

The Grand Rapids Press and Coverage of the Iraq War

ACTIVATE

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Overall Analysis of Press' Coverage of Iraq

- 1) There is a disproportionate amount of official government sources used in stories on the war in Iraq, with minimal use of Iraqi voices, international voices, or critics of the war. Democrats, in our opinion, would not constitute a dissenting perspective in most cases as many of them voted for the war and almost all have voted to continue funding the war.
Action – Utilize other news sources; international, national and local.

- 2) The human and economic cost of the war has been limited and generally one sided. Most coverage of the human cost has resulted in coverage of US soldier deaths, but rarely Iraqi civilian deaths. <http://iraqbodycount.net/> <http://icasualties.org/oif/> <http://costofwar.com/index.html> In the case of US soldiers, rarely is there information on the thousands who have been wounded and the difficulties they face once back in the US. Profiles of local soldier families could include more reporting on their emotional and economic difficulties.
Action – Report on all casualties and include footage and commentary on the human suffering the war has caused, both in Iraq and locally. With the economic cost of the war, there has been limited coverage of the real cost to taxpayers, the use of private security firms in Iraq and companies who have been profiting off the war. <http://warprofiteers.com/article.php?list=type&type=176>
<http://iraqforsale.org/profiteers.php> <http://www.mediamouse.org/resources/contracts.php>
Action – Provide viewers with more information on war profiteers (nationally and locally), how public tax money is being used by the Pentagon, and what is happening with federal legislation on war funding oversight. There also could be reporting on the relationship between military spending and economic difficulties locally.

- 3) There is a double standard when reporting on pro-war positions and anti-war positions. If the US administration, the US military, a Michigan Senator or Representative, or a local military family is sourced/cited in a story rarely to viewed hear a counter-argument. However, when anti-war groups take a position or hold a demonstration, most of the time a pro-war position is included.
Action – Have more balance with Pro and Anti-war positions. Utilize local voices more often as there are groups engaged in educational efforts, lobbying and organized campaigns against the war on an ongoing basis. www.activategr.org <http://www.justiceandpeacecoalition.org/>

Grand Rapids Press Coverage of the Iraq War: 02/19/07 to 02/25/07

Total Number of Stories: 22

Stories by the Grand Rapids Press: 1
Stories by the Associated Press: 13
Stories by the New York Times: 3
Stories by the Washington Post: 2
Stories by Cox News Service: 2
Stories by Press News Service: 1

Sources Quoted:

US Government / Military:

Dick Cheney – 2
Marine General – 1
Army General – 1
Army Sergeant – 1
Army Staff Sergeant – 1
General – 1
Lieutenant Colonel – 1
President George Bush – 1
Democratic Senator Harry Reid – 1
Democratic Senator Carl Levin – 1
Republican Senator Richard Lugar – 1
Press Secretary Tony Snow – 1

Iraqi:

Iraqi Government Spokesperson – 1

Non-Government Sources from United States:

Fiancé of Soldier Killed – 2
Private Citizen (unspecified affiliation, responding to survey about war) – 2
Psychologist – 1
Father of Soldier Killed – 1
Coach of Soldier Killed – 1
Principal of Soldier Killed – 1
Friend of Family of Soldier Killed in Iraq – 1

International Sources:

Tony Blair – 2

Protest Draws Crowds, Celebrities

WASHINGTON // Convinced this is their moment, tens of thousands marched Saturday in an anti-war demonstration linking military families, ordinary people and an icon of the Vietnam protest movement in a spirited call to get out of Iraq.

Celebrities, a half-dozen lawmakers and protesters from distant states rallied in the capital under a sunny sky, seizing an opportunity to press their cause with a Congress restive on the war and a country that has turned against the conflict.

Marching with them was Jane Fonda, in what she said was her first anti-war demonstration in 34 years.

"Silence is no longer an option," Fonda said to cheers from the stage on the National Mall. The actress once derided as "Hanoi Jane" by conservatives for her stance on Vietnam said she had held back from activism so as not to be a distraction for the Iraq anti-war movement, but needed to speak out now.

The rally on the Mall unfolded peacefully, although about 300 protesters tried to rush the Capitol, running up the grassy lawn to the front of the building. Police on motorcycles tried to stop them, scuffling with some and barricading entrances.

Protesters chanted "Our Congress" as their numbers grew and police faced off against them. Demonstrators later joined the masses marching from the Mall, around Capitol Hill and back.

About 50 demonstrators blocked a street near the Capitol for about 30 minutes, but they were dispersed without arrests.

United for Peace and Justice, a coalition group sponsoring the protest, had hoped 100,000 would come. They claimed even more afterward, but police, who no longer give official estimates, said privately the crowd was smaller than 100,000.

At the rally, 12-year-old Moriah Arnold stood on her toes to reach the microphone and tell the crowd: "Now we know our leaders either lied to us or hid the truth. Because of our actions, the rest of the world sees us as a bully and a liar."

The sixth-grader from Harvard, Mass., organized a petition drive at her school against the war that has killed more than 3,000 U.S. service-members, including seven whose deaths were reported Saturday.

More Hollywood celebrities showed up at the demonstration than buttoned-down Washington typically sees in a month.

Actor Sean Penn said lawmakers will pay a price in the 2008 elections if they do not take firmer action than to pass a nonbinding resolution against the war, the course Congress is now taking.

"If they don't stand up and make a resolution as binding as the death toll, we're not going to be behind those politicians," he said. Actors Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins also spoke.

ANALYSIS:

This story relies heavily on celebrity voices, citing 4 Hollywood actors. One US Congressman is quoted and one Iraq War Veteran who opposes the war in Iraq. The story also cites a veteran who is for the war near the end of the article. Even though it is mentioned that the national group United for Peace and Justice was the main organizing body for the march, no one from that organization was sourced in the story. The story also does not provide any real reasons why people are opposed to the US war in Iraq, nor that recent polling shows about 70% of the American public wants the war to end. The story appeared on the front page of the GR Press, but it wasn't the lead story and the Press did not cite local efforts tied to the march in DC.

