

THE SHOTS SEEN 'ROUND THE WORLD: THE IMPACT OF THE IMAGES OF MOGADISHU ON AMERICAN MILITARY OPERATIONS

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This essay argues that visual images of American casualties and POWs have had a profound effect on senior leadership's perceptions of what level of casualties the American public will and will not support during humanitarian interventions. The result is the current policy of "zero casualties," a policy that makes it virtually impossible to justify military operations in humanitarian crises because the policy is based on a profound misreading of the way the American public will interpret photojournalistic images. An argument- and rhetoric-based analytic provides a more viable and pragmatic basis for interpretation and hence for foreign policy decision making.

This essay applies understandings of rhetoric and argument to a set of visual images that received widespread attention in Western media coverage of a series of post-Cold War military operations. Specifically, I examine photographs of American POWs and combat casualties during Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf; during U.S. participation in UN operations in Mogadishu, Somalia, in the aftermath of Operation Restore Hope; and during the NATO air war with Serbia in 1999. My purpose is to provide a deeper and more satisfactory analysis of these images and the way they functioned rhetorically than has been previously available, while demonstrating the real impact those images can have on the way decisions to use military force are made. The analysis will demonstrate the contribution that an explicitly rhetorical and argumentative focus can make to the study of visual images, and will also demonstrate the benefits of analyzing visual images in historical context.

INTERPRETIVE METHODOLOGY

My data base is a series of images, both video and still, associated with news coverage of several instances in which American service personnel were killed or captured

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during military operations.¹ The unique analytical problems associated with images labeled as elements of “news coverage” are well known. Because these images are presented in a context of “authenticity,” they tend to be read not as representation but as *evidence*. Although our guard may be up when we encounter visual images (even photographic images) presented as advertisement or fiction, we tend not to utilize such defenses while watching or reading the news. Their very design encourages the reader to forget that images are constructed artifacts.² We are open, therefore, to the power of the image in photojournalism in a way we are not in other contexts. If imagery is powerful, it is all the more powerful when presented as “objective,” the human aspects of choice and composition occluded.³

A second set of issues is raised in that I have chosen images of an extremely recent vintage. The current level of concern with casualties is in many ways a post-Desert Storm phenomenon. It is a part of the oft-cited difficulty in finding a role for the American military in a world without an overarching enemy, when humanitarian operations may dominate, and when the justification for American combat losses is rarely if ever self-evident.⁴ The concern is a function of current beliefs held by the military and senior policymakers about what caused the erosion of public support for the Vietnam War, whether those beliefs are accurate or not. And it is clearly a function of the belief that the public will hold the military, at the very least, to the standards set, in terms of casualties, by Desert Storm.

At a fundamental level the fear of “casualty shyness” (that casualties will erode public support for military operations) is based on a mode of image analysis that the public is presumed to deploy, based on a method of interpretation the pundits and policymakers use.⁵ The fear is also based on a series of assumptions about the relationship between words and images: which trumps which, when, and how they interact. Further, I have chosen to deal with images centered on military personnel themselves. One reason is that there is extensive work already available on the aesthetic of contemporary combat photography, predominantly aerial combat.⁶ Less work has been done on images that foreground the body, particularly the bodies of Americans. Much of the extant work has focused on images of foreign casualties of American wars.⁷ The essence of casualty shyness is, obviously, casualties. A discussion of the phenomenon ought, therefore, to foreground the body, and specifically the American body. But to the extent that the military affairs community has discussed images, they have done so in quantitative terms or in terms of the so-called “CNN effect,” which is a related but far different phenomenon. Thus, the essay not only links the literature on visual imagery and casualty shyness,⁸ it also fills a gap that exists in the study of visual imagery as it pertains to combat photography in a specifically American context.

These concerns led to the analysis of three sets of photographic images. The first are from the Gulf War, images “frame-grabbed” from Iraqi television that show a series of Allied pilots in Iraqi custody, all showing signs of obvious physical distress.

