# The Application of a Master Frame: Tracing the War on Terror in the Irish Times 2001-8

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## Introduction

THE 'WAR ON TERROR' has surely been one of the most analysed phenomenona in political communication during the first decades of the 21st century. That this might be so is perhaps unsurprising given its prominence and its impact on domestic and international politics during this period. It has increasingly been regarded as the new ordering principle of international relations (Archetti, 2004). The phenomenon has been identified as a 'master frame' akin to the 'cold war' (Hackett, 2001; Kuypers, Cooper and Althouse, 2008) which dominated political discourse in the latter half of the 20th century. Snow and Benford (1992) originally used the term 'master frame' in their analysis of social movements to signify 'political and cultural shorthand, used to unify a broad movement and instil political agency'. Meyer (1995) later sought to expand its significance beyond social movement politics, using the term to describe a more comprehensive worldview where a master frame will have resonance both within mainstream political discourse and movement politics (Meyer, 1995). In this regard Norris et al. (2003) note that the fall of the Berlin wall and the replacement of the Cold War frame with the newer 'war on terror' frame offered 'a way for American politicians and journalists to construct a narrative to make sense of a range of diverse stories about international security, civil wars and global conflict' (Norris, Kern and Just, 2003).

This paper proposes to address a lacuna in the framing literature by studying how and in what context the master frame of the 'war on terror' was used in newspaper coverage. To date the literature on framing has been predominantly focused on either content (e.g., frames in news), framing effects, or the interplay between the two – what Scheufele (1999) called frame setting. However, little research has been conducted on the context in which a frame is used or invoked and for what purposes. In seeking to address this objective in the press, utilising a newspaper with an agenda-setting role is preferable. This choice to focus on an elite newspaper reflects what other communications scholars have observed: that stories tend to spread vertically within the news industry, with editors at regional media outlets often deferring to elite newspapers and newswires to set the national news agenda (Gitlin, 1980).

In this paper it is proposed to use the *Irish Times* as the object of study for a couple of reasons. Firstly, international news research has typically been dominated by large 'elite' nations such as the US and the UK (Lazarsfeld, 1952; Tsang, Tsai and Liu, 1988) and thus the perspectives of smaller and more peripheral countries

and newspapers are underrepresented in the literature. Secondly, a study of an elite newspaper in a small peripheral country could be seen as being more representative of newspaper coverage around the world more generally, given that, like Ireland, most countries were not directly engaged in a protracted 'war on terror'. However, a number of significant caveats to this role need to be noted. The first involves Ireland's position as a 'key intermediate zone' in what O'Hearn (2001) calls 'the Atlantic economy' of the US, the UK and Ireland. Secondly, the longstanding political, historical, cultural and social ties between Ireland and the US are difficult to understate and have been discussed elsewhere as constituting a 'special relations' master frame (O'Hearn, 2001; O'Regan, 2010). Thirdly, while Ireland was not a direct operational participant in the 'war on terror', it did (from 21 September 2001) facilitate the US military by agreeing to provide over-flight, landing and refuelling rights to US aircraft at Shannon airport, a policy that generated much controversy and which was the subject of much criticism for several years post 9/11. Indeed, in the dataset outlined below, Shannon airport was cited ten times in *Irish Times* articles that referenced the 'war on terror', the majority of which were in the context of the practice of extraordinary rendition. However, writing on the Irish response to the 'Global War on Terrorism' in 2005, Miller suggests that 'nevertheless, this decision was the first, and also final, practical Irish commitment to the US-led GWOT' (Miller, 2005). He also notes that in the run-in to the Iraq war, the controversy over the use of Shannon airport was somewhat undermined by the fact that 'Ireland was only one of 50 nations that acceded to the Bush administration's request for landing and over-flight rights'; a number which included staunch opponents of the war such as France and Germany (Miller, 2005).