Fonda was a lightning rod in the Vietnam era for her outspoken opposition to that war and her advocacy from Hanoi at the height of that conflict. Sensitive to the old wounds, she made it a point to thank the active-duty service-members, veterans and Gold Star mothers who attended the rally.

She drew parallels to the Vietnam War, citing "blindness to realities on the ground, hubris ... thoughtlessness in our approach to rebuilding a country we've destroyed." But she noted that this time, veterans, soldiers and their families increasingly and vocally are against the Iraq war.

The House Judiciary Committee chairman, Rep. John Conyers, threatened to use congressional spending power to try to stop the war. "George Bush has a habit of firing military leaders who tell him the Iraq war is failing," he said, looking out at the masses. "He can't fire you." Referring to Congress, the Michigan Democrat added: "He can't fire us.

"The founders of our country gave our Congress the power of the purse because they envisioned a scenario exactly like we find ourselves in today. Now only is it in our power, it is our obligation to stop Bush."

On the stage rested a coffin covered with a U.S. flag and a pair of military boots, symbolizing American war dead. On the Mall stood a large bin filled with tags bearing the names of Iraqis who have died.

A small contingent of active-duty service members attended the rally, wearing civilian clothes because military rules forbid them from protesting in uniform.

Air Force Staff Sgt. Tassi McKee, 26, an intelligence specialist at Fort Meade, Md., said she joined the Air Force because of patriotism, travel and money for college. "After we went to Iraq, I began to see through the lies," she said.

In the crowd, signs recalled the November elections that defeated the Republican congressional majority in part because of President Bush's Iraq policy. "I voted for peace," one said.

"I've just gotten tired of seeing widows, tired of seeing dead Marines," said Vincent DiMezza, 32, wearing a dress Marine uniform from his years as a sergeant. A Marine aircraft mechanic from 1997 to 2002, he did not serve in Iraq or Afghanistan.

About 40 people staged a counter-protest, including Army Cpl. Joshua Sparling, 25, who lost his leg to a bomb in Iraq.

He said the anti-war protesters, especially those who are veterans or who are on active duty, "need to remember the sacrifice we have made and what our fallen comrades would say if they are alive."

Bush reaffirmed his commitment to his planned troop increase in a phone conversation Saturday with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The president was in Washington for the weekend. He is often out of town during big protest days.

"He understands that Americans want to see a conclusion to the war in Iraq and the new strategy is designed to do just that," said Gordon Johndroe, a spokesman for the National Security Council.

Protest organizers said the crowd included people who came on 300 buses from 40 states.

Ehlers Claims War Vote a Mistake, Press Portrays him as Misled and Reluctant Supporter of War Despite his Consistent Record of Supporting the War

January 3, 2007

In an article published in the Grand Rapids Press on Monday titled "Ehlers voices second thoughts on war," the Press cited Grand Rapids 3rd Congressional District Representative Vern Ehlers as saying that he now believes the war in Iraq was a mistake despite voting for a resolution authorizing the war in October of 2002. According to the Press, Ehlers described the decision as "a very difficult vote for me" and explained that his decision was based on faulty intelligence. He went on to state that "I think we should have been much more cautious" in deciding to invade Iraq, instead arguing that the United States should have used more diplomatic pressure. The article then describes Ehlers as one who "has long voiced reservations about the war," specifically citing an two articles--one in September 2002 in which he said that "it is extremely serious business to go to war, and it should never be done lightly" and one in January of 2003 when he said was quoted regarding the likelihood that Iraq was on the verge of enriching uranium in which he stated "am I 100% sure? no, but there is substantial evidence."

However, the way in which the article ends is misleading and portrays Ehlers as a reluctant supporter of the war when in fact he supported it early on and has continued to support the war by voting for every military spending bill. Ehlers has also refused to support a timetable for the withdrawal of United States troops from Iraq and voted in support of the Military Commissions Act of 2006. While the Press is correct in citing Ehlers statement in a September 5, 2002 article that war is "extremely serious business," it failed to investigate how Ehlers followed through on concerns he raised at that time. In that September 5, 2002 article Ehlers raised a variety of issues concerning how the United States would aid postwar Iraq, the "unwritten rule to never assassinate a ruler of another country," whether or not the United States is seeking to stop the distribution of WMDs or remove Saddam Hussein from power. Ehlers raised similar concerns a little over a week later on September 13, 2002 when he again raised the question of the legality of removing a leader from power by force. However, following a briefing on October 4, 2002 with senior government officials, Ehlers had concluded that "the evidence [that Iraq had WMD] is substantial enough to be frightening," which Ehlers followed by voting in favor of a resolution supporting the use of force in Iraq despite the overwhelming majority of his constituents (50-to-1) opposing the use of military force. Ehlers justified his voted in a guest editorial (identical to his floor statement in Congress) raising the prospect of a nuclear attack in downtown Grand Rapids over Calder Plaza that would kill 300,000 people with a "blast [that] would devastate all of Grand Rapids and the near suburbs, a firestorm would consume the rest of the suburb and a lethal dose of radiation would envelop much of the downwind area." By that time, his concerns about the use of preemptive force were more or less alleviated with Ehlers stating that he found that the administration views war "as a final alternative, not a first step. The Bush administration continues to work with the U.N. and our allies to build a coalition and seek a peaceful end to this situation through inspections and disarmament."

