? Or perhaps was this the response of large numbers of Americans who were veterans of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, who understood that atrocities occur during wartime? Although a somewhat weak argument, because the photograph also portrays dead Vietnamese children, it could be argued that the public did not fault the military for what it may have perceived as a potential inability to differentiate between enemy combatants and civilians. This would seem to be consistent with the military’s long-standing reputation as one of America’s most trusted institutions. Put another way, perhaps the American public gave the military the benefit of the doubt in response to the My Lai photos, not because it had to, but because it wanted to.

The Abu Ghraib photos would provoke quite a different response from Americans. Rather than responding with disbelief, anger at the press, or even understanding, Americans were offended and even angry about the Abu Ghraib

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<sup>297</sup> Hersh, *My Lai-4*, 153.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

photos.<sup>299</sup> I have included three famous photographs from Abu Ghraib, all iconic because of what they portray. The first is a picture of then Corporal Charles Graner about to punch a bound detainee on the prison floor. The second is a picture of Private Lynndie England leading a naked, leashed prisoner across the floor of the prison. The third photo shows a detainee standing on top of a Meals Ready to Eat (MRE) box, with electrical wires attached to his fingers and genitals, while an obviously bored U.S. soldier looks on.



Figure 4-2. Abu Ghraib Graner.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Matt Welch, “The Pentagon’s Secret Stash,” *Reason* 36, no. 11 (April 2005) and Erin Madigan, “The Cost of War and A Thousand Words,” *National Journal* 37, no. 20, (May 14, 2005), “My Deepest Apology From Rumsfeld; ‘Nothing Less Than Tragic,’ Says Top General,” *The New York Times Late Edition*, (May 8, 2004), Fred Hiatt, “Why Hawks Should Be Angry,” *The Washington Post*, (May 31, 2004), and Linda Feldmann, “Abuse Photos Harden U.S. War Divide; As Democrats Demand Rumsfeld’s Resignation and Cheney Backs Him Up, Few Americans Are Altering Their Views,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, (May 10, 2004).

<sup>300</sup> Joan Walsh, “The Abu Ghraib Files: Dog Pile,” *Salon.com*, [http://www.salon.com/news/abu\\_ghraib/2006/03/14/introduction/](http://www.salon.com/news/abu_ghraib/2006/03/14/introduction/) (accessed November 6, 2007).



Figure 4-3. Abu Ghraib England.<sup>301</sup>



Figure 4-4. Abu Ghraib Frederick.<sup>302</sup>

Clearly, there can be no benefit of the doubt given to these soldiers. There is no way their behavior could be misconstrued as a mistake or even accidental. This is intentional and deliberate misconduct. The soldiers are calm and relaxed, appearing to know exactly what they are doing. Unlike the My Lai photo, these pictures show the soldiers in the actual process of mistreating their prisoners. Also, it is clear that these are American soldiers who are responsible for this maltreatment.

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<sup>301</sup> Joan Walsh, "The Abu Ghraib Files: Dehumanization," *Salon.com*, [http://www.salon.com/news/abu\\_ghraib/2006/03/14/introduction/](http://www.salon.com/news/abu_ghraib/2006/03/14/introduction/) (accessed November 6, 2007).

<sup>302</sup> Joan Walsh, "The Abu Ghraib Files: Electrical Wires," *Salon.com*, [http://www.salon.com/news/abu\\_ghraib/2006/03/14/introduction/](http://www.salon.com/news/abu_ghraib/2006/03/14/introduction/) (accessed November 6, 2007).

I refrained from including the more graphic photographs of naked Iraqis in dog piles or bloody from beatings for obvious reasons. Nevertheless, I would like to remind the reader that in an earlier segment of this chapter, I mentioned that the most widely rejected form of physical coercion in a PIPA poll was the use of sexual humiliation. Many of the other Abu Ghraib photos show the prisoners being subjected to various forms of sexual humiliation. According to the PIPA poll, Americans do not have any tolerance for this type of treatment, even in the context of fighting a war on terrorism. Clearly, this is unacceptable behavior that could not be misconstrued as something else.