## Literature Review

Although the literature on the terrorism-media nexus is longstanding, when the original debate was being conducted in the 1970s by the likes of Jenkins, Alexander, Lacquer and Bassiouni, terrorism was viewed in terms of discrete incidences, by discrete groups, seeking discrete goals, rather than as a globally connected struggle over the future of civilisation where every terrorist attack, no matter where it occurs, is seen as part of the overarching 'war on terror' (Bassiouni, 1978; Alexander, 1977; Jenkins, 1980; Laqueur, 1987). In addition, in the 1970s the framing approach in political communication studies was in its infancy, and would not gain widespread currency for another decade. Since its first application to the fields of media and communication studies by the likes of Tuchman (1978) and Gitlin (1980), framing has steadily increased in popularity among political communication scholars. Since the inception of the 'war on terror', scholars have used framing theory to analyse many aspects of the construct: newspaper editorials in the wake of 9/11 (Ryan, 2004); comparisons of newspaper coverage in different countries (Danis and Stohl, 2008; Dimitrova, and Stromback, 2005; Archetti 2007); in constructions of new models of press-state relations (Entman, 2003); in analysing the invocation and contestation of 'securitization' (Vultee, 2007); and in analysing the 'war on terror' through the eyes of journalists engaged in its coverage (Lewis and Reese, 2009), among many others.

    In this paper we take a slightly tangential approach to framing by being specifically concerned with the role and career of the master frame of the 'war on terror', notably as it relates to geopolitical coverage of terrorism in the pages of the *Irish Times* – as

opposed for instance to references to the 'war on terror' in the broader cultural milieu. With regard to role, the capacity of a master frame to subsume disparate issues has been cited by many scholars. For example, in asking the question 'Will the "global war on terrorism" be the new Cold War?', Buzan (2006) stresses the constructed nature of the master frame by referring to a 'macro-securitisation' of global security (denoting whether something can be successfully constructed as a threat) and stating that 'part of the GWoT's relative success can be attributed to the way in which it has tied together several longstanding security concerns arising within the liberal order, most notably crime and the trades in drugs and the technologies for weapons of mass destruction' (Buzan, 2006). It is an objective of this paper to explicitly identify what security concerns were subsumed under the 'war on terror' in the pages of the *Irish Times*. We are also concerned with the career of the 'war on terror' over the eight year period. Stahl (2008) has written about the staying power of the meta-construct of the 'war on terror', declaring that by 2005 'it had grown sour and was in need of a makeover. Simultaneously, a process was underway to supplant it with a moniker perhaps more in tune with the calling of our time – the "Long War",' but this reframing was never to take hold. The waning rhetorical power of the 'war on terror' was noted by many scholars, such as Reese (2007): 'references to the "so-called" war on terror or bracketing in quotation marks point to this reflexive awareness among many writers (but) this partial awareness has not prevented the frame from being widely accepted as a way of thinking about the "post–9/11" world' (Reese, 2007).

## Methodology

The methodology used to analyse the *Irish Times* over the eight year period was content analysis. Content analysis is a method for the systematic analysis of communications content. Wright and Page (1959) defined content analysis as a research technique for the systematic classification and description of communicative content according to certain, usually predetermined categories. Technical objectivity requires that the categories of classification and analysis be clearly and operationally defined so that other researchers can follow them reliably. In this paper the category of classification is simply the 'war on terror' and thus the coding scheme and resulting population satisfy the requirement that the content analysis be 'systematic' (Holsti, 1969) and 'replicable' (Krippendorff, 2004).

In seeking to trace the application of the 'war on terror' master frame in the *Irish Times* in the eight years post 9/11, the Lexis-Nexis database was utilised. Searching the *Irish Times* archive during the period 12 September 2001 to 12 September 2009 for the search string 'war on terror' yielded 953 results. Winnowing down this number by selecting only those entries where the result was indexed as being 'terrorism' related reduced the retrieved dataset to 672 discrete results. Finally, selecting those results that were indexed only as 'strong' 'terrorism' reduced this figure still further to 389 results. This process of winnowing was deemed necessary to exclude articles citing the 'war on terror' that were not centrally concerned with the topic, for example lifestyle or tourism articles, TV or book reviews, sports stories, business or economic stories etc. These results can be considered as a sample population of 100% of the strongly indexed articles containing the designated search string. Of the 389 results, five were duplicates. Therefore, removing these reduced the final population total to 384.