According to a review of statements in the Grand Rapids Press and news releases from Representative Ehlers office, Ehlers raised concerns one additional time at a meeting with constituents opposed to the war in January of 2003. According to a Press article published on January 22, 2003, Ehlers said that he was not "100% sure" that Iraq had WMD and that he would like to see "something more substantial" than the 11 empty chemical warheads found at that time. However, Ehlers never raised concerns about the legality of the war after October and never pressed for more evidence. By the time of a March 11, 2003 article on the arrest of antiwar protestors demanding that Ehlers consider international law and cease his support for the war, Ehlers' spokesperson rejected the issue of international law on behalf of the Ehlers administration. A week later, Ehlers supported Bush's decision to invade in a statement made on March 17, 2003. Ehlers also appeared at a pro-war rally at the end of March at which signs, according to reporting in the Grand Rapids Press, were split between those supporting Bush and those disparaging antiwar protestors. Ehlers reaffirmed his support for the war when

Saddam Hussein was captured in December of 2003, when the Abu Ghraib scandal broke in May of 2004, and in June of 2005 when he agreed with Bush's decision not to set a timetable for withdrawal. Moreover, Ehlers has supported the occupation by voting for every funding request for the war. Ehlers so-called concerns over the war were never raised in a substantive way, nor has he ever made his support for the war dependent upon conditions fulfilled by the Bush administration.

A Summary of Ehlers Statements on the Iraq War in the Media and via Official News Release

"Vern Ehlers Answers Questions from Constituents at Town Hall Meeting," Media Mouse, May 7, 2006

At his annual town hall meeting, Representative Vern Ehlers described the "main problem" in Iraq as the United States being unprepared for the post-war situation. He claimed to have raised this concern from the start, although no specifics were given.

"Congressman Ehlers responds to President's address on Iraq," News Release from Vern Ehlers, June 28, 2005

"I thought the President gave a very good speech. He covered the ground that needed to be covered and told the American people that we are not just going to wave a magic wand, get rid of the terrorists and go home. He outlined the problems and told people what is at stake."

"I think President Bush is absolutely right not to announce a date certain when we will bring our troops home. In the past, we have gone into places like Beirut and Somalia with vim and vigor, then got tired and frustrated and brought our troops home without resolving those conflicts. Tonight, President Bush tried to make it clear that we are not going to fold and run. We will stay until the problem is resolved."

"Finally, I agree with President Bush that, especially as we near our celebration of Independence Day, that we should express our thanks to the individuals who serve in our armed forces. When I meet with soldiers, I am continually impressed with how dedicated and skilled they are. We all, as Americans, owe them an incredible debt of gratitude for their sacrifice and dedication."

"Ehlers supports resolution condemning prisoners' humiliation," News Release from Vern Ehlers, May 6, 2004

"What happened in Iraq with those prisoners is absolutely atrocious," said Ehlers, R-Grand Rapids. "It is totally contrary to the way Americans expect our military personnel to treat prisoners. I am pleased that the people who perpetrated these abuses are being dealt with and that everyone in our military structure from the top down knows that this cannot and will not be tolerated."

"As awful as they are, these pictures do not represent the many Americans who are performing their duties in Iraq in an appropriate fashion," Ehlers said. "The vast majority of our troops and leaders are acting courageously and honorably in Iraq. They deserve our continued support."

"Ehlers: Capture of Hussein a 'major turning point,'" News Release from Vern Ehlers, December 14, 2003

"I am very pleased to hear the news that Saddam Hussein has been captured. Hopefully, this will lead to more stability for the people of Iraq and to less terrorism directed both against them and against our troops stationed in Iraq."

"Our troops and intelligence personnel, as well as those of our coalition force partners, deserve immense congratulations and thanks for a job well done. And, while we praise their efforts, we also pause to remember and honor those who have suffered death or injury as a result of this effort."

"Obviously, this will not put an immediate end to the hostilities in Iraq, but I believe we can expect that this will be a major turning point in our efforts to restore order and the rule of law to the citizens of Iraq. Now that Saddam Hussein is officially no longer a threat, perhaps the people of Iraq will feel more free to help us now that they know with certainty that he will not return to terrorize them once again."

"Answering the 'SOS' call; Hundreds rally in GR to 'Support Our Servicemen and women'," Barton Deiters, Grand Rapids Press, March 30, 2003

Ehlers spoke at rally hosted by a radio DJ named Rich Michaels at WODJ-FM who opened the rally with "a diatribe against Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and protestors who oppose the war." The Press described the crowd as an equal number carrying signs praising President George W. Bush and "disparaging war protestors." Ehlers described the war as "tough sledding" and stated that "we will prevail" in a speech drowned out by chants of "U-S-A."

"Congressman Ehlers comments on President Bush's speech," News Release from Vern Ehlers, March 17, 2003

"President Bush very clearly laid out what needs to be done by Saddam Hussein and the leaders of Iraq to avoid military conflict -- that is, the Iraqi dictator and his sons must give up power and leave Iraq within 48 hours."

"He also laid out pretty clearly what the military leaders and citizens of Iraq need to do to avoid conflict and to avoid injury and death."

"As it is likely that Saddam Hussein will not step down, it appears we are close to military engagement in Iraq. It is distressing that Saddam Hussein refuses to abide by the many United Nations resolutions calling on Iraq to disarm and the 1991 peace agreement that he personally signed agreeing to disarm, but now it is time to enforce the peace agreement and those UN resolutions."

"As the president said, these actions, if necessary, will be undertaken for the security of our nation and for the world as a whole and, he said, we will have the support of a broad international coalition."

"There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein and Iraq have refused to cooperate with the UN inspectors since the end of the Gulf War in 1991 and especially for the last six months of renewed inspections, in violation of the peace agreement and the UN mandates. As President Bush said tonight, 'The security of the world requires disarming Saddam Hussein now.'"

"My wife and I pray for the safety of our troops stationed in the Persian Gulf area, as well as the many innocents who may be placed in harm's way by Saddam Hussein's actions. I sincerely hope that we will be able to minimize bloodshed on both sides in the event that military action becomes a reality."

