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Fox News Channel and the George W. Bush Administration: Press-administration relations in the US war in Afghanistan through the lens of the Propaganda model

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Fox News Channel and the George W. Bush Administration:
Press-administration relations in the US war in Afghanistan through the
lens of the Propaganda model

International Relations – Global Conflicts in the Modern Era Master’s Thesis

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Fox Commentator Bill O'Reilly on the cover of his book *Culture Warrior* (2006) / Screenshot of Fox News' Hannity & Colmes TV show (Fox News)

List of abbreviations

ABC = American Broadcasting Company

CBS = Columbia Broadcasting System

CNN = Cable News Network

PM = Propaganda Model

FNC = Fox News Channel

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Abstract

This thesis explores the links between Fox News Channel (FNC) and the political and economic American elites. Examining how press-administration relations can affect historical and cultural narratives, democratic principles, as well as domestic and foreign policies in times of war, this research analyzes, throughout the lens of the Propaganda Model, Fox News' contribution in building the American narrative on the war in Afghanistan. Applying the propaganda model to Fox News's articles and TV shows enables to understand the significance of FNC's political culture, how it was actively engaged in backing the Republican administration and the latter's discourses on the "war on terror", hence encouraging the pursuit of the war in Afghanistan. Pro-war stances led to (mis)representations of Al Qaeda and the Taliban - and concepts of enmity - and the subsequent commercialization of the attacks. Entertainment, in fact, replaced a critical coverage of serious events. From the declaration of the war on terror until Obama's election in 2009, contemporary mass media - and particularly the right-wing media Fox News - have gained tremendous power and played a crucial role in American society.

Introduction

Five days after the 9/11 twin towers attack, George W. Bush first used the expression “war on terror”. On October 7, 2001, with widespread American public support, the U.S. launched “Operation Enduring Freedom” in Afghanistan. Since then, American mass media have been resorting to ambiguous and blurry concepts, and specific meta-narratives about the war in Afghanistan (Fox News' Your World 2006).

The US withdrew from Afghanistan in May 2021. Therefore, it had a 20-year presence in Afghanistan - if we do not include the arrival of American firms and development agencies in the 1960s and then, the US invasion of the country in 1989 to contain the Soviet Union. The public argument for an intervention in Afghanistan, in the aftermath of the twin towers attack, was to annihilate Al-Qaeda and especially Ben Laden, who was at the head of the 9/11 attacks. Ben Laden had taken refuge in the mountains of Tora Bora, hosted by the Taliban at the south of Kabul. Nevertheless, most of the 9/11 hijackers were of Saudi nationality and Ben Laden was regularly travelling in the US, insofar as the Saudi *Ben Laden construction Group* had contracts and financial deals with the Bush family, including investments in the Carlyle Group - in which Bush father and son, and members of the Ben Laden family, were part of the annual Council. In addition to the Taliban being partly a result of the US war against the Soviet Union - arming the Mujahideen against the Soviet army - the CIA armed and funded Afghan militia groups from 2001 onwards which were implicated in grave human rights abuses and killings of civilians (Watson Brown 2021). In total, the war costed 2.3 trillion dollars to the United States (Watson Brown 2021). More than 71 000 Afghan civilians died since 2001 and the US military casualties are estimated to exceed 2 400. Between the 9/11 attacks and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, not only did the political and military actors have a role. Mass media agencies, such as Fox News, also shaped the war and gave a specific direction to the public debate. The dominant narrative on the war in Afghanistan was the one forwarded by the Bush Administration. In fact, only one story on the war in Afghanistan was published every 8 days by Fox in 2011, and actual US casualties were undercounted, accounting for only 2% of the news (SIGAR, 2019; Brooks, 2020; Aday, 2005; Pew Research Center, 2011). South Asia expert Benjamin Hopkins points out the war in Afghanistan was the least reported war since at least WWI (Hopkins, 2021). Negative news from Afghanistan accounted for 68.8% of the news on NBC compared to only

38.3% on Fox News Channel. Thus, positive views of the war in Afghanistan resulted in a blatant omission of multiple facets of the war. FNC's comments regarding foreign policy, especially on the Middle East were mostly based on official discourses and personal opinions, resulting in the propagation of beliefs such as the one that the US was "winning the war on terror" in Afghanistan. The competition between media outlets over war narratives, information about domestic and foreign policies in times of war and the implication of actors engaged in military or political affairs is referred to as "media wars". Media wars - or the war within the war -, is not a new phenomenon (Kurspahic, 2003; Schifferes, 2003). The way information is handled during a war has far-reaching implications in today's connected society. Mass medias' coverage of conflicts tend to be even more biased than usual as crucial questions of domestic and foreign policy, urgency, security, and identity are raised. The differences that can be drawn between FNC and independent journalism but also with left-wing mass media mainly lies in the relationship between the media and the elite (political, military, and economic), on which the propaganda model focuses. The propaganda model theorized by Chomsky and Herman (1988) demonstrates the higher propension of mass media in framing the government than independent ones - also known as watch dog journalism. The propaganda model is a relevant lens to understand how FNC functions.

Fox News was founded by media mogul Rupert Murdoch in 1996. The Australian-American billionaire was determined to build up a Republican media as an alternative to liberal news, and especially to CNN. "Strong views can shape the agenda", Murdoch admitted at the 2009 Davos World Economic Forum in Switzerland (Murdoch 2009), adding "we tried to influence perceptions on the war by supporting the Bush policies". The billionaire played a crucial role in the mass media bias (Hobbs, 2015). Moreover, FNC grew exponentially in the 2000s, reaching 656.000 viewers in January 2002, while CNN had 596.000 viewers, and MSNBC had 296.000 viewers (Associated Press, 2002). In addition, Fox increased its number of viewers by 300% to an average of 3.3 million daily viewers during the war in Afghanistan (Schifferes, 2003). In fact, Fox News has been the most watched and read American media since 2001. Whose views made the news? Primarily those of Fox commentators, who, to a large extent, framed the administration's discourses on the war on terror. This primarily results from FNC's alignment on public policies under George W. Bush (Pew Research Center, April 8, 2020), and from the difficulties to express criticism after the twin towers attack (Silberstein, 2002).

Moreover, the majority of FNC viewers are Republicans, and neoconservatives. The relationship between the press and the administration in the United States, as well as the tightening of those ties during times of war, provides important insights into the spread of misinformation and the threat to media independence. Fox News' unprofessionalism (Greenwald, 2004) takes shape in shaming, impulsivity, partial and non-critical, biased speakers, and ignorance, for instance claiming that Iraq borders Afghanistan (Fox News, 2009). This is a particularly preoccupying reality in the United States, as evidenced by Fox News' rapid growth and legitimization despite these troubling flaws.

FNC is the media which accounts for the most fake news and biased information in its daily news, and this was especially the case during the “war on terror” (Pew Research Center, 2020; Dauber, 2001). Incorrect information is daily exposed throughout Murdoch's news agency which certifies legally, geopolitically (The Investigative Fund, 2014), and factually false information. This goes against the very pillars of “ethical journalism” as defined by the Society of Professional Journalists, namely independent sources of information devoid of conflicts of interests and verified information (SPJ, 2014). A PolitiFact study found that 61% of the claims made on Fox News were considered at least partly false, while only 44% of MSNBC's claims and 21% of CNN's claims reached this level (Sharockman, 2015 in Hoewe, Brownell and Wiemer, 2011). An explanation for the strong bias at FNC is rooted in the close ties the media kept with the Bush Administration. Military and White House representants accounted for respectively 30% and 35.8% of speakers invited on FNC and only 1.4% were non-ideological analysts (Pew Research Center, 2007). Criticisms made about the Bush administration or on the war accounted for merely 13% of Fox news compared to 44.6% for NBC. In fact, the record of achievement of George W. Bush's presidency (White House Archives, 2004), a very eulogistic account of the latter's mandate, is clearly reflected in FNC's pieces when analyzing articles and TV shows, which can be assimilated to campaigning rather than news production. Indeed, no matter what George W. Bush's position was, FNC's policy was to support the President (Fox News Internal Memo, 2004). This matters insofar as asymmetric information and asymmetric access to information increase in wartime, despite the crucial need for non-partisan information and a balanced coverage of events. War played a particularly important role in the development of US cable news operations and contributed to Fox News' boom in its number of viewers, propelling the media to the 1st place in terms of audience hence toppling CNN and MBC. Understanding the

Fox News phenomenon in the US enables us to seize the scope of the crisis of Democracy, which is not new but has taken new forms of tacit control and influence of the public opinion. The way in which the media functions and how it tells a story provides a deep understanding of where democracy as an ideal type is headed (Greenwald, 2004; Sterling, 2009).