Finally, perhaps the public's response to these pictures reveals something about its understanding of the context of these incidents. The My Lai massacre occurred on the battlefield, in an insecure environment, cloaked in the inevitable fog and friction of war. Soldiers were being shot at every day, making self-defense a much more plausible explanation. However, Abu Ghraib occurred inside a maximum security prison. While still a hazardous environment, it was relatively secure as compared to the lethality of the open battlefield. In this type of controlled environment, the soldiers clearly had the upper hand. At Abu Ghraib, the enemy had been clearly identified, searched, disarmed, and incarcerated. Thus the threat to U.S. forces was much different, as was the lack of any possible justification for their behavior. Undoubtedly, this was not lost on the "pretty prudent" public.

## **F. TIMING**

The occurrence of these events within the timeline of their respective wars may also be of significance. The My Lai massacre occurred fairly late in the Vietnam War, well after support had dropped below 50 percent and had remained there for quite some time. In fact, although support for the Vietnam War began at a slightly lower rate as compared to the Iraq War, it held until April 1967, when support dropped consistently

below 50 percent for the remainder of the conflict.<sup>303</sup> By the time of the September 1969 poll, those reporting that they supported the war had dropped from 60 percent in September 1965 to 32 percent in September 1969, or a total of approximately 28 percentage points.<sup>304</sup> Support would only drop a meager 4 percent further between September 1969 and the last poll of the war conducted in January 1973.<sup>305</sup> (The slightly positive up tick of support in May 1970 was probably a mini-rally driven by Nixon's Cambodian invasion, but once concluded, the pattern of support returns to normal for the war.) Similarly, comparison of the September 1969 and January 1973 polls shows that roughly 10 percent of the population reported that it had "no opinion" about the war.<sup>306</sup> This means that by the time of the My Lai massacre, most of the damage to war support had already been done. Beliefs about the war had long since polarized into one of two camps. The diehard supporters of the war were not going to change their opinions, and neither were those who vehemently opposed it. Similarly, the small minority who apparently still could not make up their minds by this late in the conflict were not likely to be influenced much by events. Moreover, by November 1969, the U.S. had been heavily involved in Vietnam for more than four years, paying significant costs in terms of

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<sup>303</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. August 27-September 1, 1965, March 3-8, 1966, May 5-10, 1966, September 8-13, 1966, November 10-15, 1966, January 26-31, 1967, April 19-24, 1967, July 13-18, 1967, October 6-11, 1967, December 7-12, 1967, February 2-6, 1968, February 22-27, 1968, August 7-12, 1968, April 4-9, 1968, September 26-October 1, 1968, January 23-28, 1969, September 17-22, 1969, January 15-20, 1970, April 2-7, 1970, May 21-26, 1970, January 8-11, 1971, May 14-17, 1971, January 12-15, 1973, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>> and Gallup Brain, Gallup Poll #725, <http://institution.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=AIPO0725> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>304</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. August 27-September 1, 1965, , March 3-8, 1966, May 5-10, 1966, September 8-13, 1966, November 10-15, 1966, January 26-31, 1967, April 19-24, 1967, July 13-18, 1967, October 6-11, 1967, December 7-12, 1967, February 2-6, 1968, February 22-27, 1968, August 7-12, 1968, April 4-9, 1968, September 26-October 1, 1968, January 23-28, 1969, September 17-22, 1969, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>> and Gallup Brain, Gallup Poll #725, <http://institution.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=AIPO0725> (accessed July 15, 2007).

<sup>305</sup> Survey by Gallup Organization. September 17-22, 1969, January 15-20, 1970, April 2-7, 1970, May 21-26, 1970, January 8-11, 1971, May 14-17, 1971, January 12-15, 1973, Retrieved August 30, 2007 from the IPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, <<http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/ipoll.html>> and Gallup Brain, Gallup Poll #725, <http://institution.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=AIPO0725> (accessed July 15, 2007).