"War protestors miss Ehlers, but get arrested," Steve Harmon, Grand Rapids Press, March 11, 2003

In response to antiwar protestors who called on Representative Ehlers to respect international law, the Press quoted Ehlers' spokesperson John Brandt as saying that "Unfortunately, Vern was 20,000 feet in the air,

probably over Cleveland, when they came. They're entitled to their opinion, but we strongly disagree with it. As long as they're doing it in a legal manner, people are entitled to exercise their freedom of speech. It's their decision (to get arrested)." The statement makes it clear that by this point Ehlers had dropped earlier concerns over the legality of preemptive war.

"Group Urges Congress to Avoid War; Residents meet with United States Rep. Vern Ehlers to Encourage him to be Cautious about waging War," Steve Harmon, Grand Rapids Press, January 22, 2003

Harmon quoted Ehlers as saying that he shared many of the same concerns as activists against the war but that "there are evil people in this world, and in the case of Saddam Hussein, he has already done evil things." The Press quoted Ehlers as saying that the "real question" was whether or not Hussein had nuclear weapons and that "I predicated my vote (on the congressional resolution authorizing force for President Bush) on whether he's likely to produce weapons of mass destruction." Ehlers said that his decision was based on special briefings from the United States Department of Defense and the CIA and that he reached the conclusion that Hussein was on the verge of producing enriched uranium. Ehlers qualified his statements by saying "Am I 100 percent sure? No, but there is substantial evidence," while stating that he would like United Nations weapons inspectors, who had at that time found 11 empty chemical warheads, to show him "something more substantial." Ehlers said that "I certainly don't want war" but said that "if there's no way to resolve this, I suspect we'll have one."

"We can't wait for Iraq to strike first," Vern Ehlers, Grand Rapids Press, October 12, 2002

Casting a vote over whether to authorize military action may be the most difficult decision a member of Congress is asked to make. It certainly is for me.

No matter who the opponent or what the circumstances, the consequence of a "yes" vote likely will be the loss of life. But failure to act holds the potential of even more terrible outcomes. Such a vote presents an excruciating moral dilemma.

For the past year, our nation has been engaged in a great civic debate. How do we protect our nation from those who would do us harm? How can we ensure the safety of our children and grandchildren here and around the world? Should we take action against potentially hostile nations? These are questions without simple answers.

President George W. Bush asked Congress to grant him the authority to take military action against Saddam Hussein and his regime in Iraq as part of our war on terrorism. No member of Congress takes such a request lightly.

On such issues, persons are often characterized as hawks or doves. I am neither. Instead, I seek to be wise as an owl. I listened to the concerns voiced by many of my constituents. I wrote President Bush informing him of their concerns and seeking answers to their questions and mine. I studied Saddam Hussein and his past actions. I sought and received extensive briefings from National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, the Central Intelligence Agency and others. And, because of my scientific background, I also received a detailed scientific briefing from civilian officials at the Pentagon about Saddam Hussein's weapons capabilities.

This information has convinced me of several things. Saddam Hussein continues to have dangerous, warlike ambitions. He has thumbed his nose at the United Nations by evicting inspectors and using the U.N.'s "oil-for-food" program to fund weapons rather than feed his impoverished people.

Saddam Hussein continues, in violation of the U.N.'s sanctions and the peace agreement he signed, to develop and produce chemical and biological weapons for war and terror. Most troubling, he continues trying to develop nuclear weapons and may be as little as a year or two away from success.

I know the destructive force of nuclear weapons. If a weapon of the type he is developing was detonated over Calder Plaza, the blast would devastate all of Grand Rapids and the near suburbs, a firestorm would consume the rest of the suburbs and a lethal dose of radiation would envelop much of the downwind area. All told, upwards of 300,000 people would be killed. Saddam Hussein's regime poses a very real threat to the safety of the United States and the rest of the world.

Early in this debate, I thought President Bush and his advisers were seeking to strike Iraq preemptively. But I found they view that as a final alternative, not a first step. The Bush administration continues to work with the U.N. and our allies to build a coalition and seek a peaceful end to this situation through inspections and disarmament.

However, we must grant the president the power to take action against Iraq because Hussein will not acquiesce until he faces a superior force. We may have to put troops on Iraq's border before he will comply, but I hope military action is not necessary.

I abhor the idea of the U.S. making a preemptive strike. Our philosophy always has been to take the first punch before we act. But when the first punch can destroy a city and kill hundreds of thousands, we must consider ways to stop that first punch.

I commend President Bush for his recent speeches in which he more clearly stated his intentions and reasons for requesting this resolution. I also commend him for working with Congress to craft a resolution that is not as broad as his original proposal and meets many of the concerns raised by Congress and our constituents. The legislative process has worked in structuring the approach and limiting action to only Iraq.

And so, after many days and weeks of thoughtful and prayerful consideration, I've decided to support this resolution. In this case, I've concluded not acting is more dangerous than acting.

"Local sentiment divided on next step; Opinion ranges from anti-war to ready to fight, but most want U.S. to move cautiously," Ted Roelofs, Grand Rapids Press, October 11, 2002

In an article reviewing local reaction to the vote to authorize the use of military force in Iraq, Ehlers spokesperson was cited saying that calls, letters, and emails to the office averaged 50-1 against war. The Press quoted Brandt as saying that "the unifying message is don't do anything" and described him as dismissing the opposition as a result of an organized campaign against the war rather than a true reflection of opinion in West Michigan. Brandt went on to say that "The volume is not nearly as high as some issues that I've experienced, such as NAFTA and even impeachment."

"House votes to give president war authority," News Release from Vern Ehlers, October 10, 2002

"I've discussed it with my constituents and colleagues, I've written President Bush, I've received briefings from high-level officials at the White House and the Pentagon and I've read about Iraq and Saddam Hussein," Ehlers

said. "After many days and weeks of thoughtful and prayerful consideration, I have concluded that not taking action against Saddam Hussein is more dangerous than taking action."