The propaganda model (PM) explains how the integration of the media into capitalist structures has enabled political and economic elites to exercise abusive control over media output. Herman and Chomsky's theory shows how governmental and corporate entities choose the information that best fit their interests, in a mutually dependent relationship. In addition, language is at the core of mobilization of audiences against a perceived enemy. Examining Fox News through the lens of the propaganda model is a relevant way to study the media's coverage of the war in Afghanistan, insofar as it has, at first glance, the key features of a "consent manufacturer", eponymous title of Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's book on mediatic propaganda in democracy (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). In the PM model, wealth and power are crucial factors with the emphasis put on class interests and the unequal control of resources by corporate entities. These mass media firms qualify as such according to 5 variables: the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the media (1). In this regard, looking at Fox News' founder and director Rupert Murdoch, and its successor, Robert Ailes, confirms the role and importance of the owner in the media's orientation. Media consultant for Richard Nixon in the 1960's, Ailes promoted the idea of a Republican television program as a path to power (Hoewe Brownell and Wiemer, 2011) insofar as ideas were conveyed quicker and to a larger audience who does not need to think the information through but integrate it (Ailes, 1971 in Hoewe, Brownell and Wiemer, 2011). The goal is to simplify, minimize, give a partial image of what is dealt with, going along with the administration's ready-made expressions such as "Islamic fascism" (Fox News' Hannity & Colmes, August 10, 2006). Labelling is a judicious mean to fulfill this goal. In effect, media labeling encourages narrow thinking and prevents a holistic view of the conflict strategy (Caliskan, 2019). Terrorism, Al Qaeda, the Taliban, the "war on Terror" and winning the latter (Fox News' Your World with Neil Cavuto, July 24, 2006) were all several of the ambiguous labels and groups that were misunderstood and thus misused by political actors and the media.

Studying the depth of press-administration relations is crucial to seize policy outcomes and news outcomes (Sigal, 1973). Therefore, advertisement played a tremendous role in these fake news

campaigns. Advertising as the primary income source of mass media is the second characteristic of media to which the propaganda model is applicable (2). It plays a substantial role in increasing concentration and increasing revenue. Thirdly, Herman and Chomsky put forward the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power (3). Scholar Matthew Yglesias claims in his "case for Fox News Studies" that FCN is "obviously a political actor", but also "fundamentally a media enterprise" (Yglesias, 2018). "Flak" as a means of disciplining the media (4); and "anticommunism" as a national religion and control mechanism (5) are the two last lenses of identification.

Maybe the fifth variable could be questioned insofar as "anticommunism" is not a widespread ideology as it used to be during McCarthyism. Certainly, anti-Russian sentiments remain strong in US politics and the US war in Afghanistan was mainly pushed by the Soviet intervention in 1979. However, contemporary ideologies have replaced anticommunism, as new scapegoats of our modern era have risen. Ideology is considered here as a process of dominant language, replication of values and views legitimizing the ones of elites', which authorizes, sustains, and reproduces social relations and organizations (from Thompson, 1990, cited in Turner, 2006: 279). For example, anti-Muslim, anti-abortion, anti-leftist (Smith and Searles 2014; Media Matters, 2007; 2009; Internal Fox Memo, 2003) are ideologies which were created against movements, essentialized populations and activists who the neoconservatives abhor (Dorransoro and Harling, 2005). This "anti" dimension is strong amongst the coalition of conservative Republicans, businessowners and right-wing mass media, and aims to justify interventionism by designating national and foreign enemies (Shalom, 1999). Delegitimizing political opponents as a key tactic is the hallmark of conservative media such as FNC (Hemmer 2016; Peck 2017; Rosenwald 2019; Scacco et al. forthcoming).

Furthermore, the Propaganda model applied to television would be a first insofar as Chomsky himself acknowledge "Ed Herman and I kept almost entirely to print media in our book *Manufacturing Consent* because we didn't have the resources to do a systematic study of TV" (Chomsky, 2022). In 2007, 43% of Americans watched the news on television, making it the most important medium of communication (Pew Research Center 2007). All in all, this thesis adapts the PM to the modern era, replacing or, to the least, adding up on ideologies like anticommunism looking at anti-Islamism, and opposition to "otherness" in general (Chomsky,

2002). We will also reflect on the relevance of other variables such as the interpenetration of CIA and FBI agents within the media (Boyd-Barrett, 2004) as well as Broudy and Tanji's Security System Filter (Broudy and Tanji, 2018). In fact, Herman and Chomsky pointed out the relevance of complementary theories to enrich the PM to provide a more holistic and thus build a stronger framework.

RQ: With this in mind, does the propaganda model apply to Fox News Channel's framing of the Bush administration's narratives on the war in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2009?

A significant flaw in current scholarship focusing on Fox News lies in the absence of the analysis of media frames in the war in Afghanistan, although it is the US's longest and most expensive war abroad. Similarly, papers on media coverage and behavior in the war in Afghanistan do not include FNC. For instance, Jill A. Edy and Patrick C. Meirick, in their thorough analysis of *Media Frames, Frame Adoption, and Support for the War in Afghanistan*, do not mention Fox (Edy and Meirick, 2006). If some scholars mention Fox or the war in Afghanistan, they do not go in the in-depth of the analysis. However, most scholars agree that media and especially the right-wing media Fox News Channel covered the war in a particularly partisan way, meaning it did not critically assess the policies put forward by the administration nor did it cover the war factually (Korn, 2011; Silberstein, 2002; Aday, 2005; Aday, Livingston, & Hebert, 2005; Aday, Cluverius, & Livingston, 2005; Cheney, 1993; Hallin, 1984, 1991; Katovsky & Carlson, 2003; Kellner, 1992; Newhagen, 1994; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2002). As W.J.T. Mitchell highlights, "every story is really two stories" and the importance of uncovering both defines what "good journalism" is. Indeed, in this technological era, who gets to tell "what happened" and "what was said" has power (Mitchell, 2011).

As Halimi argues, the diffuse violence that results from the monopoly of several "families" - such as the Murdochs - in charge of mass media (Halimi, 1997) is much more insidious because not visible as such. The information is selected between news that "work" and news that must be "avoided" (Halimi, 1997). As Herman and Chomsky point out (2002) in the

case of the United States, two-dozen firms control nearly the entirety of media experienced by most US citizens. Serge Halimi explains how media editors just like political elites, do not rotate and are thus, not renewed, carrying several “mandates” in a row. News thus fit shareholders’, political actors’, and industrials’ agenda, and this is an indicator of ideology. If the audience is composed of consumers, the media must satisfy the demand in a capitalistic dynamic.

Thus, one explanation to the vast network of power relations is the integration of the media into capitalist structures (Mysore, 2020; Gramsci, 1971; Altheide, 1984) - or media corporatism - that has enabled governmental and economic elites to exercise disproportionate control over media output. The military-media complex (Altheide, 1999; Dudge and Schechter, 2006; Lee and Solomon, 1990; Solomon, 2005) is a substantial lens to look at potential conflicts of interest within media. This nexus highlights the strong loophole in which these actors empower one another (Hemmer, 2018) throughout a “Radicalization model”. As such, the special treatment reserved to the administration and to Fox reporters in return - the latter spending most of their time at the White House (Mayer, 2019; Bennett, 1990) - are the root causes of how the news is covered. Audiences have become clients where entertainment, fear, and social control are the necessary ingredients (Altheide, 2006) to a profitable business (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). This business model works: Fox News is the largest cable news channel in 2002, one year after the 9/11 attacks and the massive coverage of the “war on terror” by FNC. However, some scholars (Potter, 2003) believe media shapes demand more than it responds to market desires, focusing on conditioning processes. Thereby, media would be an enhancer rather than a manufacturer of consent (Hastings, 2005). Some scholars believe values matter more than information in politics and within society (Patterson, 1996). Hereof, FNC emphasized the former to fit both Fox News’ and the administration’s agenda, to grow as a capitalistic structure but also to spread these values in reaction to the “leftist-media” it originally targeted. In this way, mass media can be considered as “political actors” (Harmon and Muenchen, 2009) embracing the highly securitized environment, substituting the issue from a technical one to one of public opinion (Edy and Meirick, 2007). FNC surfed on this environment of fear, rage, and uncertainty after 9/11, resorting to war framings, which tend to be higher when major political events occur - such as the Patriot Act, or the intensification of air strikes in Afghanistan (Edy and Meirick, 2007). Moreover, this “intent to influence” (Grygiel and Weston, 2020) was higher within FNC

because of the media's aim to emphasize the political legitimacy of the Republican administration waging the new war (Draper, 2020).