These were most often shown in the United States as a series of still photographs of individual men shown from the waist up. The second set, shown both in video and still form, comes from the aftermath of the October 3, 1993 battle in Mogadishu in which 18 men were killed, over 70 wounded, and one captured. They are divisible into two subsets: first are images frame-grabbed from a video taken by the Somalis of Chief Warrant Officer Michael Durant while he was in Somali custody. These images closely resemble those in the first set. Durant is shown from the waist up and is in obvious physical discomfort. The other subset, still shocking and disturbing, is of the bodies of American soldiers being dragged through Mogadishu streets by mobs of Somalis. The final set, again both video and frame-grabbed stills, taken this time from Serbian television, are of the three American soldiers taken prisoner during a patrol on the Macedonia-Kosovo border during the 1999 NATO air war with Serbia. While each of the POW images is strangely reminiscent of the others, it is only when they are placed next to one another that the physical similarities in the images of the POWs become apparent. No images from the conflicts in Iraq or Kosovo, however, compare to those of the bodies in Mogadishu streets.

THE STUDY OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION

In an increasingly media-saturated environment, ignoring visual imagery provides less and less satisfactory work.⁹ It would be difficult, for example, to provide adequate explanation of the stories on Kosovar refugees and their impact on American public opinion without simultaneously examining the visual imagery that accompanied those stories.¹⁰ Even the examination of print media lacks something critical when accompanying photographs, much less layout and other aspects of graphic design, are ignored.

The study of visual imagery is an increasingly interdisciplinary phenomenon, drawing from a wide variety of methods and approaches in the humanities.¹¹ One of the primary insights contributed by scholars of rhetoric and argument is the claim that visual images can, in and of themselves, function as arguments. Certainly the process of interpreting photographic images is complex enough that it should be considered a form of “reading” in its own right. As Graham Clarke notes,

Whenever we look at a photographic image we engage in a series of complex readings which relate as much to the expectations and assumptions that we bring to the image as to the photographic subject itself. Indeed, rather than the notion of looking, which suggests a passive act of recognition, we need to insist that we *read* a photograph, not as an image but as a *text*.¹²

The photographs of the bodies of American servicemen in the streets of Mogadishu can be read, for example, as making the visual argument that Somalia is Vietnam.

The camera angle is in each instance low, placing the viewer's perspective where the photographer's, the standing observer's, would naturally have been. The bodies are being dragged away from that perspective, a reminder of the fate of American POWs, MIAs, and casualties in that previous conflict; the bodies are being *taken away from us*.¹³ The bodies are surrounded by Somalis of all ages and both genders, none in clothing that can be identified as specifically military uniforms. Thus the argument is made that it is the general population of that country that has turned against us. Once again we are in a chaotic environment where combatants cannot be easily distinguished from noncombatants, and where the very people we came to help are the ones killing our troops.

It has been argued that part of the power of the visual is that, unlike words, which are processed in linear fashion, images are taken in "at once," leaving less critical space with which to approach them. We are all trained, in more or less sophisticated ways, to "read" political discourse. Such sophistication does not, as a matter of course, come into play in the reception of photographs. Thus while many of the aspects of a critical reading of imagery make common sense when laid out explicitly, they are not yet "naturalized" or internalized parts of our encounters with images. But the lack of internalization is not an intrinsic function of images; instead, it is an aspect of the way we have been taught (or more accurately, not taught) to read images.¹⁴

Thus, critical interpretations of images require slowing down the process of interpretation, examining details and the way those details work together to form an overall impression. Such interpretive work also requires sensitivity to linkages between particular images and others that have come before. Some of these images include the video of NATO forces entering Kosovo, confronted by cheering crowds, women presenting flowers, babies, and the like; similar images include U.S. Marines entering Kuwait City in 1991, both clearly drawing on familiar imagery from the World War II period. Such links draw implicit analogies between a previous event and a current one.

Multiple aspects of the construction of images are also pertinent to a study of this type. Photographic images have a certain structure. They are taken from particular camera angles,¹⁵ for example, and cropped to include some elements and exclude others.