"Passage of this resolution does not mean that we will be going to war with Iraq tomorrow, next week or even next month," Ehlers said. "It does not require that the U.S. go to war at all. But it sends a signal to Saddam Hussein that we are serious about requiring him to live up to his promises to cease weapons development, destroy his existing weaponry, end his human rights abuses and provide United Nations weapons inspectors free, unfettered access throughout the country."

"Casting a vote over whether to authorize military action may be the most difficult decision a member of Congress is asked to make," he said. "It certainly was for me."

"Activists discouraged by president's speech; Peace supporters find small hope, but local congressmen say address may sway them in favor of military action," Rick Wilson, Grand Rapids Press, October 8, 2002

The Press described Ehlers as saying that Bush was restrained in making a case for a military attack on Iraq. Ehlers was quoted stating that "based on the classified briefings I've been given, there was much more information he could have given" and that "he could have said more about the kind of weapons Saddam has and how far along he is in their development." Ehlers was described as wanting to see specific provisions in the resolution saying when President Bush could launch a military attack, stating that "my goal will be to ensure that we've explored every other option before we engage in a land invasion" and that "there are lots of roads to take before we go there."

"Congressman Ehlers receives briefings on Iraq," News Release from Vern Ehlers, October 4, 2002

"The evidence is substantial enough to be frightening," said Ehlers, R-Grand Rapids. "It highlights the need to have a free and totally unfettered inspection program in Iraq, as well as the need to disarm Saddam Hussein's forces. Mr. Hussein agreed do these things after the Gulf War, but he has not lived up to the agreement."

"I appreciate all the input I've received from the residents of the Third Congressional District and I am equally appreciative of the information that the White House and the Congressional leadership has provided me. This is an agonizing decision and I am approaching it very carefully."

"Lawmakers back Bush's stance on Iraq; They are impressed by the case he makes against Saddam Hussein and by his effort to forge an international coalition to confront him," Grand Rapids Press, September 13, 2002

The Press cited Ehlers described Ehlers as saying that there is "still a lot of work to be done before he will be ready to support full-out war." Ehlers said that "we would need a great deal more information than we have at this point" and that "sending in our own troops is a last resort." Ehlers was described as being troubled by administration officials aggressively advocating for regime change by force and saying that such a strategy would violate the principle against eliminating the leader of another country through the use of arms. He said that if Iraq did not allow unfettered access to weapons inspectors, air strikes on suspected facilities would be logical. He also was quoted in support of President Bush's approach, stating that "He didn't say 'We're going to go in and clobber the guy or send our troops in if you don't do this' and that "I've not seen any information that says the U.S. should act alone... If we go off on our own, they wouldn't support us."

"Congressmen want more evidence before strike," Steven Harmon, Grand Rapids Press, September 5, 2002

Ehlers was quoted stating that "the president should not proceed without the support of not only Congress and the public, but of our allies, too" and that "it is extremely serious business to go to war, and it should never be done lightly." He was also quoted raising additional questions including "What is our objective? Are we trying to stop the distribution of weapons of mass destruction or are we just trying to unseat Saddam Hussein? Are we trying to assassinate him? There is an unwritten rule to never assassinate a ruler of another country. Are we talking about replacing him with another general or a democracy?" He questioned whether or not the United States would police Iraq for stability in the aftermath and provide financial aid, with Ehlers quoted as saying "Congress doesn't care to write blank checks."

Grand Rapids Press Supporting Government's Iran Claims

February 19, 2007

Over the past week, the Grand Rapids Press, the major newspaper in West Michigan, has published a series of articles that appear to be designed to build support for the Bush administration's Iran policy and possibly even building support for a military attack on Iran. The articles all stem from the context of heightened rhetoric from the Bush administration linking Iran to attacks on US soldiers in Iraq, with many of them relying on evidence presented at a briefing by United States military officials on the weekend of February 10. That briefing, conducted by officials who refused to be quoted and insisted on anonymity, presented what the military claimed was proof that the Iranian government is supplying insurgents in Iraq with weapons. The Grand Rapids Press ran a story based on an initial account of this briefing from the New York Times on Monday the 12th, relying on official sources to assert that Iran was supplying Iraqi insurgents with weapons. While publishing one story that was critical of this claim on the 13th, the Press accepted the premise of the military's claim that the Iranian government wants to harm United States soldiers in Iraq. The Press' support of this claim reached its apex on Wednesday the 14th, when it ran [a front-page article titled "New type of bomb from Iran killed area soldier"](#) in which reporter Ted Roelofs links Iran to the death of a local soldier.

Roelofs' article was a lengthy and emotional piece that relied primarily on comments from the father of Army Spc. Brandon Stout, who was killed in Iraq on January 22 when his Humvee was attacked. Roelofs cites William Stout as saying that the Pentagon told him the attack was "bigger than the IED" and that the death of his son was "instant" due to lethality of the bomb. Stout is also quoted as saying that the attack tells him "we are going to be in another war here with another country pretty soon." Roelofs cites a briefing given by the United States military on Saturday as proof that weapons from Iran are being used to attack United States soldiers in Iraq, describing the United States military as scrambling to find ways to reinforce armor on Humvees to lessen the fatalities from these attacks. Aside from William Stout, who despite the tragic loss of his son, is clearly not an expert on the Iraq War or relations with Iran, Roelofs relies heavily on "official" sources, citing Defense Secretary Robert Gates, United States Congressional Representative Peter Hoekstra, and an "unnamed officer" cited in the Washington Post, all of whom supported the general assertion that Iran wants to attack United States soldiers in Iraq.