Furthermore, as Mullen and Klaehn point out, (2010) 2.6% of the total articles on media and political communication focus on the PM. This either means that the theory must be updated to the current media and political landscape - which hasn't drastically evolved since, except if research focuses on social media - or that the critical-Marxist theory is not relevant enough. Two waves of criticisms against the PM were identified by Mullen and Klaehn (2010).

Scholars from the first wave (1980-1990s) argue the model is too political, deterministic, and even "conspiratorial". Second wave scholars also argued the methodology was doubtable, reiterated the lack of focus on journalist professionalism and myriad of independent journalists, contributing to the checks and balances of the administration. Scholars like Klaehn (2003b) claimed, the PM was on the contrary "open" and the variables flexible as well as easily testable empirically. However, the propaganda model (Chomsky and Herman, 1988) has its limits insofar as FNC did not *per se* push Americans to hold pro-war views. The former rather emphasized or confirmed its viewers' beliefs insofar as most Fox followers were supporting Bush's war. As such, rather than being told what to think by the news, audiences choose news based on their values (Nwabueze and Okonkwo, 2018; Schröder, 2019). In that sense, the hypodermic needle theory, developed by Harold Lasswell in 1927 will not be an appropriate lens in this research as we focus on media *behavior* rather than its *effects* on an audience. If the agenda-setting theory (Mccombs and Shaw, 1972) is relevant when shedding light on the interdependency of officials' agenda and the media's agenda, the core focus of McCombs and Shaw is brought on the public and this not the primary interest of this thesis. The aim of this research is indeed to identify the roots of the functional and ideological structure of FNC in the way it backed the Bush administration. Moreover, it is crucial to emphasize that FNC did not cover the war in Afghanistan *per se* (Wilesmith, 2011). Instead, it substantially relayed the official discourse on the broader "war on terror". By metonymy, Fox News would thus refer to the war in Afghanistan by merely covering the "war on Terror". In addition, very few Fox reporters were sent on the ground to cover the war, to the very exception of some like Teri Schultz.

Furthermore, mass media such as CNN, ABC, CBS and even *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, usually positioned at the left of the spectrum, also held pro-war views, and omitted many fundamental topics related to the way the war was conducted. In fact, media must

make choices in the news pieces they convey, and have a limited access to information, especially in wartime. As senior reporter and foreign correspondent Greg Wilesmith argues, officials create an opportunity for reports that enables in exchange a promotion of their policies (Wilesmith, 2011). The necessary step of coping with partial information and developing close ties with the administration occurs in all mass media. To a certain extent, the administration's incentive on reporters is less strong than one can think. The rise of criticisms against the war from 2007 onwards, following the first 2005 scandal regarding Guantanamo, is a significant example. 9/11 was a particularly traumatic experience for the American population, but one can argue the mediatic momentum faded away after the first reports were released and the Democratic and dissident voices from civil society spoke up.

Additionally, imagery on Afghanistan was less sensational, and it was not deemed a "target rich environment" either military or symbolically (Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in Mitchell, 2011). The war on terror was mainly taking place in Iraq at the beginning, thus explaining the lack of coverage on the American intervention in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2004. In fact, scholars working on mass media, the "war on terror" and political communication, mainly focused on Iraq (Tumber and Palmer, 2004; Lukin, 2013) leaving Afghanistan aside. Afghanistan, alongside Iraq and Syria is the country where the US footprint was the most prominent. Even though the war in Iraq came to an end, Afghanistan remained out of the news. Furthermore, labels which were massively resorted to by the administration and the media such as "terrorism", "enemy", "threat" enable to better identify against what or who the struggle is against, as some authors like Carl Schmitt argues (Schmitt, 1932). Schmitt claims that naming pushes to action, and Fox News was focused on maintaining this specific representation of the US war on the agenda.

The mediatic troika - neoconservative politicians, neoconservative corporate owners, and right-wing media - controls the vast majority of the flows of information. Independent media broadcasting alternative approaches and views from the opposition has almost no leverage compared to the juggernaut that American mass media are. In times of war the latter's framing of speech-acts affect perceptions of threats and thus encourages warfare. Bush's reaction to the 9/11 attacks included not only war abroad, but also fear at home, which was embraced by Fox (Swint, 2008; Greenwald, 2004; Hemmer, 2016). In these two reactions, the enduring reality of the terror attacks remain far longer than the original harm. To this extent, Fox News has the main functions

of a propaganda machine (Chomsky and Herman, 1988) and affects the core principles of democracy - transparency, plurality, criticism of the government, impartiality- especially in wartime. The biggest concern centered on democracy is that alternative media - that is, those that offer a different point of view, and even information of higher quality - lack the required funds to compete with mainstream media (Fischer, 2021 in Hase, 2021). Biased media is a serious concern and to a certain extent is considered like modern terrorism (European Committee on Culture, 2005).

Furthermore, Fox News viewers held a higher average rate of misperceptions about the Iraq War than audiences of other news sources, including CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS, NPR, and print outlets (Kull et al. 2003 in), and the same accounts for Afghanistan. In effect, Fox News has the most misinformed audience (University of Maryland study, 2010), especially when it comes to foreign politics, and this is still true today. Even though other media were conveying pro-war ideas, no other media, supported the war to the extent Fox did.

All in all, this thesis also aims to gapping the misunderstandings (Herring and Robinson, 2003) regarding the PM. The PM does, in fact, provide relevant explanations for media behavior and its consequences. To this day, the absence of an alternative theory also underlines the relevance of resorting to this particular model. In other words, the PM is the most effective theory to understand media orientation and entanglement with state interests, which is not a conspiratorial and deliberate statement as some believe but a well-known fact which has been sufficiently covered by now to be admitted and recognized as such.

Methodology

This thesis will examine the breadth of the conflicts of interest within Fox News using the five variables set forth by Herman and Chomsky in their Propaganda model. As defined above, the five variables identified by the authors are:

- The **size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation** of the media
- **Advertising** as the primary income source of mass media
- The reliance of the media on **information provided by government, business, and “Experts”** funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power
- **“Flak”** as a means of disciplining the media

- **“Anticommunism”** as a national religion and control mechanism – adding to it anti-leftism and anti-Islamism.

Following these criteria, it is worth mentioning the following:

- (1) We will examine empirical studies and review of literature through primary sources;
- (2) The central theme for this research is aimed at television and news production;
- (3) The research is limited to FNC articles and TV shows published between 2001 and 2009, and neoconservatives’ comments, discourses, and speeches during the same period.

The limitations of the propaganda model due to its theorization in 1988 - before the proliferation of mass media at the digital age - will be acknowledged and adapted to the evolutions and new challenges in the midst of the 21st century. Overall, the PM succeeds in showing FNC supports rather than it challenges the system. Herman and Chomsky’s model offers one of the most “invaluable tool” for understanding media behavior in contemporary societies, (Mullen and Klaehn, 2010) and explaining the elite’s management of public discourse in democracies or elite “system” (Broudy and Tanji, 2018).

In addition, as the PM explains, mass media such as FNC comply to the market forces and participate and maintain social forces. In fact, the stalemate of the war in Afghanistan is rooted in the profit the administration and private enterprises were making out of it. On the 15 billion dollars allocated to development in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2008, 40% were indirectly benefiting donors throughout profits their firms were making and salaries for their international consultants (Barry, 2021). Fox News, like most of the neoconservatives, supported this facete of the war, convinced it was a boon for the US economy, and perceiving this opportunity as a return on investment. Thereby, the potential ties between the main US firms which benefited from the war in Afghanistan and FNC will be examined in this thesis. Then, we will analyze how their relationship may have been a case of propaganda and elite reinforcement, and if it reflected in Fox narratives on the war. We will do this by looking at: interdependency, similar political support and views, stances on the war in Afghanistan and convergence of interests.