When examining visual images presented in the context of photojournalism, two aspects must be kept in mind. The first is that part of the point of the image is to suppress the fact of its constructedness. Someone made the photograph. Someone else developed, produced, and cropped it, and determined its placement and use. Yet visual images offered as news are presented as authentic and objective pieces of evidence—not as representations of reality, but in a sense, as reality itself. Seeing the image, we are led to believe that we are looking at "what really happened," *precisely what we would have seen had we been there*, and to forget that what really happened

could have been represented quite differently had the photographer and those responsible for the production and dissemination of the photograph made different choices. Clearly this is true for combat photography.¹⁶ As Clarke notes, “A painting . . . always reflects the way it was made. Photography, as a medium, is deceptively invisible, leaving us with a seamless act of representation, an insistent thereness.”¹⁷ Photography is understood as a form of “witnessing.”¹⁸ This is deceptive, however. For, despite appearances, “war as represented by still photography does not really exist. . . . Photographs, all war photographs, do not re-create life on the battlefield, they interpret it.”¹⁹ The photograph, in a sense, contains a potential narrative account within itself, and while the reader provides the narrative, far from “being a ‘witness,’ it [the photograph] is often a director of the way events are seen.”²⁰ As Susan D. Moeller notes,

because a photographer’s interpretation of events relies on a mechanical instrument, photographs have been considered to be more accurate than their verbal counterparts. Over the course of the twentieth century, words have become suspect. . . . In an imperfect world, photography has been viewed as the closest one can come to an unimpeachable witness to war.²¹

The implications are potentially profound: “Censored and uncensored, photographers and their publications have controlled how the American public regards battle.”²²

The second aspect of visual imagery that matters regarding photojournalism is that, despite their potential power, images are interpreted within an already existing context. Images come *with* words; in video, the reporter’s voiceover; in print media, a caption. They come with historical baggage, both in terms of the particular event and in terms of previous events. As Clarke notes, “The cliché that the camera cannot lie is, thus, part of a deep but misplaced notion of the camera’s veracity as an agent of recording. The trace of the past, the mark of historical significance, clings to such images, giving them an almost talismanic quality and presence as evidence of what was.”²³ Americans would not have interpreted imagery from Kosovo without reference to the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, and would not interpret images of the American military without reference to previous conflicts in Somalia, Desert Storm, Vietnam, or, in some instances, World War II.²⁴ It is critical to remember, then, that despite the power images have to shape perceptions, images do not stand alone.

Official channels respond to images as well. Political and military leaders attempt to contextualize images through words, articulating an interpretation that they would prefer the American people to place on given images, whatever interpretation journalists may promote. The argument made here is that focusing on the image alone, without acknowledging the interplay of images and words, is a mistake. So,

too, is the presumption that any particular image can *only* be read in a single way. The words that accompany the images can provide the basis and grounding for interpretations; they do not determine in advance which interpretation *must* be read into a given image.

CONTEXT: VIETNAM

It is virtually impossible to discuss American military policy without discussing Vietnam, since

the Vietnam experience affected the U.S. military so deeply and so broadly that it lurks behind most of what has been thought and done in military and security affairs since then, even when civilian or military officials specifically disavow a connection. Vietnam is so much a part of the foundation on which present behavior is premised that it forms part of the context of influence as a matter of fact, even when it is not accepted in this role as a matter of consciousness.²⁵

It is not Vietnam *per se* but contemporary *understandings of Vietnam* that are necessary to comprehend.

There are several fine “cultural histories” of our relationship to the Vietnam experience. Many scholars have focused on the cultural shifts in our assessment of Vietnam, yet there has been less focus on the changes in the impact those cultural shifts have had on the way Vietnam has influenced American military and defense policy specifically,²⁶ as opposed to American culture more generally.²⁷ Today, as it is discussed in the media and in many military outlets, Vietnam has come to stand for a tragic episode in American history from which several lessons can be learned.²⁸ These lessons have been codified in the Weinberger/Powell doctrines of the 1980s and 1990s.²⁹ However, I would like to focus on the assumptions that underlie one of the key lessons taken from Vietnam: the United States cannot successfully go to war without the full support of the American people.

This lesson stems from a series of assumptions about what went wrong in Vietnam that *may or may not be factually true*, but which are generally believed to be true and, I would argue, hold the status of consensus within mainstream discussions. It is generally believed that support for the conflict in Vietnam eroded as a result of increasing casualties.³⁰ It is further believed that the unprecedented freedom of the press to roam the combat zone at will, to publish or air images with little outside interference, and the status of Vietnam as the first “living room war” contributed to that erosion. For the first time, it is argued, members of the American public saw for themselves (to the extent photographic images can ever convey the realities of combat) what it was that really happened when we sent young men into battle. Each of these subsidiary assumptions is clearly arguable and

has been argued. Nonetheless, the overall impression remains that support for Vietnam, while it eroded for a variety of reasons, would not have eroded as disastrously or as rapidly without the casualties and, critically, without the graphic images of those casualties. The links between support, casualties, and imagery are believed to be established empirically by the historical experience in Vietnam.³¹