While appealing to the emotions of people who empathize with the suffering of a family of a soldier killed in Iraq, Roelofs' piece relies on sources that have been greatly questioned in recent days. There have been several [analyses calling into question specifics of the United States "evidence" laid out at the briefing](#), showing that it is part of [an ongoing campaign of disinformation regarding Iran](#). Even some [within the military](#) and [the corporate media](#) have distanced themselves from the claims, yet the Grand Rapids Press story ends with Representative Hoekstra and William Stout calling for increased troop movements in Iraq to seal the border to prevent Iranian influence.

The basis for these claims was reporting in the New York Times over the weekend on Iran's alleged supply of weapons to Iraqi insurgents. On Monday, February 12, the Grand Rapids Press reprinted a story from the New York Times by James Glanz under the title "Weapons Display indicts Iran, U.S. Says." The story was based on a briefing by United States military officials on Saturday during which the officials displayed "their first public evidence" that "Iran supplies Shiite extremists in Iraq with some of the most lethal weapons in the war." The article goes on to state that the weapons include canisters called "explosively formed penetrators or EFPs" and are "perhaps the most feared weapon faced by American and Iraqi troops" in Iraq. The article explains that the briefing was held "under strict security," with the United States military showing an array of EFPs, mortar shells, and rocket-propelled grenades with serial numbers that the military claimed could be linked to Iran. The military also claimed that Iranian leaders have authorized smuggling the weapons into Iraq, an assertion made

without evidence and under the insistence of anonymity.

The article cited "doubts" that people could have about the evidence due to the timing (the weapons had been known about since 2004) and the insistence on anonymity, but asserted, "the direct physical evidence presented on Sunday was extraordinary." The article also attempted to appeal emotionally to its readers, stating that more than 170 Americans had been killed and 620 wounded with these weapons. It ended by concluding that "without specific evidence" the military claimed that the Iranian security apparatus, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force controlled the delivery of these weapons into Iraq and asserted that they could do so only with the knowledge of the Iranian government and their complicity.

While the initial report raised a number of serious allegations and was reprinted in numerous news sources, it has been widely discredited since the allegations against Iran first appeared in the New York Times on Saturday. The radio news program [Democracy Now](#) cited two striking [similarities between the Times article and the articles that built support for the invasion of Iraq](#), an almost complete reliance on anonymous "official" sources and [the authorship of Michael Gordon](#). Gordon played a major role in building support for the Iraq War, co-authoring a piece with Judith Miller alleging that the Iraq had weapons of mass destruction on September 8, 2002, a piece which was then used by Vice President Dick Cheney to state that it was not just the Bush administration asserting that Iraq had WMD, but also the New York Times. Critics have highlighted the fact that [the New York Times has positioned itself over the past few decades as the official government paper](#) and has been quick to report the official stance of the United States, relying frequently on official sources to the exclusion of independent sources. This was particularly problematic with the piece on the alleged weapons from Iran, as the story failed to provide any [context about the relationship between the Iranian government and Iraq](#). Moreover, it is also worth noting that not far into the article doubts are raised about the accuracy of the claims with the Times piece pointing out that there was no direct evidence presented, yet both the New York Times and the Grand Rapids Press locally ran the story under headlines that treated the allegations as fact rather than allegations.

Even when subsequent reporting raised some issues about the specifics of the United States' claims, the corporate media--including the Grand Rapids Press--[bought into the overall idea that Iran is threatening United States troops in Iraq](#). The Grand Rapids Press ran an article from the Washington Post on Tuesday the 13th titled ["Top brass accuses Iran, not its leaders,"](#) citing the fact that the Marine General Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had made comments on Monday saying that the United States had no information linking the Iranian government to the supply of weapons allegedly coming from Iran into Shiite insurgent groups in Iraq. He maintained that, "It is clear that Iranians are involved, and it's clear that materials from Iran are involved" but said that he would "not say by what I know that the Iranian government clearly knows or is complicit." The version of the article printed by the Grand Rapids Press, greatly altered and edited from the original version that appeared in the Washington Post, included a denial from the Iranian government but concluded with State Department spokesman Sean McCormack stating that "the Iranians are up to their eyeballs in this activity." This edit ended the article with more certainty than the original version in the Washington Post, which described how the Bush administration has been evasive and has referred reporters to multiple agencies and frequently refused to answer questions, while also cutting a quote critical of the administration's policy on Iran from Democratic Senator Christopher J. Dodd of Connecticut. The placement is also important, as all stories reporting the involvement of the Iranian government have been on front page of the Grand Rapids Press, while this article was located on page A3.

In the Thursday, February 15 edition, the Grand Rapids Press ran [a Newsday article by Craig Gordon](#) under the headline "Bush rips Iran, but U.S. won't attack." That article, printed on page A5, discussed [President Bush's comments at a news conference](#) in which he stated that the United States has no intention to attack Iran despite his blaming the Iranian government for a recent spate of deadly attacks on US soldiers. However, even as a number of sources within the government and outside of the government have raised significant doubts about

Iran's supplying weapons to Iraq, President Bush maintained that despite having no idea whether Iranians at the "highest levels" of the government were responsible, Bush continued to point the blame at Iran. The article quotes Bush saying that, "the idea that somehow we're manufacturing the idea that the Iranians are providing IEDs is preposterous," showing that the Bush administration still believes the discredited evidence. Bush framed the issue within the context of needing to act to "protect our troops," stating "we're going to do something about that it, pure and simple." Far from raising questions about earlier claims reported in the Grand Rapids Press, the article gives continued credence to those claims. Moreover, as was the case with previous reporting on the issue, this story relies exclusively on official sources within the government, with the only voices being present being Bush's and that of Democratic Senator Hillary Clinton, who only said that she was "deeply concerned" and did not get into specifics of the claims. The article does not directly address the considerable debate over the accuracy of the Bush administration's claims and instead bolsters the one-sided reporting on the topic in the Grand Rapids Press.