Furthermore, the absence of the PM’s focus on the importance of language and relationship between ideology, politics and language in mass media’s *Manufacturing Consent* will be briefly discussed in the conclusion, thus going beyond the PM and offering a complementary approach to it. Complementary theories such as the agenda setting theory, and

especially securitization, will be preconized in this thesis. Securitization is the process by which a threat is made apparent throughout speech-acts. The latter designates a person or a group presented as an existential threat that requires an emergency action. In fact, Fox News' partisan stances and framing of the political leaders' discourses and speech-acts prevented a national debate to emerge and contributed to reinforcing misperceptions throughout the establishment of securitization mechanisms. This eventually undermined the efforts to explain a situation, understand its roots and provide a response devoid of passion. Over-securitization of terrorism generated an environment of fear and 'revenge', thus generating an increased militarization of Afghanistan. These theories have been chosen insofar as they enable to further grasp the "socializing enterprise" (Bernay, 1928) that "persists in many contemporary capitalist democracies: manufacture, through mass media, public consent to political, corporate, and military strategies profiting the centers of elite power and wealth" (Broudy and Tanji, 2018).

Because we do not have the space to discuss about comparative analysis with other mass media, we will not deal with other US media in this paper, even though this could be interesting in a further research paper. Nevertheless, this issue will be briefly mentioned in the last section, without getting in the in-depth of the topic.

To proceed, Fox News' online articles and TV shows will be analyzed during George W. Bush's mandate, from 2001 to 2009, as it is the administration who waged war in Afghanistan. Most of these sources are found in FNC and other websites archives, or accessible online. Both primary and secondary sources will be examined, also focusing on the broader literature on the war on terror, political communication, press-administration relations, and American media.

The size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of FNC

Fox News Channel is spearheaded by Fox Corporation, owned by its founder, the businessman Rupert Murdoch. Murdoch's empire stretches from the US to Australia, passing by the UK. The ties between Australian right-wing media aligned on pro-war politicians in the war in Afghanistan were well-known, as were the Brexit Leave campaign and the election of Donald Trump tightly linked. Murdoch's Republican and anti-liberal stances were explicit, and this was one of the central incentives in founding Fox News.

Fox is a family-owned business with 39.6% ownership share (Viet, 2020). Rupert Murdoch's son, Lachlan Murdoch, was designated CEO and executive chairman in 1996 and has remained at the head of the company since then. The Fox Corporation includes radio, television, and business. Fox is a titanic corporation of 9 000 employees in 2020 and a revenue of 12.3 billion dollars. Furthermore, Rupert Murdoch was ranked by Forbes 32nd most powerful personality in the world, and 76th most wealthy in 2015. His wealth is estimated today at roughly 18.7 billion dollars. He is first and foremost "a man of power and of extremes" (Tuccille, 1989), his primary vocation being to influence US political and business agenda as he publicly recognizes. Murdoch has reiterated his support of Bush over the years, stating that American media are too harsh with the President (Murdoch, April 24, 2007). Fox News, contrary to media Murdoch targeted, has never been critical of the Republican president. Furthermore, Murdoch's empire, "the most far-reaching communication empire in existence" (Tuccille, 1989), extends way beyond Fox Corporation. His admiration for Republican figures was expressed in the workplace where he expected journalists to support the administration and promote right-wing ideas (Greenwald, 2004). Therefore, the debate was also limited internally.

The billionaire also owns MySpace and not less than 175 newspapers - such as *The Sun* - which all supported the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Greenslade, 2003). Politically, apart from being a convinced Republican, Murdoch does not hide his support of the Zionist project, which is also represented in the general FNC mindset. In this regard, Arab reporters have left Fox because of regular anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim positions within the media.

On eight members of the Board of directors, two are members of the Murdoch family and seven are men. Furthermore, as politicians are among the directors, conflicts of interest appear to be common (Reporters Without Borders, 2016). For example, Republican politician and former Speaker of the House Paul Ryan joined Fox Corporation's board in 2019. Likewise, investor and Fox reporter Anna Dias Griffin and her husband have been largely funding Republican's campaigns. Paul Ryan, member of the Republican Party, was the vice-presidential nominee in the 2012 election running alongside Mitt Romney and believes capitalism is under assault - one among Fox's multiple conspiracies. Similarly, FNC political commentator Dana Perino was the 26th White House Press Secretary, under President George W. Bush from September 14, 2007, to January 20, 2009. Political commentator James Pinkerton served on the White House staff under both Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush and on each of their presidential campaigns from 1980

to 1992 before becoming, in January 2008, a senior adviser to the Mike Huckabee 2008 Republican presidential campaign. There are many more examples of journalists and commentators being part of the White House before, afterwards or during their time at FNC. In effect, most of them stayed in close touch with members of the government and spent some of their personal time in Washington or outside, with members of the administration (Hemmer, 2016), even though Fox's headquarters are in New York.

In addition, Fox News' structure of governance lacks inclusivity. The second CEO in Fox's history, succeeding to Robert Ailes is a woman named Suzanne Scott, nominated for her gender partly because of the recurrent scandals related to sexism and sexual harassment within the media. Nevertheless, this Republican is known for her complicity in the multiple cases of sexual harassment - the core reason why Ailes was replaced - and her compliance with sexist measures implemented in the workplace at Fox News (The Guardian, 2018). Gender-based and racial discriminations and comments are commonplace at Fox News (The New York Times, 2018; Fox News' Hannity and Colmes, February 27, 2006).

In fact, the media is more prone to making profit than it is to guarantee a safe working environment for its employees (Murdoch, 2018). Criteria such as size, ownership and the nature of governance enable to seize the company's culture and political culture. Thereby, Fox News runs more like a company than a media hence favoring profitability over quality information. Wealth and power are the two core features of the Propaganda model. As such, Murdoch donated throughout his News Corporation 427 487 dollars in soft money to the Republicans between 2001 and 2002, financing among other the war in Iraq and Afghanistan (The Guardian, 2003). However, according to Gabriel Sherman, author of *The Loudest Voice in the room*, one cannot grasp the Fox phenomenon without looking, in a top-down approach, at Roger Ailes, his background, and his goals insofar as "the entire channel is an expression of his world views". Taking this into account, one can argue that indeed, Fox is more a political project than it is a news outlet (Sherman, 2014).

All in all, FNC, by serving the dominant role of patriot after September 11, neglected the investigative role it had to play and was overly responsive to government policies (Jamieson and Waldman, 2002). According to both mass media experts:

*(...) this “dancing with the government” phenomenon made the media frame the attack as **an attack on who we are rather than on what the government has done**. This framing is consistent with U.S. media’s steady retreat from international news since the end of the Vietnam War and also reflects profit-driven owners.*

Consequently, Fox News Channel answers the first PM variable, looking at the media’s founder background and at the media’s highly capitalistic and profit-oriented culture.

Advertising as the primary income source of mass media

Fox News’ top sponsors include some of the country's largest corporations, such as General Motors, Chevrolet, Johnson and Johnson, Google, Walmart, and Pfizer. Interestingly, the United Services Automobile Association (USAA) figures among these advertisers. The USAA is a firm specialized in insurance and financial services for the US armed forces and US veterans, who for the record served in Iraq and Afghanistan. USAA is also known for its entanglement in a Ponzi scheme, and was held accountable for bank and mortgage frauds, hiding to regulators for years their exact performance evaluations.

Additionally, USAA serves as an intermediate in introducing speakers from the military to participate in Fox’s programs. Militaries’ voices were valued by FNC. In fact, militaries accounted for 30% of Fox News’ experts invited to share their views (Pew Research Center, 2011). Moreover, the insurance company had to review its policy about avoiding Fox opinion shows in 2017 after criticisms regarding USAA’s alleged political entanglements with the conservative media. Many customers such as the retired Army Colonel Joseph Collins have been complaining about USAA’s advertisement of certain shows, saying: “Stop supporting this right wing radical or your members will pull the plug on you”. In the same wake, a letter regrouping 40 organizations such as Black Lives Matter, Women’s March, Avaaz, Center for Media and Democracy, and Free Press, called upon big groups advertising Fox News to reconsider their partnership with the “conspiracy” and “extremist” right-wing media, asking to: “Stop funding lies and hate; don’t buy ads on Fox News” (Drop Fox, 2021).

Furthermore, Fox News Television received 420 million dollars of net political advertising revenue company-wide during the year 2020 (Fox News Annual Report, 2021), on a total revenue of 2.9 billion dollars. Fox is not the media which has the biggest revenue from

advertising. CNN actually comes first (Pew Research Center, July 13, 2021). However, Fox News states in its “Goals and Strategies” that “Increase revenue growth” is one of its top priorities (Fox News Annual Report, 2021) and it largely fulfilled this goal as it is the most profitable media, far ahead of CNN and MSNBC (Pew Research Center, 2021). In addition, FNC sold most shares to Disney in 2019, a company which does not hide its close ties with Republicans and its right-wing stances. In fact, Disney tried to prevent the release, in 2004, of Michael Moore’s documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11*, on Bush and the “war on terror”.