The key features of press coverage of the war were the television images of fire-fights and combat casualties. That those images appeared to contradict official discourse about the war's progress heightened their impact, but was not solely responsible for their impact. Yet, the assumption remains that the American people were not ready to see what they had not seen before.³²

CONTEXT: DESERT STORM

In the wake of Vietnam, Desert Storm was to validate the lessons learned from that earlier conflict. It was a test case of the military's interpretation of what went wrong in Vietnam, and of their efforts to ensure that the same mistakes would not happen again. It is important to remember that, for purposes of rhetorical analysis, it is not historical accuracy but historical perception that matters. In that context, Desert Storm was represented at the time and in the immediate aftermath as enacting all the criteria of the "Weinberger Doctrine." In the aftermath of Vietnam, the services sought to answer the question "what went wrong?" An important part of the answer was codified by then-Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger in a famous address in 1984, in which he laid out a checklist of conditions that had to be met before an operation could be supported and assurances given that it was "not another Vietnam."³³ And the link between the conditions laid out for war by that doctrine and the need to exorcise the demon of Vietnam was made explicitly and often. Desert Storm would be the war that would "kick" the spirit of Vietnam and prove that America could get it right.³⁴

One of the key elements of the Weinberger Doctrine, of course, was that the United States should only go to war if assured of public support.³⁵ Once the war began, support had to be strong and steady. In fact, in Desert Storm support was so strong that administration officials were sent out after the first week to attempt to dampen enthusiasm, reminding the public that the war could be a long haul, that casualties were likely, that euphoria was inappropriate.³⁶ As with the other criteria developed out of the assessment of Vietnam, the success of Desert Storm did, in fact, appear to prove that military success could be had when wars were fought "correctly," and that public support, in turn, could be sustained.

It was not long after the conclusion of hostilities, however, that the apparent success of the war effort—and the public support for the military, unseen since World War II—began to raise concerns. Many in the military recognized that Desert Storm was in many ways unique and therefore not replicable. The fear was that the war in

the Gulf had in essence conditioned the American public to have certain expectations about the conduct of war to which the military might not be able to live up. As Marine Corps Major Michael Slater wrote:

When we fight the next war—as we will—the most unfortunate individual of all will be the admiral or general in command of the fighting forces. Future commanders, regardless of the situation, will be held to the standards of the last war. If casualties exceed those of Desert Storm, the commander will be chastised in the press and by Congress. After all, the populace has been educated to believe—and now expects—all warfare to be dominated by technology and won with precision-guided munitions launched from stand-off platforms at little cost in blood to either side. If heavy casualties occur on tomorrow's killing fields, the carnage will be viewed as the result of military incompetence.³⁷

Noted another author, all “future U.S. force projection operations will be sternly conditioned by the political imperative of minimizing both U.S. military and enemy civilian casualties—with Desert Storm providing the yardstick by which such operations invariably will be compared.”³⁸ He elaborated:

Desert Storm's spectacular brevity and cleanliness . . . will inescapably provide the benchmark. . . . [I]t is a benchmark probably impossible to replicate ever again. If pre-Desert Storm U.S. military force planning was haunted by the disastrous legacy of Vietnam, post-Desert Storm planning will be plagued by the specter of falling short of the splendid and relatively painless performance of U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf in 1991.³⁹

This concern was most particularly expressed regarding the extremely low rate of casualties and the speed of the war. The two obviously are related, as the faster the war, the lower the likelihood of casualties, at least in a situation like Desert Storm in which an inferior military was routed. What would happen in subsequent military actions, which would almost inevitably be longer and bloodier? In articulating these concerns, analysts make clear the assumptions held about public opinion during wartime. Fundamentally, the assumption is that public opinion cannot be trusted, that it will not hold. Support remains high when casualties are low and when the war effort itself is short. A “Saddam or Giap may have the option of fighting a prolonged war,” says Lieutenant Colonel Jeff Barnett, U.S. Air Force. “We don't have that option. The quicker we can defeat the enemy the better. The longer the war drags on, the lower our chances of winning.”⁴⁰ Public “patience . . . can also drive the demand for forces to rapidly resolve the situation. Long-suffering approaches are not an American strong suit.” Lack of public patience dictates a need for “overwhelming—not minimum—force to control the level and duration of violence.”⁴¹ Thus, the

“wars we conduct . . . will be designed to reach a conclusion as quickly as possible.”⁴² The fear is that even in a conflict with relatively low American casualties, if the fighting drags on, support will ultimately lag.