Even before the Press ran its initial article on the alleged weapons from Iran, a day before that article appeared, the Grand Rapids Press ran a story from the Associated Press titled "[Bush Iran rhetoric echoes Iraq stance](#)." The story, written by Tom Raum of the Associated Press, examined some of the parallels between President George W. Bush's "tough new stance on Iran and his military buildup in the Persian Gulf." It begins by describing how the administration is "making allegations about Iran without providing proof," while also making similar claims that Iran is behind the recent abduction and execution of five United States soldiers. The story cites President Bush's recent assertions that he has no plans to invade Iran, but mentions that in recent days the United States has increased the naval presence in the Persian Gulf to the highest level since 2003, confirmed that the military has been given the authority to kill or capture Iranian agents "plotting attacks" on United States forces, and has armed Iran's neighbors with Patriot missiles. The article cites only three sources, Democratic Senator Jim Webb of Virginia, Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institute and advisor to the Iraq Study Group, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's former National Security Advisor. The Press cut the article after a section in which it talks about how Bush is "betting" that he can prop up the Iraqi government and stop Iran's supply of weapons and fighters to Iraq, omitting the remaining 287 words of an 819 word article. The 287 words omitted were significant, as they explained that Iran has denied these allegations and that "outside actors" like Iran are not considered "a major driver of violence" in Iraq by the National Intelligence Estimate. The original AP article also quoted additional sources both within and outside of the Bush administration to convey to readers that there is considerable difference of opinion over the best strategy for dealing with Iran. This official ambiguity over how best to deal with the situation in Iran has been absent from the Grand Rapids Press over the past week, with the Press instead relying heavily on government sources and wire stories--supplemented by an emotional piece tying the death of a local soldier to weapons supplied by Iran--to build support for the Bush administration's Iran policy. While the specific intentions of the Bush administration are unclear at this point, in light of recent statements, military maneuvering, and similarities to its public relations campaign used in 2003 to build support for the invasion of Iraq, there is a serious possibility that the administration is attempting to incrementally build support for an invasion of Iran. Consequently, the Grand Rapids Press needs to look critically both at its reporting of the Iraq invasion and the role that it played in building support for that war, as well as its recent coverage of Iran, and begin to ask critical questions. Both as journalists and as a major supplier of news to people living in West Michigan, the Press must position itself as a government watchdog rather than as a vehicle for amplifying the assertions of the government and military.

Grand Rapids News Sources on the War in Iraq

Professor Jim Goode GVSU
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Karen Henry
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Rev. Doug Van Doren Plymouth UCC
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Mark Mattison West Michigan Justice and Peace Coalition
mmattison@allvantage.com

Institute for Global Education
454-1642 ige@iserv.net

Bob Fabri Media Mouse
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Lori ACTIVATE
lori@mediamouse.org

Independent and International News Sources on Iraq

Electronic Iraq

<http://www.electroniciraq.net/>

Iraq Dispatches <http://blog.newstandardnews.net/iraqdispatches/>

The New Standard

<http://newstandardnews.net/>

The Middle East Research and Information Project

<http://www.merip.org/>

Al Jazeera

<http://english.aljazeera.net/>

Iraq in War

<http://www.iraq-war.ru/>

Washington Report on Middle East Affairs

<http://www.wrmea.com/index.htm>

Democracy Now

<http://democracynow.org/>

BBC

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

Local War Profiteer Information

Companies that have received Military Contracts since 2002

<i>Name of Company</i>	<i>Total \$ amount in Contracts</i>	<i>tax subsidies(known)</i>
Advantage Sign Co.	\$70,000	n/a
Blackmer System One	\$28,390	n/a
Borisch Manufacturing	\$9,815,688	Dollar value unknown
Cardinal Maintenance Service	\$111,532	n/a
Choice Service	\$9,723	n/a
Clean Rooms International	\$15,197	n/a
Corporate Security Solutions	\$125,000	n/a
D & M Midwest	\$144,163	n/a
Dover Resources Inc.	\$177,211	n/a
Eaton Aerospace	\$15,515,473	n/a
Evans Tempcon	\$2,141,573	n/a
Grand Valley State University	\$100,000	n/a
Hollymatic Corp.	\$45,333	n/a
Kentwood Office Furniture	\$25,078	n/a
L-3 Communications Avionics	\$23,219,484	n/a
Modern Fire & Security Systems	\$107,000	n/a
RSL Electronics USA	\$961,560	n/a
Smith's Industries	\$197,192,671	\$6,648,000
Steelcase	\$42,831	n/a
Unique Truck Equipment	\$31,995	n/a
Wolverine Worldwide	\$214,987,642	\$1,400,000
Woodward FST	\$27,146,154	n/a
Totals	\$492,043,701	

For more information go to <http://www.mediamouse.org/resources/contracts.php>

Military Recruiting Facts

Education Benefits

To qualify for college aid you have to pay a \$1,200 non-refundable deposit (\$100 a month for the first year) to the military to join the Montgomery GI Bill. If you receive a less-than-honorable discharge (as about one in four people do), leave the military in less than 3 years, (as one in three do), or later decide not to go to college, the military will keep your deposit and give you nothing.

57% of the veterans who sign up for the GI Bill have never seen a penny in college assistance, and the average net payout to veterans has been only \$2,151. 29% of veterans have been determined not eligible for benefits at the time of their discharge.

The maximum benefit you can qualify for under the Montgomery GI Bill is \$36,144. To earn a larger benefit, like the \$70,000 the military is so fond of advertising, you must qualify for the Army/Navy College Fund. To do this you must score in the top half of the military entry tests and be willing to enter a designated job specialty. These designated Military Occupational Specialties are the most unpopular in the military and the military has a hard time filling them because they have no skills that are transferable to the civilian job market and/or are exceptionally dangerous.

While most enlistees join the Montgomery GI Bill, only about 1 in 20 qualify for the higher benefit Army College Fund or Navy College Fund.