An analysis of the breakdown of the 384 results found that the majority (i.e. 61%)

were stories featured in the *Irish Times*'s World News section. (This figure increases to 65% if the 4% of results that featured on the front page of the newspaper are taken into account.) Following this the next most frequently represented sections of the newspaper were Opinion (14%) and Letters (9%). The remainder of sections represented did not account, individually, for more than 4% of the total: Features (4%), Home News (4%), Business (2%), Entertainment supplement (1%) and Weekend supplement (1%). Of the 233 results that appeared in the newspaper under the World News banner, 74% were by in-house correspondents, usually the *Irish Times* correspondent in the US. The remaining 26% of results came directly from news agency or newspaper syndication services. Their attribution is as follows: Reuters (13%), *Guardian* (6%), AFP (2%), AP/Reuters (1%), AFP/Reuters (1%), *LA Times/Washington Post* (1%), PA (1%) and the *Financial Times* (1%).

## Findings

In any population of newspaper articles that cite the 'war on terror', a casual reader could expect that they would contain substantial discussion of the terrorist group that proffered the rationale for the war – namely, al-Qaeda. However, articles that dealt exclusively or substantively with 'Al-Qaeda' amount to no more that 10% of the population surveyed, that is, approximately 35 articles. To be defined or coded as dealing exclusively or substantively with 'al-Qaeda', articles were included that mentioned 'Al Qaeda' in the headline or were otherwise deemed to be largely concerned with the group or its activities. Of this 10%, the articles could be broken down into categories comprising five main themes, listed in order of frequency of occurrence: 1. articles dealing with al-Qaeda attacks; 2. articles dealing with threats and warnings of attacks; 3. articles dealing with the strategy or tactics of counterterrorism forces or al-Qaeda themselves; 4. articles dealing with 'battlegrounds' or where al-Qaeda were speculated to have a presence; and finally 5. articles dealing with the arrest or capture of alleged al-Qaeda militants.

In the analysis of the population, no *a priori* hypothesis was used to guide categorisation of how the master frame of the 'war on terror' was applied in the pages of the *Irish Times*. Instead, it was envisaged that such categorisations would emerge inductively from a careful reading of the dataset. Indeed, it was surprising to the author how clearly 'phases of application' emerged from the text, and how clearly delineated they were from each other. In total, three 'phases of application' were identified: 1. co-option; 2. strategic; and 3. policy. Co-option refers to the phenomenon where actors sought to tie disparate geopolitical issues to the 'war on terror'. It lasted from October 2001 to December 2003, comprising some 17 articles. Strategic refers to the explicit use of the 'war on terror' frame by actors a: seeking either to promote or oppose the Iraq War; and b: in contesting the 2004 US presidential election. The Iraq 'phase of application' lasted from October 2002 to March 2004 and comprised 16 articles. The 2004 election 'phase of application' lasted from January 2004 to November 2004 and comprised 19 articles. The third and final phase of application, policy, began almost immediately after the 2004 election in January 2005 and lasted until May 2008, although the four major policy debates comprising 'policy' (legal, privacy, torture and rendition) each had its own lifecycle in the pages of the *Irish Times*. The policy category of application comprised the most frequent application, consisting of some 30 articles. Each 'phase of application' is discussed in more detail below.

Apart from the articles identified above as being representative of one of the three 'phases of application', the remainder of the articles in the dataset that cited the 'war on terror' did so in the context of up to one hundred disparate issues and contexts. These ranged from the Washington, D.C. sniper to the Afghanistan opium trade, from the 9/11 Commission to the global arms trade, and from the role of Irish intelligence to the case of former UK ambassador Craig Murray, amongst many others. However, of the approximately eight dozen issues and contexts identified, only three recurred more than three times – the issue of human rights being one and the political situation in Pakistan and Somalia being the others.

### Co-option

One of the most striking findings that emerge from an analysis of the dataset, most noticeably in the first eighteen months after the attacks of 9/11, is the extent to which various issues, seemingly unconnected heretofore, became subsumed under the master frame of the 'war on terror'. In the months following the attacks countries as diverse as Uzbekistan, the Philippines, China, Russia, Columbia, Indonesia, Israel and Palestine were all stipulated by actors in the *Irish Times* as constituting 'battlefields' in the progressively disparate 'war on terror'. The analysis finds that the majority of such assertions went unchallenged.