Fox’s priorities overall concern business-oriented goals. These goals prevail over providing an independent and critical source of information. The latter are however inscribed in the journalism’s code of deontology. In effect, FNC refers to its audience by using the term “consumer” (Fox News Annual Report, 2021). Thus, capitalistic dimension is prominent. Likewise, most advertisers are SUV and luxury vehicles companies and resorts, such as Sandals, Cadillac, Mercedes Benz, and Lexus.

As media specialist Jennifer Grygiel argues in *Unmasking Uncle Sam: A Legal Test for Defining and Identifying State Media*, the US state media agency targeted ads. Looking at FNC, certainly the media is *de jure* independent, but its close ties with the state and powerful firms, do question its independence. The author thus conceptualizes the power and scope of the media’s “intent to influence” (2020). It would in fact not be surprising that Fox News function like a state-media insofar as Fox “consumers” tend to have an especially positive view of the president, given that 93% of those who name the network as their main source of political news identify as Republican (Pew Research Center, 2020).

Nevertheless, the pressure of investors, bought by larger corporate conglomerates leads to the necessity of finding news sources of revenue that sometimes infringe the boundaries of ethic (Jeremy, 1999). This issue, particularly correlated to television as a medium of communication, is more reliant on standards than on journalists. For instance, in June 2003, the Federal Communications Commission voted for a series of changes to existing media regulation which facilitated monopoly, the rise in corporate ownership of media, and the rise in rate of television.

The reliance of the media on information provided by the establishment

In *Right Moves: The Conservative Think Tank in American Political Culture since 1945*, Jason Stahl examines the triangulation of neoconservatives - conservative think tanks, political elite, economic elite - unveiling its significant power over production of knowledge and especially over information conveyed by mass media. Likewise, Klaehn and Mullen (2010a, 2010b) have stressed out the importance of considering the concept of power when examining how media operate. In other terms, coercion and domination are enabled by structural capacities such as institutions where power relations are constant, and this is evident when investigating FNC.

The news' reliance on power brokers for information is actually both-sided. In reality, Fox became a quasi-vital media for the Republican administration as the conservative media was promoting the latter's "war on terror". In that regard, David Frum, former speechwriter for George W. Bush, admitted that "Republicans originally thought that Fox worked for us and now we're discovering we work for Fox." (Frum, 2010). As previously stated, Fox heavily relies on militaries as analysts and pundits, and this is part of FNC's close ties with the defense industry, which also include Pentagon contractors (The Investigative Fund, 2014). Retired General John Jack Keane was one of Fox's security analysts, regularly advocating for General Dynamics as one of its board directors (Media Matters, 2017). Keane was a partisan of the war in Afghanistan, constantly pleading for more troops - managing to convince Bush - and more money to military contractors such as General Dynamics. The latter figures among the five companies - including Boeing, Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, and Northrop Grumman - which benefited the most from the war in Afghanistan, according to a report from the Watson institute (Brown University, 2021). In addition, Keane is married to Republican political commentator Angela McGlowan, who published *How Americans Are Being Exploited by the Lies of the Liberal Agenda* in 2007.

Moreover, a study conducted by FAIR showed that Democrats - the majority being conservative democrats who tended to affirm Bush policies - invited on FNC accounted for only 15% of total speakers compared to 85% Republicans (FAIR, 2004). This is not surprising as it confirms the media is mainly addressed to Republicans (Pew Research Center, April 8, 2020). This bias in speaker selection demonstrates that FNC primarily relies on information from one side or school of thought.

As LSE scholar Malavika Mysore argues, the media must choose its sources considering its relationship with power, and not to offend them (Mysore, 2020). During the “war on terror”, the “institutional bias” (Sigal, 1973; Gans, 1979; Bennett 2007) - namely journalists heavily relying on official sources and information - was the rule set by the administration and FNC abided by it meticulously, hence producing an elite consensus discourse. For instance, the Bush Administration had formally requested that the US networks apply self-censorship and not run any al Qaeda material live. Censorship and control of information by administration and especially neoconservatives were common (Wilesmith, 2011). Robert S. Bevelacqua, a retired Green Beret and former Fox News analyst admitted that military analysts chosen by the administration, had a crucial impact in the way the war was covered (Bevelacqua in Barstow, 2008). In effect, he adds the administration gave the direction they wanted and the information they wanted to see in the news. He also claims that money played a significant role, arguing that many of these analysts were lobbying for government contracts while journalists aspired to high positions. Limited and controlled access was the key so the question was: what kind of information do we have and what could be missing? And how are we going to convey this information? Officials transformed the obstacle of information into an opportunity, a way of promoting their policies (Wilesmith, 2011).

On top of this, television, in particular, produced “a new breed of semi-journalists: a corps of retired generals and admirals and other experts” and invited them on screens since the 1991 Persian Gulf war (Hess and Kalb, 2003). This is especially visible on Fox’s TV sets. As David Brock, CEO of Media Matters, puts it: “Fox News Channel is a platform of opinion sharing, and one that is monolithic, it’s not journalism” (Brock in Greenwald, 2004). In other terms, facts do not matter to Fox, nor does proof or seeking the truth behind each information, despite the fact truth seeking is one of the key principles of “ethical journalism” (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014). Fox “journalism” entails commenting political events, and upholding a certain culture at the workplace, on the TV set, and thus in American society. This one-sided story and subjectivity are represented in the speakers’ identity, background, and way they are selected by FNC.

Moreover, it was required from journalists and FNC staff in general to not challenge or adopt a confrontational style towards the Bush administration and Republicans speakers in general (Hayes and Guardino, 2010). Again, as Malavika Mysore studied in her research, media

as manufacturer of consent must choose sources considering their relationships with power, and not to offend them (Mysore, 2020). Thereby, both sides are clearly not adequately covered. As reported by a Pew Research Center study, FNC quoted Republicans nearly ten times as often about Afghanistan (Pew Research Center, 2007). In effect, the bias towards Bush is not hidden by the news agency. During the Bush vs Kerry Presidential campaign, the countdown to “Bush’s reelection” was reminded daily before the news started.

In addition, the strong trust granted to Bush by FNC - especially when it comes to the “war on terror” - clearly reflects in the programs, as reporters and commentators were convinced the President was making the right choices (Fox News' Hannity & Colmes, February 27, 2006). Neoconservatives from the administration were also looked up to. For instance, when Colin Powell died, Fox News draw a eulogistic portrait of the man behind the invasion of both Iraq and Afghanistan (Fox News, October 18, 2001). Programs advocated in favor of a military intervention in Afghanistan, deemed necessary as FNC interlinked the intervention with principles of “respect” for victims of 9/11, “protection” of US territory and “retaliation” against the “terrorists”, deciding which Americans were “loyal” or not (Fox Broadcasting Co's Fox News Sunday, June 26 edition 2005). Even when George W. Bush was entangled in scandals or questioned by polls and reports, O'Reilly backed the President:

*All right, this Osama bin Laden video was just released late this afternoon. And I believe it will help President Bush because it's a reminder of the villain, what he's done. He's actually gloating about what he's done. And even though Bush hasn't gotten him, all the polls say **Bush is much stronger in the minds of Americans on terror**¹. (FOX News Channel, The O'Reilly Factor, October 29, 2004).*

Likewise, on the same day Dick Morris argued that:

***Bush has nothing to defend himself about.** This tape will help Bush enormously. [...] It's all going to help Bush. Because, look, in the worst poll, he gets by a 10-point margin being better in Iraq and a 20-point margin being better in the war on terror. And there is no way that Kerry is going to flip those issues with three days left (FOX News Channel, The Big Story with John Gibson, 2004).*

Furthermore, as Media Matters has exposed:

¹ Bold highlight added to emphasize on a specific passage in the quote

In discussions of suspected terrorists detained at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, FOX News Channel host and radio host Bill O'Reilly has repeatedly supported the Bush administration's position that it's dangerous and unnecessary to allow the detainees to challenge their detention in federal court. He claimed that since those captured in Afghanistan and held at Guantánamo are "foreigners" -- i.e., non-Afghans who traveled to Afghanistan to fight the U.S. invasion -- they are unlikely to be innocent people captured by mistake. O'Reilly is wrong: While many Guantánamo detainees are non-Afghan, a significant plurality is, in fact, from Afghanistan (Media Matters, 2004).