In addition to military service, there are additional requirements to meet before soldiers receive money. First, you must be attending an accredited school. Second, the military's payment plan is based on a four-year college schedule: they will pay you equal portions of your money over 36 months (the equivalent of four academic years of nine months each). If you, like 56% of veterans using the Montgomery GI Bill, attend a two-year school or vocational school you can not receive larger payments over a shorter period of time. That means a two-year college graduate will receive only half of the money they have earned.

The Montgomery GI Bill is inadequate to cover the costs of many colleges and universities. The average cost of public colleges is \$12,127 per year with private colleges costing an average of \$29,0626 per year. The maximum GI Bill benefit, \$9,306 per year, does not cover the average cost of public colleges and the average amount received by veterans in 2004, \$5,540, is not even half of the average.

Only 43% of those who signed up for the military and began paying into the GI Bill have received anything, meaning that 57% have received no college benefits.

The average net amount that the military has spent on the GI Bill is less than 1/8th of what it spends on recruiting.

Job Training

Only 12% of male veterans and 6% of female veterans surveyed made any use of skills learned in the military in their civilian jobs according to research by Ohio State University researchers who received funding from the military.

Studies have found that on average, veterans earn less than non-veterans. In a comprehensive overview of 14 studies which analyzed this question, Stephen R. Barley of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell U. found that the average post-Vietnam War-era veteran will earn between 11% (Crane and Wise 1987) and 19% (Rosen and Taubman, 1982) less than non-veterans from comparable socioeconomic backgrounds. According to a 1990 study by Bryant and Wilhite, the average veteran will earn 85 cents less per hour (about \$1700 less per year) than

non-veteran peers.

1/3rd of the homeless population in the United States are military veterans.

Race

African Americans represent about 29% of the enlisted personnel of the Army, 21.1% enlisted personnel of the Navy, 15.8% enlisted personnel of the Marine Corps, and 18.5% enlisted personnel of the Air Force with only 8% overall represented as officers. African Americans make up about 13% of the US population.

Latinos represent about 9% of the enlisted personnel of the Army, 10.5% enlisted personnel of the Navy, 14% enlisted personnel of the Marine Corps, and 5.6% enlisted personnel of the Air Force with only 4% overall represented as officers. 17.5% of Latinos in the armed forces are in critical combat-related positions. Latinos make up about 13.5% of the US population.

Capitalizing on an unemployment rate of more than 40%, Army recruiting offices in Puerto Rico garner more than 4 times the number of recruits US-based recruiting offices average on a yearly basis.

During the Gulf War, over 50% of front-line troops were people of color.

The military openly targets "minority" populations such as youth of color and low-income youth who the military determines are unlikely to attend college. Marine spokesperson Dave Griesmer says that while the military seeks "diverse candidates" "...if 95% of kids in that area go on to college, a recruiter is going to decide where the best market is. Recruiters need to prioritize."

When recent studies showed a slight dip in young African-Americans' interest in the military (which was already disproportionately high), the Pentagon reacted with a new ad campaign. The Pentagon is now using special Spanish-language ads to target Latino youth, sending fancy recruitment vehicles into lower-income and minority communities, and advertising using hip-hop.

Recruiters Lie

By the Army's own count, there were 320 substantiated cases of what it calls recruitment improprieties in 2004, up from 199 in 1999, the last year it missed its active-duty recruitment goal, and 213 in 2002, the year before the war in Iraq started. The offenses varied from threats and coercion to false promises that applicants would not be sent to Iraq. Many incidents involved more than one recruiter, and the number of those investigated rose to 1,118 last year, or nearly one in five of all recruiters, up from 913 in 2002, or one in eight.

Recruiters and some senior Army officials say that for every impropriety that is found, at least two more are never discovered. And the Army's figures show that it is not punishing serious offenses as it once did. In 2002, roughly 5 of every 10 recruiters who were found to have committed improprieties intentionally or through gross negligence were relieved of duty; in 2004, that number slipped to 3 in 10.

The military enlistment document is not a contract. The document itself says "Laws and regulations that govern military personnel may change without notice to me. Such changes may affect my status, pay, allowances, benefits, and responsibilities as a member of the Armed Forces regardless of the provisions of this enlistment/reenlistment document." This means that the military has absolutely no obligation to keep any promise made by recruiters, even if it was received in writing.

It is a myth that one can enlist in the military for only a pre-determined amount of time such as 2

years as the military reserves the right to extend enlistees' terms. According to the enlistment agreement: "In the event of war, my enlistment in the Armed Forces continues until six (6) months after the war ends, unless my enlistment is ended sooner by the President of the United States.", "b. If I am a member of a Reserve Component of an Armed Force at the beginning of a period of war or national emergency declared by Congress, or if I become a member during that period, my military service may be extended without my consent until six (6) months after the end of that period of war.", and "c. As a member of a Reserve Component, in time of war or national emergency declared by the Congress, I may be required to serve on active duty (other than for training) for the entire period of the war or emergency and for six (6) months after its end."

Women and the Military

50% of women at the Air Force, Army, and Naval academies report being sexually harassed and "hostile attitudes and inappropriate actions toward women" continues "to hinder the establishment of a safe and professional environment."

79% of women veterans surveyed by the by Iowa City Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) and University of Iowa researchers reported experiences of sexual harassment during their military service; 30 percent of the women reported an attempted or completed rape.

In 2005, reports of sexual assault were up by 40% in the military with a total of 2,734 reported sexual assaults.

Women in the military are typically limited to types of work that fit within traditional gender roles. According to a 1998 government report, "many women report that they are not allowed to work at the jobs for which they were trained . . . [and] that they are routinely assigned clerical or administrative duties instead of being given the opportunity to work in the full range of their occupations (GAO/NSIAD-99-27, 11/98)."