Two of the early and most prominent examples of this co-option involved the labelling of pre-existing nationalist or separatist struggles involving major powers as in fact constituting new fronts in the 'war on terror'. The first involved China, specifically the Uighur militants in the province of Xinjiang. For example, in January 2002 an article (with AFP listed in lieu of by-line) reported on the arrest of 166 separatists and declared that 'among the 166 were ethnic Uighur separatists classified by Beijing as "terrorists" and other "major criminals"'. Although the statement is uncontested the inverted commas suggest a little reflective awareness on the part of the author (whether agency or in-house) and the UN Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson is quoted in the same report as warning Chinese leaders that they should not use the war on terror as an excuse for widespread repression in Xinjiang (AFP, 2002b).[2]

In October 2002 another independence struggle, this time in Chechnya, was thrust into the foreground of the 'war on terror' through the siege of a Moscow theatre by Chechen separatists, with the Russians keen to stipulate the incident as constituting a new front in the 'war on terror'. Then the siege at a school in Beslan some eighteen months later (by pro-Chechen gunmen) prompted *Irish Times* columnist Eddie Holt to reflect critically on this co-option by saying that:

> supporters of George Bush's 'war on terror' will argue there's a seamless unity between the attacks on the twin towers and that on the school in Beslan. It's comforting because it identifies a common enemy and gives a more global complexion to Islamic terrorism. It suits Vladimir Putin to agree with the Bush summation and worse, it gives him licence to perpetrate even more brutality in Chechnya (Holt, 2004).

2 The use of inverted commas around terrorists to denote its contested nature occurred eight times in the dataset in the context of six geographic regions. However, the above example is the only case where official framing is deliberately foregrounded as a candidate for scepticism.

Such explicitly critical reflection was rare in the *Irish Times* and is notable as being one of the very few occasions over the eight years where a journalist draws attention to possible political motivations underlying the 'war on terror' frame. In the body of world news reports the only stance critical of the co-option in general is by NGOs working in the area. Reporter Daniel McLaughlin, for example, documents complaints by human rights organisations that say Washington's 'war on terror' is 'providing cover for a crackdown on basic freedoms in former Soviet states that offer bases and support for US action in Afghanistan' (McLaughlin, 2003).

Two other significant cases of co-option occurred in the Philippines and Latin America, regions not previously associated in terms of domestic security issues. In an AFP/Reuters report on 30 January 2002 the reader is informed that about 600 US soldiers are to take part in exercises in the Philippines 'which represent the most significant expansion of the US war on terror after Afghanistan'. Likewise, a 25 March 2002 report by the AFP entitled 'Bush takes war on terror to Latin America' quotes the president of Peru, Alejandro Toledo, as saying that Lima and Washington were allies in 'a war without quarter against terrorism and drug trafficking', thus conflating terrorism and drug trafficking in a way that terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism had been conflated in the Philippines and elsewhere (AFP, 2002a). Six months later, on 4 October 2002, *Irish Times* reporter Michael McCaughan reports on Columbia's 'slide towards dictatorial rule' since the arrival of President Álvaro Uribe the previous August, noting how 'President Uribe has hitched his own war on terror wagon to the US, riding the tide to crush a threat to state security' (McCaughan 2002). Indeed, 'riding the tide' is a good metaphor for what was happening around the world at this time in terms of co-option. Apart from the concerns of some human rights organisations noted above, little reportage is explicitly sceptical of this co-option.[3]

A final but more complex case of co-option involves the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Two early reports in the weeks after 9/11 implicitly suggested that the Middle East conflict was distinct from the nascent 'war on terror'. The Israelis, and the Israeli president Ariel Sharon in particular, were reportedly urged by the US administration not to do anything that would either 'distract from' (Horovitz, 2001) or 'interfere with' (Smyth, 2001) the new 'war'. However, in a Reuters report entitled 'Israel using US war – Patten' (Reuters, 2002) this strategy of co-option or conflation by Israel was explicitly identified by the then EU External Relations Commissioner, Chris Patten, who, speaking to BBC's *Breakfast with Frost*, accused Israel of hijacking the US-led war on terror (Reuters 2002).