Additionally, framing George W. Bush's speeches enables to be sure decisions such as the Patriot Act are defended and kept on the agenda. FNC's role was to serve political legitimacy under pressure to find evidence to justify the war (Draper, 2020). Thereby, the narrative was clearly dominating since those who decided to maintain certain aspects of events on the agenda were the ones in power. They could define chronology and terms in their own interest, thus owning the narrative and establishing 9/11 and the war in terror in time (Rowlandson, 2015).

FNC in fact supported the "vital" necessity of implementing the Patriot Act as put by Bush himself, interviewing partisans of this "antiterrorist law". During the President's speech at the law's signing ceremony, he said it was "vital to the war on terror and defending citizens against a ruthless enemy" (Bush, 2006). The very title of Fox's article "Patriot Act Needed in War on Terror" is biased insofar as it *urbi orbi* claims the law is necessary to "win" (Fox News, January 13th, 2005). The media tried to seem objective by picking both Democrats - like former Senator Bob Graham, who contributed to writing the Patriot Act - and Republicans such as Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison to comment the reauthorization of the law. FNC depicted this "antiterrorist law" as a boon for matters of national security. For instance, Bill Gavin, a former FBI assistant director qualified the Patriot Act of a "tremendous help" and argued it should have been in place before 9/11. Thus, FNC keeps the Bush administration's priorities on the agenda in order to maintain and fuel their particular metanarrative of the war. In this way, domestic and foreign policies intertwined and the distinction between matters of national security and human/civil rights were blurred.

Moreover, interviews at the White House were mostly done by reporters from FNC, selected by the President for their mutual trust and close ties, and treated most of the time like members of the administration (White House Archives, 2008; The New Yorker, November

2019). Other media did not - and still do not - benefit from such a special status as they were accorded less interviews and access to governmental spheres than their Fox colleagues, if not accused of spreading fake news. In fact, some argue the US has never been that close of having a state TV, assimilating to propaganda (Hemmer, 2016).

Roger Ailes personally sent FNC political commentator Kathleen McFarland - who became Trump's National security advisor in 2017 - in Afghanistan to recruit General David Petraeus to run the presidential elections, with Ailes to help him run his campaign (Sherman, 2014). Additionally, McFarland directly asked Petraeus in his office in Kabul if there was anything Fox News was doing "right or wrong" that he wished the media would change (Washington Post, 2011). Regularly, Fox would ask the White House to bring Republican figures such as Sarah Palin on the TV set (Sherman, 2014). As Sandra Korn emphasizes, the close relationship between the military and the media may thus undermine reporters' primary goal of uncovering the truth (Korn, 2011). This close relationship to the government partly explains why very few Fox reporters were sent to Afghanistan to cover US activities there. John Stack, Vice President of newsgathering at Fox News Channel confessed Fox presented reports from the Pentagon coupled with illustrations from news agencies such as the AP and Reuters (Riciardi, 2006). However, he acknowledges the media should had been contributing to the national discussion by addressing questions such as: What are we doing right and what are we doing wrong? Are we tackling the right problems and in the right order? Why is the Taliban coming back to life? What is the structure of the insurgency? Where does it get its weapons and find safe haven?

"Flak" as a means of disciplining the media

Analyzing flak and the enforcers for the case study of FNC enables to understand the power dynamics and scope of exogeneous pressure. As Herman and Chomsky demonstrate, "flak" reveals the interpenetration of right-wing agents of power in the media. In *Manufacturing Consent*, the authors define "flak" and explain its relevance arguing that:

The producers of flak add to one another's strength and reinforce the command of political authority in its news-management activities. The government is a major producer of flak, regularly assailing, threatening, and "correcting" the media, trying to contain any deviations

*from the established line. News management itself is designed to produce flak. **Although the flak machines steadily attack the mass media, the media treat them well.** They receive respectful attention, and their propagandistic role and links to a larger corporate program are rarely mentioned or analyzed. AIM head, Reed Irvine's diatribes are frequently published, and right-wing network flacks who regularly assail the "liberal media," such as Michael Ledeen, are given Op-Ed column space, sympathetic reviewers, and a regular place on talk shows as experts. **This reflects the power of the sponsors, including the well-entrenched position of the right wing in the mass media themselves.*** (Herman and Chomsky, 1988)

Individuals like Reed Irvine, the founder of Accuracy in Media (AIM) in 1969, are flak producers, and their main objective was to serve the Republican agenda. The former marine founded AIM to “balance” liberal media such as CNN, hence opening the door to right-wing media such as Fox News (AIM, 2004). Ironically the mindset of Irvine at the time was to provide facts and avoid influences and biased news to spread. In fact, Fox reporter Christine Herridge won the AIM award in 2013 for her work on the Benghazi Gate. Benghazi-gate is a term coined by Republicans who immediately politicized the 2012 terrorist attack on the US consulate in Benghazi, as part of their opposition campaign against President Obama.

The extensive coverage of this attack in Libya during Barack Obama's presidency versus the meagre coverage of a long-lasting war in Afghanistan under President Bush shows the unbalance and politicization of Fox's news pieces. However, the multiple failures and mistakes made in Afghanistan never made up the news during Bush's mandate provoking a scandal like the one of Benghazi. The torture of detainees in 2003-2004 especially (ICC, 2016; Doran and Quraishi; 2002) and other illegal practices, the increasing of bombings such as the one of Azizabad on August 22, 2008 – killing 90 civilians including 60 children (UN, 2008) -, were all kept under silence. According to human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, who publishes a report estimating that bombings of civilians were multiplied by three between 2006 and 2007 (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Similarly, a case has never been opened regarding allegations that the Bush administration resisted efforts to investigate a CIA-backed Afghan warlord over the killings of hundreds of Taliban prisoners in 2001 (Doran and Quraishi, 2002).

Additionally, AIM's executive director Malcom Kline refers to the Washington Post as a “reactionary media” and to the former Soviet Union as the “Evil Empire” (AIM, 2004). During the George W. Bush administration, AIM accused the media of bias against the Iraq War,

defended the Bush administration. Pro war stances in general (Chapman, Roger; Ciment, James (March 17, 2015). *Culture Wars: An Encyclopedia of Issues, Viewpoints and Voices*. Routledge. p. 339) and bias in war on terror especially (Goss, Brian Michael (August 1, 2009). "The Left-Media's Stranglehold". *Journalism Studies*. 10 (4): 455–473.)

Nevertheless, the conservative group Accuracy in Media has also fulfilled its role of watchdog group. Indeed, AIM claimed that there was a conflict of interest in Fox News' co-sponsorship of the May 15, 2007, Republican presidential debate (AIM archive, March 5, 2016). AIM outlined that candidate Rudy Giuliani's law firm worked on copyright protection and legislation regarding the purchase of cable television lineups for News Corporation, parent company at the time of Fox News, Fox Television Stations, Fox Sports and Fox Sports News, Fox Television Studios, 20th Century Fox, Fox star Productions, 20th Television, 20th Century Fox Television, Fox Searchlight Pictures, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment and DirecTV, and suggesting that Fox News might be biased in favor of Giuliani's candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination.

All in all, when it comes to Fox, flak is more directed towards other media, liberal or foreign such as CNN or Al Jazeera than it is endured by FNC from its advertisers and sources of information.

In this regard, the blatant intimidation of people holding different views, aiming to favor Bush and the establishment, while delegitimizing Democrats, is particularly expressed in the TV shows hosted by Bill O'Reilly. Indeed, the latter constantly cuts speakers who might be critical vis à vis US foreign policies. One time - as it is common on FNC- an extremely aggressive response was given to speaker Jeremy Glick who claimed Afghans were paying the price of this war whereas they were not responsible for the 9/11 attacks. "Shut up", "I won't debate with you", "You should be ashamed (...) the Afghans killed your father (...) Bush had nothing to do with this (9/11)", "you don't respect America", responded O'Reilly, accusing the interviewee of using "vile propaganda" (The O'Reilly Factor, February 4, 2003). This inconsistent rhetoric is pathologic to O'Reilly's disturbing TV shows and to FNC in general, in which debates, and intellectual honesty are not welcomed. The emotional dimension of Fox News' coverage is strong and expressed in the media's language and reactions to different views and facts countering the hegemonic discourses (Korn, 2011).

Similarly, in the aftermath of 9/11, Richard Clarke, former national security expert who resigned in 2003, wrote the book *Against All Enemies*, critically reflecting on Bush's position regarding terrorism before the suicide attacks occurred in the US. When Clarke's book was released, Bush's supporters and especially FNC surged on the expert, claiming the book was part of a conspiracy against Bush and in favor of Clinton. This brings us to Herman and Chomsky's last variable which is Fox's main *raison d'être*: its everyday struggle against Democrats.