All of this matters because it reflects the underlying assumption I link here with “casualty shyness.” It is an assumption that regarding military action, as opposed to other government policies, public opinion polling may not be useful. People’s opinions, and their judgments about what is likely to change their opinions, simply cannot be trusted. And it is an assumption that the two most important characteristics of the public that need to be taken into account regarding military action are impatience and the ability to turn on a dime under certain conditions.

There were several instances during Desert Storm when policymakers feared exactly such shifts in public opinion. The administration feared that the bombing of the shelter in the Ameriyah section of Baghdad, which (whether an appropriate military target or not) clearly led to multiple civilian casualties, would affect support. In fact it did not.⁴³ There is reason to believe that the war ended when it did in part because of fears of public reaction to the photographs of the so-called “Highway of Death” that were about to be released.⁴⁴ And there was concern regarding the way the public would respond when Iraqi video of Allied prisoners began to air on Western television outlets, accompanied by frame-grabbed stills in most print outlets.

Those images, presented in both still and video, are a series of rapid cuts (video) or side-by-side images (stills) of aircrews still in flight suits, clearly suffering from cuts and bruises around the face. The rapid-cut style of presentation is of particular interest, as it shortened the video substantially, replacing in most instances the sound track of the original, which can sometimes be heard but barely made out over the voices of Western reporters. This technique serves to mute the statements made by the prisoners, important for reasons I will discuss below. The men are made to appear extremely vulnerable. In some instances their stance can only be described as shameful: that is to say, they stand as if they are deeply ashamed (although the most obvious instance of this is actually in imagery of a British airman).

The presentational style therefore draws attention to the visual at the expense of the audio. This matters because the rhetorical messages of the two aspects of the image permit radically different readings. The visual images are against neutral backgrounds, and because of the focus of the image—showing the men from the waist up—the eye is drawn to the injuries. What is highlighted is that Allied prisoners have suffered what appear to be injuries stemming from intentional beatings. Although it was made public after the prisoners’ release that some of the injuries were suffered in the violence of the process of ejecting from high performance aircraft and in at least one instance from self-inflicted wounds, none of that could be known at the time. Most members of the public, it seems safe to assume, would not associate injuries with ejecting, which is not perceived to be quite as violent a

process as it actually is. And the navy lieutenant who punched himself in an effort to avoid being a candidate for Iraqi television happened to be the one whose image was most reproduced in the American press.⁴⁵

The immediate (and largely accurate) assumption was that prisoners had been beaten. Since these were airmen, once they were out of their aircraft they were pretty much out of the fight. To beat them seemed, therefore, to convey several messages about the Iraqis. The principal argument made by the photographic texts is that the enemy is unfair. Americans believe you do not fight those who cannot fight back. To beat prisoners is not offensive just because it violates the tenets of international law, but because it simply seems to violate basic tenets of fair play. It is just wrong. The images, then, at least at first, convey more about the enemy than about the prisoners.

The images themselves received relatively little attention, especially when compared to the overwhelming importance the issue of POWs had played in bringing the Vietnam conflict to a close. Drawing attention to the Desert Storm POWs would have drawn attention to failures in the air war at a time when the nation as a whole was far more interested in representations of the American military as virtually invincible. After all, the “Top Gun” image of the military pilot validated in countless popular films had done quite well without mentioning the POWs. The highly publicized efficiency of the air campaign would be undermined by a focus on the Gulf War POWs.⁴⁶ In a sense, the very presence of the bodies contradicted the cultural memory of the war already in production at the time. As Marita Sturken notes:

Bodies, whether marked by race, gender, or the fragility of flesh, were rendered invisible in the spectacular images of the Gulf War. The pleasures of viewing spectacle necessitate the absence of its consequences. The bodies of the Gulf War needed to be dis-remembered in order for the story of technological prowess to be told.⁴⁷

These images also focused attention on a problem built into the Bush administration’s rhetorical strategy concerning the war. As noted, a heroic interpretation of the Desert Storm POWs requires the continued demonization of Iraq generally and Saddam Hussein specifically. But by demonizing Saddam Hussein (and simultaneously personalizing the war as one with, not Iraq or even the Iraqi people, but Saddam himself), even to the point of calling Saddam “another Hitler,” the administration made it difficult to define any outcome that left Saddam in power as a success. While this seemed to make little difference in the immediate aftermath of the war, it has certainly colored the public perception of the war in the intervening years.