*Strategic*
The second major phase of application of the master frame of the 'war on terror' related to its use by the Bush administration in seeking both to promote and execute the Iraq War in 2003 and later in contesting the 2004 US presidential election. Turning to the Iraq war debate first, 16 articles in the dataset are identified as dealing with Iraq. Perhaps the most commonly cited theme in the newspaper during the

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3 The author is grateful for the comments of an anonymous reviewer who pointed out that this section is 'really more about how elite actors who are quoted employed the master frame than how the newspaper itself dealt with it.' This is true to an extent. However, the fact that such usage is only very occasionally challenged (and almost never unless a newsworthy actor does the challenging) is a reflection of how the newspaper dealt with it, even if only evidenced by its absence.

year-long run-up to the conflict was the charge by those opposed to the war that it was 'a distraction' from the 'war on terror'. On 26 September 2002 for example, Al Gore was quoted as saying that the proposed Iraqi conflict was 'a politically moti- vated distraction from the war on terror' (O'Clery, 2002c). In the aftermath of the Bali bombings of October 2002, correspondent Conor O'Clery quotes Amy Quinn of the Institute for Policy Studies, a liberal think-tank, as saying 'It will lead some people to say that the focus on Saddam Hussein is a diversion and moves the focus away from al-Qaeda and terrorism' (O'Clery, 2002a). Similarly, a month later Sena- tor Bob Graham is reported as saying that the administration 'is so focused on Iraq they are not paying attention to the war on terror' (O'Clery, 2002b). The Bush administration, however, began to vigorously assert its own framing in January 2003 with President Bush's State of the Union Speech on the 28th, where he attempted to explicitly link the 'war on terror' and 'rogue nations' such as Iraq. Responding to the aforementioned Democratic charge that the proposed conflict was a distraction from the 'war on terror', *Irish Times* correspondent O'Clery reported Vice President Dick Cheney as saying that: 'confronting the threat posed by Iraq is not a distraction from the war on terror, it is absolutely crucial to winning the war on terror' (O'Clery, 2003).

Another aspect of this strategic application of the 'war on terror' related to its use by the Bush administration in burnishing their national security credentials in the run-up to the 2004 presidential election. President Bush launched his re-election campaign on 20 January 2004 during his State of the Union address by insisting his controversial doctrine of pre-emptive military action had persuaded rogue states to cooperate with Washington's war on terrorism. When asked by NBC News if Amer- ica could win the war on terror, Bush conceded, 'I don't think you can win it. But I think you can create conditions so that those who use terror as a tool are less accept- able in parts of the world' (O'Clery, 2004a). However, coming under fire from Democrats for this seemingly defeatist attitude, Bush then reversed his statement the following day by stating that 'we will win' the 'war on terror'. The Kerry campaign was quick to attack what they labelled a 'flip-flop': 'This President has gone from mission accomplished to mission miscalculated to mission impossible on the war on terror' (O'Clery, 2004b).

On the 3rd anniversary of 9/11 Vice President Cheney levelled the charge that 'if Mr Kerry were elected president in November it would increase the danger of another terrorist attack' (O'Clery, 2004d). However, after a barrage of criticism that Cheney had overstepped a line in using scare tactics, he said he wanted to 'clear up' the stir created by his remarks in Des Moines, Iowa: 'I did not say if Kerry is elected, we will be hit by a terrorist attack,' Cheney told the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. He had meant that if the US was attacked again, he believed Kerry would fall back on a 'pre-9/11 mind-set', treating terrorists as criminals rather than going to war. Kerry responded by saying that 'this was a shameful and outrageous effort to distract atten- tion from America's economic and social problems. America is not as safe as we ought to be after 9/11. We can do a better job at homeland security. I can fight a more effective war on terror' (O'Clery, 2004d). This statement by Kerry to the effect that he could fight a more effective war on terror crystallised the Democratic response to the Bush administration. No attempt was made to challenge the framing of the administration, thus ceding the definition of the issue to the incumbents. It is

perhaps unsurprising therefore that an opinion poll reported by O'Clery on 13 September 2004 found that Bush led Kerry as the candidate 'most likely to keep the United States safe' by a margin of 23 percentage points (O'Clery, 2004c).