Anti-leftist, Anti-Islamism

Insofar as framing and labeling go hand in hand, the Fox's ideology and close ties with the administration are inextricably linked. According to Murat Caliskan, the terms frequently used by government officials familiarize the public with concepts that are then normalized through their widespread use by media outlets such as FNC. This encourages a mindset that is fundamentally opposed to one that is focused on conflict strategic effectiveness. (Caliskan, 2019). As the scholar argues, the concept of "Blitzkrieg", for instance, was not an official one in the 1940s since it was coined by commentators and not by German military doctrine.

The violence generated by the 9/11 attacks were unevenly experienced by marginalized groups, including Muslims and those perceived as Muslim (Jackson, 2021) suffering from stereotypes conveyed by the administration and the media. These stereotypes were progressively institutionalized and trivialized throughout fake news and Fox's strategy of fear. The diminishing terms used to describe "Middle-Eastern" populations goes hand in hand with the stereotyped language FNC adopts. The media frequently uses phrases such as "hunting them (terrorists) down" or claiming, "Afghans are being ungrateful" (Fox News' Your World with Neil Cavuto, May 29, 2005) referring to riots happening across Afghanistan, while the US was supposedly putting all efforts to "liberate Afghanistan" (Mrs. Bush, 2008). This nation-building jargon framed COIN strategy put in place by the Administration. Overall, language has been central to realizing the policies of the "war on terror" (Collins and Glover 2002; Holland 2012b; Jackson 2005a; Silberstein 2002).

As Islam was the new target, Democrats and leftists in general were attacked on FNC as well. Media owner Ted Turner, who was invited on O'Reilly's show to give his view on the war, was humiliated and constantly interrupted by Fox's famous host. Turner's nuanced analysis of the US position towards Afghanistan were automatically castigated by O'Reilly who argued Turner "is terribly misguided" and "embraces Fidel Castro". O'Reilly then asked: "Why do you hate America, Ted?" (The O'Reilly Factor, 2006). This is a relevant example of the specific rhetoric adopted by FNC. This right-wing media embraces what Jeff Cohen, former Fox contributor calls "attack-politics" (Cohen in Greenwald, 2004). This particular mediatic culture confers to Fox the key role of marginalizing, silencing and stigmatizing those who do not share their views. Most of all, FNC fuels conspiracy theories and practices constant denial instead of building solid arguments. Fox News Channels works as a machine of manufacturing consent by opposition to everything or everyone it despises. "Anti" was the cornerstone on which the media was founded, preventing any kind of discussion that could challenge or criticize the Bush administration. Highly offensive, as well as highly defensive, Fox News Channel ensured Bush and his allies' images were not smeared by the public opinion and voices from the opposition. Attack politics is the contrary of professional journalism. In effect, Fox News' director until 2017, Robert Ailes had little journalism experience, but brought to the job the mindset of a political operative (Brock and Havt, 2012), just like Donald Trump had little experience of politics before being elected President of the United States in 2016. Republicans who are the most conservative tend to deconstruct politics: it is no longer a profession (Weber, 1919), but rather a power relationship through which one can rise to the highest levels of command. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, a strong ideological position inherent in Fox News' way of covering the news led to misrepresentations of the "enemy" (Porter, 2009) throughout the media.

Moreover, Fox journalist Kelley Beaucar Vlahos' article "U.S. Looks Beyond Afghanistan for Next Front in War on Terror" (Fox News, 2001) reflected how Afghanistan was just a first step in the war on terror. The broader war on "Islamic fundamentalism", looking beyond the war in Afghanistan was in fact the Bush administration's main goal. Fox News' was aligned with these concerns, and this is expressed in Vlahos' article. She claims terrorism is "directed against Israeli Jews", and that terrorist groups are primarily defined by their "anti-Westernism and anti-Zionism" position, linking these groups to Hamas and Hezbollah in a very odd and confusing way, blatantly lacking expertise on the topic. In effect, Iran and its proxies, as

well as Qatar - in conflict with US' Saudi ally - Russia and China represent the main perceived threats by the US, and then relayed as such by FNC.

According to Sherman in his book *The Loudest voice in the room* (Sherman, 2014), FNC fueled the clash of civilization theory in the aftermath of 9/11, advocating for an intervention in the Middle East and contributing to a Muslim/Christian, us versus them, US ("free world")/Middle East ("rogue states") divide. The creation of the "fearful other" discourse and foreign policy are intimately linked with questions of identity (Larsen 2007; Holland, 2014). Samuel P. Huntington's theory of civilizational clash (Huntington, 1996) brushes a Manichean painting of human interactions and conflicts primarily based on religious and cultural identities. The determinism and ideological aspects of the American political scientist's thesis has been criticized by many scholars (Fox, 2005; Mungiu Pippidi and Mindruta, 2002; Henderson and Tucker, 2001; Russett, Oneal, and Cox, 2000; Harvey, 2000). In fact, Noam Chomsky himself argued that this concept was just a new justification for the US "for any atrocities that they wanted to carry out", which was required after the Cold War as the Soviet Union was no longer a viable threat (Chomsky, 2007). On the other hand, this theory was particularly appreciated among neoconservatives (Dorronsoro and Harling, 2005) and in effect, George W. Bush made regular references to the clash of civilization (Bush, September 11, 2006). This symbolic utilization of IR theories (Eriksson and Norman, 2011; Cohen, 2003) could be an interesting, related topic for further research.

Moreover, what news outlets present as terrorism informs, as Fisher puts it, "which groups society is willing to protect, and what kind of violence it is willing to tolerate" (Fisher, 2017). Politicians use pejoratively the term terrorist in a strategic way (Jackson, 2007) to advance their agendas, but so do the media (Nacos, 2016; Rothenberger, 2021), influenced by the perception of national identities. This "anti" narrative thus enhanced the "we vs. them" perception or "in and out" group bias (Van Hauwaert and Huber, 2020), as it was demonstrated by SIT in Critical Terrorism Studies. Thereby, FNC downplayed violence by the in-group and exaggerated threats by the out-group - such as Afghans (Fishman and Marvin, 2003).

Fear and fake news regarding ethnicity and foreigners are numerous, beyond the specific case of Afghanistan. On January 11, 2015, Fox News commentator Steven Emerson, who had been criticized for inaccuracies in the past, reported that Birmingham, in the United Kingdom - a city of over one million people, was a Muslim-only city falsely claiming that: "In Britain, it's not

just no-go zones, there are actual cities like Birmingham that are totally Muslim where non-Muslims just simply don't go in". The "no-go zones" is a common expression within Fox, which was also used to designate neighborhoods in France and was vehemently counter argued by French authorities. As emphasized by the securitization theory, collective support for decisions and designation of threats is the hallmark of securitization. Thus, media play a key role in this regard. This process in effect results in a vicious circle that can increase intolerance and securitization of certain issues and hence, making conflicts more likely (McSweeney, 1996).

Similarly, Iranian-Swedish newspaper commentator, author and legal professional Behrang Kianzad responded to a Fox News story about allegedly Muslim violence in the city of Malmö (Fox News, 2004), in Sweden. Kianzad wrote that altercations with the police were not only originated by Muslims, also pointing out that the Fox News allegation that Malmö had about 25% immigrants from Muslim countries was false, estimating the rate to rather approximately 7%. Furthermore, Kianzad condemned the rhetoric used by Fox News that implied that the Swedish city, like other European cities "invaded" by illegal immigrants, had reached some sort of breaking point due to Muslim immigrants who were, in addition, "potential terrorists".

All in all, conservatives combine their fears of designated "enemies" in far-fetched designations such as "Bolchevick Bernie" (Kincaid, 2015), a nickname given by Cliff Kincaid to the Democrat candidate after alleged ties between Bernie Sanders and Russia Today. Reminiscing the red scare during the 1950s when McCarthyism was at its apogee, Cliff Kincaid, director of Accuracy in Media's Center for Investigative Journalism argued that "While conservatives have made progress, the Russian and Chinese governments, as well as the Muslim Brotherhood, are buying their way into Western media markets, in order to confuse people and whitewash their own aggressive policies" (Kincaid, 2015). Misperceptions bring to escalation of tensions by an oversecritization in which the psychological component predominates. Then again, fear is one of the main business strategies of FNC, aligned its close circle, namely its sources of information, and most of its invited speakers.

Conclusion

To conclude, after applying the five variables identified by Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model, this thesis can assess Fox News has the main attributes of a Republican-media and contributes to further polarizing American society on serious public debates. This analysis outlined the media does not follow "ethical journalism" principles and thus, rather functions like an entertainment company, based on profit, but also political, motives.