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

blood and treasure. By the end of 1969, the U.S. had suffered 47,768 combat related casualties, or 82 percent of its total casualties for the entire Vietnam War.<sup>307</sup> Similarly, the United States would ultimately spend \$111 billion on the war in Vietnam.<sup>308</sup> Costs of war by this period were even high enough to justify a national draft, with the first Selective Service drawing held December 1, 1969, just following release of the news of the massacre.<sup>309</sup> Clearly, this late in the war, Vietnam had been “up close and personal” in the lives of many Americans. Perhaps America’s sympathy towards Vietnamese civilians and their subsequent suffering had also diminished by late 1969. This is not to suggest that America condoned the atrocity at My Lai, but rather that by this late in the war, concern about the bad things happening to the Vietnamese may have been overshadowed by America’s own heavy losses.

It is also probable that some of America’s response to the My Lai incident can be explained by nothing more than simple racism towards Vietnamese and Asians in general. The Vietnam War was our third consecutive war in the Asian theater. The generation of Americans that fought in Vietnam was only one generation away from those who fought the Japanese in WWII, and less than a generation away from those who served in Korea. One need not look much further than the language used to describe the Vietnamese during this era, including such derogatory terms as “gook,” “dink,” and “slope.” Calley’s original indictment charged him with the murder of “Oriental human beings,” rather than Vietnamese.<sup>310</sup> This was a time when the civil rights movement was still fairly new and political correctness was unheard of. Therefore, it is likely that many Americans simply discounted the value of Vietnamese life and Asians in general. Abu Ghraib occurred in a completely different era under a new mindset. Today our political correctness and sensitivity towards racism, improper behavior, and maltreatment has

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<sup>307</sup> The National Archives, Statistical Information About Casualties of the Vietnam Conflict, <http://www.archives.gov/research/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.html#year> (accessed September 24, 2007).

<sup>308</sup> Statistical Summary: America’s Major Wars, The United States Civil War Center, located at <http://www.cwc.lsu.edu/other/stats/warcost.htm> (accessed October 5, 2007).

<sup>309</sup> Selective Service System, History and Records: Vietnam Lotteries, located at <http://www.sss.gov/lotter1.htm> (accessed October 5, 2007).

<sup>310</sup> Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, 21.

permeated nearly every aspect of society to include the military. All members of the armed services are now required to conduct annual equal opportunity training. This is in stark contrast to the era of the Vietnam War. Put simply, things have changed.

The Abu Ghraib incident occurred fairly early in the Iraq War at a time when support had not yet fallen below 50 percent. Using the Gallup “mistake question” again for consistency, we find that by the time of the Abu Ghraib incident, support had fallen from its highpoint of 75 percent in the March 24-25, 2003 poll, to 57 percent by the April 16-18, 2004 poll, for a total drop of 18 percent.<sup>311</sup> When Mueller reported that support dropped off more rapidly during the Iraq War, his conclusions were based on the effect of cumulative casualties over time.<sup>312</sup> Interestingly though, when the effect of time is examined separate from casualties, it appears that support for the Iraq War actually lasted quite a bit longer than for Vietnam. Using the Gallup “mistake question” for consistency in comparison, support fell regularly below 50 percent beginning in August 2005.<sup>313</sup> This means that a majority of Americans supported the war for the first 29 months of the conflict. Even in the worst case scenario, where the Vietnam “mistake question” is compared to the Gallup “worth it” question, support held the majority for almost 18 months of war, as compared to Vietnam where support held a majority for almost 20 months.<sup>314</sup> Thus, even for the worst case scenario, war support lasted a comparable amount of time. Therefore, the only real difference with Abu Ghraib is that the incident occurred early in the conflict, at a time when support was falling, but had not yet fallen below the 50 percent threshold. Except for the Gallup “worth it” question, which appears to be a little different anyway, majority support would hold for quite some time even after the public became aware of the incident. Clearly, for the Iraq War, permanent damage had not yet been done to public opinion support, and “war weariness” had not yet set in. Similarly, by the time of the Abu Ghraib incident, the U.S. had not yet paid as high a cost

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<sup>311</sup> USA Today/Gallup Polls 3/24-25/2003 to 7/6-8/2007, MoE +/- 3, located at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq2.htm> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>312</sup> Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome,” 44, and Gelpi and Mueller, “The Cost of War,” 139.