*Policy*

The third and final major phase of application of the master frame of the 'war on terror' began in February 2005 and lasted until 2008. During this period citations of the 'war on terror' in the pages of the *Irish Times* were predominantly in the context of four major policy debates that can be categorised under legal, privacy, torture and rendition. In each case the 'war on terror' framing was promulgated as the rationale for significant departures from previous policy norms.

The 'legal' policy debate centred on the legal challenges to the Bush administration's newly designed military detention and tribunals system. The most striking finding of the analysis of *Irish Times* coverage of this topic was the tendency to greet every legal decision by US courts as either 'a victory' or 'a defeat' in the US administration's prosecution of the 'war on terror'. The first report of this nature merited a front page story on 1 February 2005 by US correspondent Conor O'Clery, who framed the legal defeat in the case of Osama Bin Laden's driver, Salim Hamdan, as 'a far-reaching setback to the Bush administration's "war on terror"' (O'Clery, 2005). The judge in Washington has ruled that special military tribunals set up to try hundreds of detainees at Guantanamo Bay were unconstitutional as they 'violate the petitioners' rights to due process of law guaranteed by the Fifth Amendment to the US constitution' (O'Clery, 2005). When the case was appealed to the Supreme Court and the verdict handed down on 29 June 2006, the new *Irish Times* US correspondent Denis Staunton again framed the defeat in terms of the 'war on terror':

> 'In a stinging rebuke to President George Bush's conduct of the fight against terrorism, the US Supreme Court has ruled that military tribunals used to try inmates at Guantánamo Bay violate American law and the Geneva Conventions' (Staunton, 2006a). When the administration won their first significant legal case on 3 April 2006 in the case of José Padilla, a US citizen captured in Chicago, the decision was again framed in terms of the 'war on terror', with the reporter, Patti Waldmeir of the Financial Times Service, describing the verdict as a significant legal victory for the Bush administration in the 'war on terror' (Waldmeir, 2006). It is significant that all three authors framed the legal verdicts as 'victories' or 'defeats' for the Bush administration's war on terror. This raises two issues. First, the implication that the 'war on terror' is 'the Bush administration's,' rather than belonging to 'the American people' for instance, (the former being a subtle nod to its constructed origins) and second, the implication that a legal verdict could be depicted as 'a defeat' for the war on terror. Could such legal judgements not have constituted 'a victory' if they resulted in policy consistent with US laws and jurisprudence, or would the latter not apply when questions of agency were so closely tied to the administration?

The second major policy debate, privacy, relates to three distinct issues where privacy advocates maintained that existing data protection laws had been nullified by programs instigated under the aegis of the 'war on terror'. These were: 1) electronic

eavesdropping in the US on private citizen communications; 2) EU airline passenger data; and 3) EU banking records being passed to US authorities. Similar to the framing in the 'legal' category discussed above, in all cases the arguments were again framed in the pages of the *Irish Times* as either 'supporting' or 'undermining' the 'war on terror'. For instance, when Democratic senator Russell Feingold proposed to censure the president for authorising the NSA eavesdropping in March 2006, Republicans accused him of political grandstanding in introducing the motion, which they said undermines America's 'war on terror' (Staunton, 2006b). Likewise, when European correspondent Jamie Smyth reported on 23 November 2005 the verdict of an advisor to the European Court of Justice that the transfer of airline passenger data to US authorities was illegal, it was framed by the correspondent as a decision by the EU not to help in the 'war on terror' (Smyth, 2005).

The third and fourth applications of the master frame in domestic and foreign policy debates involved the controversies over, respectively, torture and rendition. The treatment of these can best be analysed in parallel due to the fact that torture was often alleged as a result of the policy of rendition. While the administration was always adamant that the US 'does not torture', what emerges from the analysis of reports on both topics was the constant refrain of the Bush administration and its supporters that both 'enhanced interrogation techniques' and rendition were 'necessary tools' in the 'war on terror'. For example, on 5 October 2007, in a report by correspondent Denis Staunton which discussed the issue by the Justice department of two secret legal opinions on methods used to interrogate suspected terrorists, White House spokesperson Dana Perino cited this mantra:

> We know that these are ruthless individuals … they'll do anything to try to carry out their attacks. And this president has put in place, all within the foursquare corners of the law, tools in the global war on terror that we need' (Staunton, 2007). Six months later, on 10 March 2008, in a report entitled 'Bush rejects Bill outlawing torture use by CIA' the president justified his veto of the proposed legislation again by saying: 'The Bill Congress sent me would take away one of the most valuable tools in the war on terror' (Staunton, 2008).