These images do not provide room for positive interpretive possibilities. Either the POWs made the tapes without excessive coercion—in which case they themselves contradict our fondest cultural beliefs about warriors and what the warrior code means—or they were coerced, and we allowed those who did those things to them to get away with it. Thus Elliot Gruner holds,

The POW of Desert Storm has become almost an antihero in this respect. . . . He seems to tarnish our notion of how Americans should make war by the apparent ease with which he made statements damning his nation. Her plight, if she was tortured or otherwise mistreated, demands an immediate justice still beyond the reach of prosecution. The victors . . . again seem impotent.⁴⁸

The final, and more sensitive, argument is that the cultural mythology associated with the Vietnam POWs made it difficult to integrate images of the Gulf War POWs in completely positive ways. Gruner further observes:

It was the Vietnam POW who reemerged after the Gulf War, not only in the various pathetic and useful resurrections of the POW/MIA issue, but as a heroic image in and of itself. The Vietnam POW seems to be the preferred referent for our culture. We seem to be reaching back across the Gulf War to recover the Vietnam POW just as we preferred the image of the World War II POW to that of the Korean POW. . . . Troubling or unsatisfying images do not excite an audience as much as properly endorsed heroes. Images that problematize something we could better dismiss as success do not last as long. It is more comforting for Americans to think of a stalwart Vietnam POW such as Lance Sijan, who resisted to the death, than to think about Jeffrey Zaun and other Gulf War POWs who did less and lived.⁴⁹

Multiple interpretations of these images were possible. They could be seen solely as personal indictments of the individual men portrayed. They could be seen as proof that the war's limited aims, in the face of an enemy already labeled barbaric, were insufficient. They could be seen as proof that continued operations were likely to produce unacceptable casualties and POWs. Or they could be seen as signs of what the administration had been saying about the enemy all along, as yet more justification for fighting an all-out war to a final conclusion. The photographs themselves are not unidirectional; they are ambiguous, permitting multiple interpretations. The photographs received little attention because the dominant interpretation was that they demonstrated the war had been justified all along. Why? Because they appeared in the context of months of rhetoric concerning the nature of the Iraqi regime and of other actions that seemed to bear out that rhetoric,⁵⁰ and because the press presented them as fitting seamlessly into that vision of events.⁵¹ And, they demonstrated justification because that was the representation provided by administration spokespeople, including the president:

I watched, along with you, that *repulsive* parade of American airmen on Iraqi television—one more proof of the *savagery* of Saddam. But I knew as they read their prepared statements criticizing this country that those were false words *forced* on them by their captors. I saw one of General McPeak's kids—one American pilot yesterday was

asked why he was sure the pilots were coerced, their statements false. And he said, "I know that because these guys are Americans."⁵²

Administration rhetoric in this instance accomplishes two things. First, it reemphasizes that the entire event says more about the Iraqis than about the American captives. It is just another example of the "savagery" that has been discussed all along. And second, it turns their statements around. Rather than indicating a weakness on the part of the pilots, it reemphasizes the nature of the pilots as Americans, who would never make such statements willingly. The images are never given a chance to dominate American perceptions of the war (or the pilots) or to alter them. They are presented as nothing more than additional evidence for the rhetoric that has framed the war effort from the very beginning.

These photographs and the popular response to them demonstrate that images of American and Allied POWs do not necessarily shatter public opinion or will, and might even strengthen it. The images, in context and in combination with administration rhetoric about the images, never come to dominate American sensibilities about our memories of the conflict in the Gulf.

MOGADISHU

The United States originally intervened in Somalia in December 1992. Operation Restore Hope may have been the most media-saturated military intervention in history. Indeed, historians argue that the media heavily influenced the initial impetus behind the intervention. Policymakers feared that disturbing images of starving Somalis, particularly children, were building a pressure among the public to "do something."⁵³ President Bush wanted to leave office with a "grand gesture."⁵⁴ There is evidence that the military, desperate at the time to avoid similar pressures to intervene in Bosnia, felt that it was politically impossible to avoid intervening in both, and hence supported what they perceived as the "better" intervention.⁵⁵ The initial troops to "hit the beach" did so only to find teams of photographers already there waiting for them. In a somewhat surreal scene, one camera team was initially captured (the cameras kept rolling).