<sup>313</sup> USA Today/Gallup Polls 3/24-25/2003 to 7/6-8/2007, MoE +/- 3, located at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq2.htm> (accessed July 30, 2007).

<sup>314</sup> CNN/USA Today/Gallup Polls, 1/3-5/2003 to 11/11-13/2006, MoE +/- 3, located at <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq9.htm> (accessed July 30, 2007).

to the Iraq War in terms of casualties. By April 2004, the U.S. casualty numbers were at 738, or roughly 20 percent for the entire war period as of the end of August 2007.<sup>315</sup> Although the exact cost numbers for April 2004 are not available, by the end of 2004 the Iraq War had cost the United States \$77.3 billion.<sup>316</sup> Compared in terms of casualties and fiscal costs, by April 2004, the Iraq War had not yet cost the U.S. nearly what the Vietnam War had by the time the My Lai incident occurred. Perhaps by this period, Americans had not become as weary of the war in Iraq as they did in Vietnam. Only time can reveal the long term effects of what the public felt and when for the Iraq War.

## G. CONCLUSION

Explaining why these case studies had differing results is a difficult if not almost impossible endeavor. For My Lai, we may never know for sure because we do not have the information we need to find the effect. It would seem logical that My Lai would have had more of a measurable effect on public opinion support for the Vietnam War, given all that we know about the variables that can cause a change, albeit short-term change, in support for a war or conflict. As a result, the lack of data explanation would seem to best explain why there was no effect for My Lai. Most likely, there was some sort of effect, but either we cannot find it because we do not have enough data to bracket the incident or the rather weak ability of the atrocity variable to change support was somehow overshadowed by the presidential rally going on at the same time. It would not be difficult for an average presidential rally of 3-5 percentage points to overshadow or even cancel out the effect of the atrocity variable of roughly the same magnitude.

Also strong is the explanation that heightened civilian casualty sensitivity is a more recent, growing phenomenon. Nevertheless, Americans were probably always sensitive to civilian casualties. After all, we value human life, unlike those who seek to inflict mass casualties. However, modern precision-guided munitions and almost real-

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<sup>315</sup> Global War on Terrorism: Operation Iraqi Freedom Casualties, By Month (March 19, 2003 through September 1, 2007, located at <http://siadapp.dmdcosd.mil/personnel/casualty/OIF-Total-by-month.pdf> (accessed September 24, 2007).

<sup>316</sup> Jonathan Weisman, "Projected Iraq War Costs Soar: Total Spending Is Likely to More Than Double, Analysis Finds," *The Washington Post*, (April 27, 2006), located at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/04/26/AR2006042601601.html> (accessed October 5, 2007).



time media reporting bring the horrors of war to the forefront of our awareness and discussion. Knowledge of precision changes the public's expectations of what is acceptable and unacceptable in war. As Jesus Christ said, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."<sup>317</sup>

America's hyper-sensitivity to torture is also a salient explanation for why Abu Ghraib captured the public's attention and created such an outcry. The available polling data on how Americans feel about torture and especially sexual humiliation assuredly seems to fit the context of the Abu Ghraib incident. Similarly, the differences in accountability for the "bad apples" of My Lai and Abu Ghraib are also important because of the resulting public's perceptions of unfairness for the military's handling of Calley's punishment and subsequent sense of justice it seems to have felt for the Abu Ghraib perpetrators. Although punishment was handed down long after the effect of the incident would have worn off, for My Lai, Calley was singled-out from the beginning, and from the beginning, the American public demanded that others be held accountable as well.