As Herman and Chomsky point out themselves, such a polarization has been emphasized throughout this research:

*(...) a propaganda approach to media coverage suggests a systematic and highly political dichotomization in news coverage based on serviceability to important domestic power interests. This should be observable in **dichotomized choices of story** and in **the volume and quality of coverage... such dichotomization** in the mass media is **massive and systematic**: not only are choices for publicity and suppression comprehensible in terms of system advantage, but the modes of handling favored and inconvenient materials (placement, tone, context, fullness of treatment) differ **in ways that serve political ends**.* (Herman and Chomsky, 1988).

Moreover, our focus on Afghanistan enabled to expose the implications of FNC's lack of coverage of the war, necessary to the emergence of a public debate in the US. A Pew study revealed Americans were in fact not paying attention to what was happening in Afghanistan. Only 25% could estimate the number of US troop deaths in Afghanistan, fewer than those who could identify the number of fatalities in Iraq (42%). Not only was there lack of news on Afghanistan, but also a crucial lack of analysis of the conflict. 53% admitted that they missed the background information needed to follow news about Afghanistan (Pew Research Center, 2009).

To sum up, from the application of Herman and Chomsky's five variables to Fox News, this paper draws the following observation:

- Wealth and power play a tremendous role in Fox's growth and success. Murdoch's empire stretches from business to news with a thin line between both. Fox News is the most profitable of Fox Corporations Murdoch and his family own 39% of Fox News, and he is one of the US' top billionaires. In addition, Fox is primarily driven by profit.
- Advertisement reveals a lot about the company, especially regarding FNC's entanglement with military corporations which made huge profits in Afghanistan. Fox is also advertised

by US's biggest firms and the scope of targeted ads questions the media's independence. Even though advertisement was not Fox's main source of information 20 years ago, it is today, especially since large parts were sold to Walt Disney in 2019.

- The third variable is undoubtedly the most important of all five variables. The reliance of the FNC on information provided by the establishment is a substantial part of the media's identity and survival. Memos circulated among Fox journalists strongly preconized what to talk about and how to say it. Nevertheless, as this research has outlined, the relationship between Fox and these agents of power is one of interdependence. In other terms, Fox works for them, and they work for Fox at the benefits are mutuals and the objectives similar.
- "Flak" as a way of controlling the media is not particularly relevant here insofar as the pressure comes from within. As mentioned above, Murdoch and Ailes were making sure throughout Fox memos that the guidelines in terms of positionality and topics to pick were well aligned with the Republicans and Bush's agenda. However, flak as a way of fighting other news outlet and "groups" is a substantial part of Fox's strategy, which takes us to the fifth and last variable.
- Fear and polarization as a business strategy, often formulating conspiracy theories. Pushing for such frames and labels normalized exclusive and often discriminatory - if not paternalist and racist - narratives.

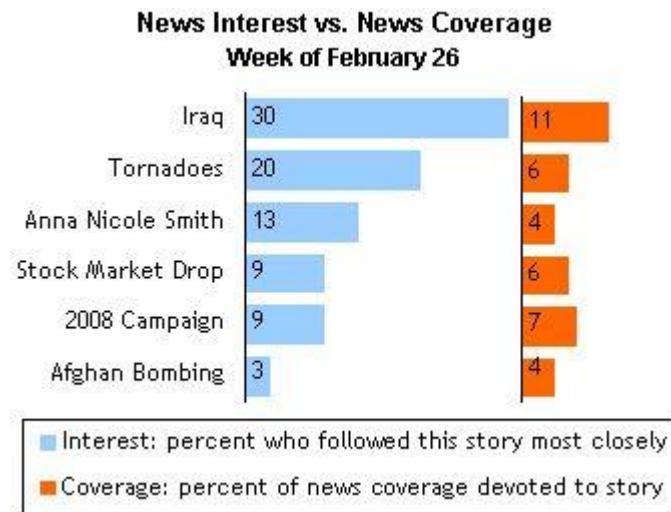
The 6th variable investigated by Boyd-Barrett (2004) and Broudy and Tanji was also verifiable in the case study of Fox News. The former's variable seeks to unveil the interpenetration of CIA and FBI agents in the media. Indeed, they have been regularly invited and consulted by Fox when aligned with the latter's agenda. Bill Gavin, a former FBI assistant director was invited on Fox to express the "tremendous help" the Patriot Act was, and that it should had been, in his opinion, put in place before 9/11 (Fox News, June 11, 2005). The variable examined by Broudy and Tanji "engages with the question of how the general public is driven from the arena of political debate and conditioned to support political elites promulgating policies claiming to be essential for state security and public safety" (Broudy and Tanji, 2018). While this thesis has not looked into cultural conditioning per se, it has revealed the scope of security narratives within the "war on terror". Maintaining the myth of a super powerful America (Dorronsoro and Harling, 2005)

throughout the entertainment of fear, priorities of “national security” and “protection” of US citizens kept on the agenda justified many abuses in politics and in the news.

Understanding the level of compliance of Fox News with the administration was crucial in comprehending the political dynamics and levels of support of the way the war in Afghanistan was led. As Benett puts it: “The press has grown too close to the sources of power in this nation, making it largely the communication mechanism of the government” (Bennett et al. 2007). The media massively adopted the language of the “global war on terror” when reporting on terrorism (Jackson 2005) without any distinction and critical analysis. Looking beyond Chomsky and Herman’s PM, the importance of culture as a determining factor has been acknowledged throughout this thesis, in an environment where public discussion touching upon economy, but most importantly identity and nationalism, has become exclusively political (Denton and Woodward, 1990). As for the securitization theory, it brought a relevant complementary approach to the PM. Desecuritization, namely the process throughout which an issue is withdrawn from the security agenda, would have enabled, in the case of the war in Afghanistan and the broader “war on terror”, a mature reflection on the events.

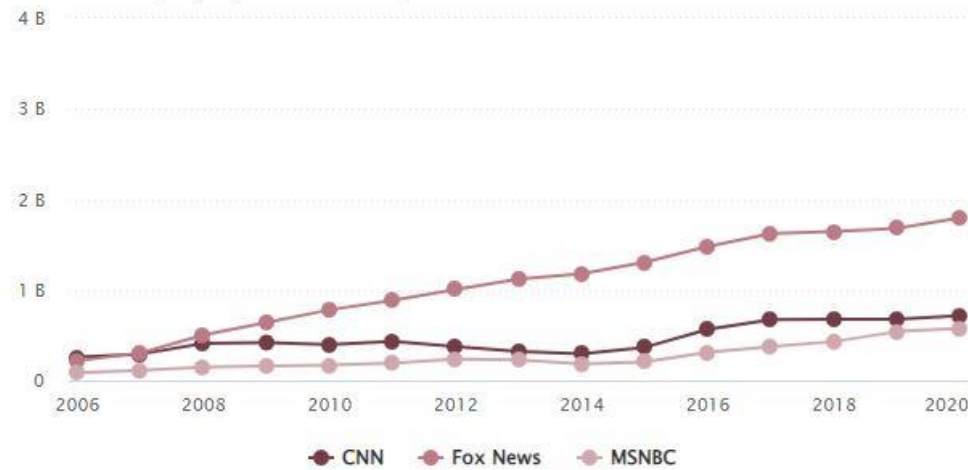
All in all, this thesis revealed how FNC fueled Bush and his close circle’s meta-narratives, to the expanses of journalistic deontology. The right-wing media also avoided debates regarding the war in Afghanistan, supported Bush and his administration’s decisions regarding the broader “war on terror”, while publishing very few articles on Afghanistan. The same goes for TV shows. In addition, Fox’s views on the “war on terror” classifies the media as an entertainment company rather than a journalistic one. As a result, the conflict in Afghanistan was under-analyzed, understood and covered, and the war being lost, the thousands of civilians bombed as well as the US deaths were not shared. Opinions prevailed over information and as such, FNC did not full its role public accountability. The choice of analysts, as presented throughout this research, clearly confirms FNC’s bias. Finally, “attack-politics” is the cornerstone of Fox News shows such as the ones of Billy O’Reilly. Commentators have a central role in the fabric of FNC’s identity and language is key. Language formulates ideas, opinions, and perceptions. Further research could focus on what we call *soft terrorism* to characterize Fox’s activities, strategy, and political culture.

Appendix



Pew Research Center. March 8, 2007

Total annual profit (in U.S. dollars)



Pew Research Center. July 13, 2021

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