Counter-framing to the administration's 'necessary tools' argument is contained within the pages of the *Irish Times* but rarely in the news section proper, unless legitimated actors directly challenge such framing. An op-ed piece by the Irish director of Amnesty International demonstrates once again the important (albeit limited) role of NGOs in challenging state actions in the elite press (Love, 2005). The op-ed piece attacks the policy of enhanced interrogation techniques by outlining that they contravene the UN Convention against Torture and attacks the administration's claim that rendition is legal. Apart from this single op-ed, the only counter-framing that was documented in the pages of the *Irish Times* concerned official investigations at European and UN level into the practices of torture and rendition. Three such investigations were reported. On 8 June 2006 Lara Marlowe documented the results of an investigation by the Council of Europe which found that 'European governments are guilty of intentional or grossly negligent collusion in allowing the United States to establish "a global spider's web" of secret detentions and unlawful state transfers' (Marlowe, 2006). Subsequently, a UN human rights body concluded an investigation

by saying that any 'secret detention' centres the US was operating abroad violated international law and should be shut immediately (Waddington, 2006). Finally, some five months later European correspondent, Jamie Smyth similarly reported the results of an investigation by a committee of the European Parliament that 'strongly criticises eleven EU member states and several top politicians for not fully co-operating with its inquiry into the practice of rendition by the CIA and the existence of secret prisons' (Smyth, 2006). Without these independent investigations, it would have fallen on NGOs alone to challenge the administration's framing of these policies as 'necessary tools in the war on terror'. However, in the hierarchy of news sources, NGOs' framing power is considerably weaker than any US administration which as Hall et al. (1982) have found constitute 'primary definers' of topics in the news (Hall et al., 1978).

*Reflective Awareness*
Two articles in the dataset from early 2009 signalled both an end to the master framing of the 'war on terror' and an implicit acknowledgement that its utility as 'a political and cultural shorthand to unify a broad movement' (Snow and Benford 1992) had expired or had even become counter-productive. The first, entitled 'Successor ends Bush's almost decade-long "war on terror"' came only four days after the inauguration of the new US President Obama on 20 January 2009 (Priest, 2009). Commenting on the new administration's declared policy to close military tribunals and CIA overseas prisons, as well as repealing Bush's legal interpretations relating to interrogations, the *Washington Post/LA Times* journalist declared that 'with the stroke of his pen he effectively declared an end to the war on terror as former president George Bush defined it.' The second was even more explicit. In an article appearing on 26 March 2009 entitled 'E-mail signals end of war on terror,' the reporter (this time from the *Guardian* service) recounts a message recently sent to senior Pentagon staff explaining that the new administration would prefer to avoid using the terms Long War or Global War On Terror (GWOT): 'Instead, they have been asked to use a bureaucratic phrase that could hardly be further from the fiery rhetoric of the months immediately following the 9/11 terrorist attacks – overseas contingency operations' (Burkeman, 2009). Apart from signalling the end of an almost decade long 'macro-securitisation' (Buzan, 2006), the two articles serve to highlight the constructed nature of the master frame to begin with.

The rebranding, however, came after a period where the usage of the master frame was increasingly cited critically or with a nod to its constructed nature. Two principal methods were utilised by authors to achieve this reflective emphasis. The first was the use of inverted commas and the second (less frequent) was the addition of the preface 'so-called'. An analysis of the use of inverted commas over the course of the eight years is especially instructive. Taken as a ratio between the number of times the master frame 'war on terror' was cited as against the number of times it was enclosed by inverted commas, the results show a steady and consistent pattern of increasing usage over the period of the study, possibly indicating increased scepticism during that time. The ratios for each year are as follows: 2001: 11%; 2002: 18%; 2003: 18%; 2004: 24%; 2005: 54%; 2006: 51%; 2007: 47%; 2008: 50%; 2009: 10%. Apart from 2009, which contained only 21 articles – or 5% of the total dataset – the figures for the other years show a very definite increase in reflective awareness

of the constructed nature of the frame, a pattern which surely contributed to the new administration's 'rebranding' in early 2009. The figures for the preface 'so-called' are less dramatic as this was used only 26 times (out of 384), but again broadly repeat the same pattern with no usage in 2001 or 2002 increasing to 28% usage in 2009. (Between 2003 and 2008 the preface was used on average in 10% of citations.)