Likewise, the images of American soldiers abusing their prisoners at Abu Ghraib left little doubt as to their intentions or who was responsible for the behavior. Unlike the photographs of My Lai, the Abu Ghraib photos showed soldiers unfeelingly committing their crimes. Finally, the four long years of costly combat in Vietnam had probably done more damage to public opinion support than could ever be done by any single incident, even of this magnitude. Moreover, although support for the Iraq War was falling, Americans were still trying to make up their minds about the war when Abu Ghraib occurred. Subsequently, Abu Ghraib seemed to really damage the credibility of an administration already reeling from the effects of not finding weapons of mass destruction, which it used to justify the war in Iraq. Therefore, the individual intricacy of these particular incidents seems to fill the gap where the public opinion polling data falls short. Unfortunately, only the occurrence of more wartime atrocities can further our knowledge of this difficult to understand variable affecting public opinion support.

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<sup>317</sup> Luke 12:46b, *Life Application Bible: New International Version*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc and Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 1831.

## V. CONCLUSION

### A. ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

At the onset of this thesis project, I sought to determine whether acts of atrocity cause a negative effect on public opinion support for a war or conflict. Additionally, I sought to answer three related questions: Do these acts of atrocity effectively “finish off” public opinion about a war or conflict, or are they merely “bumps and wiggles” in the public support timeline? Can we predict the extremity of the shift in public opinion support following one of these incidents? Are certain types of military misconduct more prone to cause a negative effect on public support?

Clearly, neither the My Lai massacre nor the Abu Ghraib prisoner scandal effectively finished off public opinion support for either conflict, as evidenced by the public opinion polling questions from Gallup and Pew designed to measure generalized war support. Moreover, as the Abu Ghraib case study reveals, it appears that these incidents only have a short-term impact on public opinion support, lasting only a few weeks to about a month in duration. Long-term, the data reveals that public opinion support quickly returns to a pattern indicative of the particular war or conflict. Therefore, we can conclude that the atrocity variable is not as powerful as one would expect. At best, it is a weak variable affecting public opinion support, representing nothing more than a “bump or wiggle” in the overall public opinion support timeline. Following this same line of reasoning, the atrocity variable also appears to yield to the stronger variables at play, including perceptions of success or failure, casualties, time, elite influences, and media priming. Also notable, is that the data fail to reveal any discernable patterns about where the opposition comes from. At times, those in the undecided category move over to the opposition category, yielding a percentage point or two, while at other times, the change comes from those who had previously supported the war. This suggests that the atrocity variable is more powerful at solidifying pre-existing views about a war or conflict, than at changing particular viewpoints.

Attempts to predict the extremity of shift in public opinion support caused by the atrocity variable are problematic. Because the atrocity variable is a weak variable,

yielding a barely discernable change over a short period of time, we are at the mercy of the limitations of the available public opinion polling data. As we saw with the My Lai case, sometimes the data fails to effectively bracket the incident, offering us a poor snapshot of the before and after effect. Additionally, the My Lai data revealed that inconsistencies in rounding or discrepancies with the sources reporting the data can create confusion, and potentially lead to false results. Similarly, all of the major polling organizations issue a disclaimer for their data, with a plus or minus 3 percent margin of error. When looking for an effect that is already small (about 3 percent), and short-lived (better measured in weeks than in months), this creates a question about how much of this change in support is due to margin of error in the data or actual changes in support. Also important is what other variables are in play at the time of the incident. As our case studies showed, the president's ability to rally the American people could completely overshadow the atrocity variable or help set public opinion back on course. This suggests a certain amount of instability for the atrocity variable. Unfortunately, more case studies are necessary to better understand the extremity of the shift caused by the variable, given the limitations of the available data and case studies.

Examination of the case studies reveals that the public reacted quite differently to My Lai than it did for Abu Ghraib. Although complex, it would appear that the public does react differently to certain types of misconduct than it does for others. Because I have already devoted an entire chapter to why I believe this to be the case, I will not draw any new conclusions here, but instead will re-emphasize a few key points. Although our "pretty prudent" public is far from perfect, it is fair. It did not like what it saw following My Lai, but it was willing to give the military the benefit of the doubt, because it understands that mistakes are made in the awfulness of war. At the time, World War II veterans were only one generation removed from those serving in Vietnam. Korean War veterans were less than a generation removed. Perhaps the public's sense of fairness/unfairness was further magnified for the My Lai case by the images it saw of Lieutenant William Calley. Calley appeared very young and innocent, although today we know that he was not. However, Calley's appearance may have caused the public to question the fairness of the burden of warfare as placed on the shoulders of the nation's

youth—specifically, the burden to carry out the policies of an administration fighting an unpopular war. As such, the already “war weary” public was more willing to put the media, military, governmental elites, and the foreign policy on trial as opposed to the person. Abu Ghraib was completely different. The public could not give the soldiers the benefit of the doubt because the images it saw clearly showed maltreatment occurring. There was no innocence to be found in the faces of Specialist Charles Graner and Private Lynndie England. There was no fog and friction of the battlefield to prompt the benefit of the doubt, only a semi-secure prison environment. As such, the public demanded justice from the perpetrators of the injustice. For Abu Ghraib, the public was more willing to put the perpetrators on trial than the media, military, governmental elites, or the foreign policy.

Finally, although based on only two data periods, the differences in the results for these two case studies suggest a possible trend towards an increasingly negative public reaction to these types of incidents. Therefore, future acts of atrocity may resonate more strongly with the public than My Lai or Abu Ghraib did. This leads to several important policy implications.

## **B. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

While the My Lai and Abu Ghraib incidents only affected public opinion support in the short-term, there are several important long-term policy implications that can be gleaned from our analysis of these two case studies. First, the cases revealed that the president emerges on top with regards to his ability to shape public opinion support for foreign policy. As the My Lai and Abu Ghraib rallies illustrate, the president’s ability to “rally the public ‘round the flag” is an important tool can be used to minimize the effect of the atrocity variable or at least place public opinion back on track to a degree consistent with the pattern of the particular war or conflict. Second, although acts of atrocity do not affect public opinion support over the long-term, they can create quite a distraction for policy makers, at least in the short-term. Much of this is due to the “mediagenic” nature of these events. The longer it takes to appropriately resolve one of these incidents, the worse off an administration will be in terms of negative press. The peril here really lies in the amount of effort required to manage the bad press versus

concentrate on the mission at hand—specifically the war effort. These incidents are a distraction from the mission and therefore should be handled as swiftly as possible, if for no other reason than they are a morale killer for troops serving in the theater of operations where they occur. Also, as suggested in the previous section, future events may resonate more strongly with the public, creating an increasingly negative reaction and more severe consequences for decision-makers. Third, perceptions of a cover-up, whether real or perceived, only make things worse, because they generate additional reporting on an incident, prolonging its impact. Regardless of policy makers’ best intentions to protect troops serving in a particular theater of operations, once the media gets wind of one of these stories—it will report it, and probably sooner as opposed to later. It would be better for policy makers to have a good plan to get the story out to the public, but in such a way where the facts are reported accurately. This will continue to be a challenge for senior military leaders. Somehow, a balance must be struck between the need for operational security (OPSEC), the requirement to ensure the accused receive a fair trial, and the necessity to protect troops serving in a particular theater versus the need to get the story out. Fourth, accountability is important to the public, as is fairness, and justice. This extends all the way up and down the chain of command. Failure to maintain proper accountability creates the perception that only the junior officers and enlisted personnel bear the brunt of the punishment for incidents that clearly extend higher into the chain of command. This is certainly not lost on the “pretty prudent” public, junior officers, or enlisted personnel. Finally, although these acts of atrocity do not have a lasting impact domestically, they create a much different reaction with regards to our international partners. Prudent policy makers would do well to remember that international support may not bounce back as easily or as quickly as domestic support.

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