## Conclusions

Some obvious questions are thrown up by the analysis and subsequent findings. Firstly, to what extent are the 'phases of application' identified in the *Irish Times* replicated in other newspapers and indeed other media such as TV or radio? Although definitive answers are outside the scope of this paper, it can be speculated that they are replicated to a greater or lesser extent. After all, none of the phases identified have any inherent Irish dimension, such that the coverage might have been skewed to reflect localised concerns. Archetti (2008) has noted that the selection of newsworthy sources by journalists is shaped by a country's national interest and national journalistic culture (Archetti, 2008). Given that there is no national interest specific to Ireland and that the journalistic culture is much closer to the US or UK model of objectivity than the continental version, there is little reason to believe that the 'phases of application' are not replicated at least within what Hallin and Mancini (2004) called the 'Liberal model' of media system, one of three classifications of media system identified by the authors in the western world, and comprising the British, American and Irish systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Indeed, of the three phases identified, all were international in scope and were newsworthy either in themselves (for example the Iraq War, the US presidential election of 2004) or alternatively because statements or actions by primary political definers made them newsworthy (for example Putin on Chechnya, the US Supreme Court on legal issues etc.). It would interesting to explore the extent to which these phases of application are replicated within other media systems such as the others identified by Hallin & Mancini (2004): the 'Polarized Pluralist model' found in the Mediterranean countries and the 'Democratic Corporatist model' found in the media systems of northern and central European countries, and indeed those of non-western media systems.

The second question raised by the analysis relates to meaning – what do these 'phases of application' tell us about political communication, and specifically the usage of the 'war on terror' master frame? It could be argued that the findings, and specifically the absence of any significant counter-framing to the administration, validates Entman's cascade model (2003), which identifies the variables that, acting together, can explain the emergence and outcomes of frame contests – that is, motivations, power, strategy and cultural congruence (Entman, 2003). Specifically, with regard to power, it could be said that the faithful reproduction of the master frame in the pages of the *Irish Times* resonates with the argument by Carragee and Roef (2004) who concluded that framing research needs to be linked to the political and social questions regarding power central to the media hegemony thesis, and specifically the importance of resources in the process of frame sponsorship. On a more elementary level it could simply be stated that the absence of counter-framing provides evidence of what Sigal referred to in his analysis of the interaction between American reporters and officials: that what the news media reports 'is not what happens, but what someone says has happened or will happen' (Sigal, 1973).

With regard to the *Irish Times* itself, it is difficult to assert what is unique or different about its coverage of the 'war on terror' in the absence of a parallel study of other newspapers over the same period. Within that coverage, however, little critical reflection is found, perhaps reflecting the Liberal Model's tendency towards professional standards like objectivity, but also perhaps reflecting Ireland's position as a 'key intermediate zone' in what O'Hearn (2001) called 'the Atlantic economy' of the US, UK & Ireland, and the historic, cultural and social ties between the countries which has been discussed elsewhere as constituting a 'special relations' master frame (O'Hearn, 2001; O'Regan, 2010). On the few occasions that it does surface, it is contained (some might say quarantined), within news features, opinion columns or special constructions such as a 'media scope' column than ran until 2001. However, in the absence of comparative data, it is impossible to state whether this critical reflection was less or more substantial than other elite newspapers either within or without the 'Liberal' media system.

What can be conclusively stated is that the power of the master frame of the 'war on terror' declined in the pages of the *Irish Times* over the period of the study, as indicated both by the increased reflective awareness evidenced in its citation as well as by its eventual replacement by the new administration with a term so forgettable that it suggested a desire to bury the descriptor altogether. We can only speculate as to why its power declined so dramatically, but the suggestion by Cziesche that the power of a linguistic frame depends on the performance of its practices seems close to the mark (Cziesche, 2007).

## AUTHOR

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