Despite the regular cautionary stories on "if Somalia, why not Bosnia?"⁵⁶ and "should the United States become the world's policeman?" the overall tone of the coverage was quite positive. This was certainly true of the visual imagery, which focused overwhelmingly on young American Marines with smiling Somali children. It was the perfect feel-good Christmas story for Americans, still swelling with the pride in their military engendered by Desert Storm (despite the naysayers who claimed the worst of the famine had already ended).

Eventually, however, the nature of the mission changed. As food moved from the ports to the inland and rural areas, which had been worst hit, the bulk of the Marine

force departed. The mission became less a U.S. show and more a UN operation, and the goals of the mission changed as well.⁵⁷ It was during this stage of the operation that a new mission was added. Some have called it “nation building” (a pejorative term for today’s military); others have referred to it as “stabilizing the political situation on the ground.” One way or the other, it led to the specific demand for various warlord factions in Mogadishu to be disarmed and brought to the peace table, and for Mohammed Farah Aideed, leader of one of the key clans in Somalia, to be captured. After a number of UN peacekeepers in Mogadishu were killed by Aideed’s men, this mission became specifically assigned to the few remaining American forces in Mogadishu, primarily elite Ranger forces of the Army. At some point the additional decision was made to bring in the super-secret “Delta” force, and the two units began to operate together in efforts to find and arrest Aideed.⁵⁸

During this phase information was received, and judged reliable, that a number of Aideed’s senior advisors were to meet in a hotel in downtown Mogadishu. Forces were mobilized, as they had been on prior occasions, for a “swoop and grab” operation: Helicopters would drop the men in, they would “snatch” those the UN wanted arrested, and quickly depart the scene. However, unlike previous missions, this time several American helicopters were shot down. At that point, American troops were left vulnerable, as they needed to proceed on foot to the locations of the crash scenes in attempts to rescue and recover American personnel. This delay gave the Somalis time to mass in the area. Additional problems with the evacuation convoys on the ground developed, and the result was that a large contingent of American troops was left to fend for themselves overnight with no hope of evacuation from the air, while attempts to form a large enough rescue convoy of ground vehicles took hours to organize and deploy.⁵⁹

The ensuing battle has since been described repeatedly as the most intense fire-fight involving American troops since Vietnam. Over 70 men were wounded and 18 were killed during the night. What made this battle unlike any other in recent American history, however, was the imagery made available within days to the American public. The intensity of the fire was such that, in the end, rescue teams dropped to help one helicopter were killed (air rescue was impossible, but there were attempts made early on to drop in special rescue teams from the air), and Somalis ultimately captured the pilot of that craft, the sole survivor, Chief Warrant Officer Michael Durant. The imagery remains shocking. The images of Durant come from videotape made by his Somali captors and differ little in detail from the other POW images described here. But the bodies from that crash, which American troops were unable to recover, were paraded through the streets of Mogadishu, stripped, dragged, and mutilated, by triumphant Somalis.

The first set of images are those of Durant. He is shown from the waist up, dirty, in obvious physical discomfort, attempting to prop himself up by his hands (he had injured his back in the crash.) His voice can barely be made out in most of the

showings of the video, but he appears to be giving little information other than the fact that he is an American and that he is a pilot. The stills are frame-grabbed, shown with closeups of the face, making clear the bruises and scars he has sustained. His image was the cover that week for *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*. Besides the story's prominence in print media, it was the lead story on all three networks on October 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 (on the 4th CBS had it second).⁶⁰

The photograph harkens back more to those of Vietnam POWs than to those of the Gulf War, by virtue of the contextual fact that Durant has been captured by representatives of a clan in a chaotic scene, not by an organized army during a traditional battle. Although the setting is only visible in the video, given the close cropping of the still images, the contribution of the setting to this interpretation would still be available for the stills; the very nature of frame grabbing as a technique is to make the images referents to the video images as much as to the events the videos represent. In the video it is clear that, rather than being in an antiseptic television studio, Durant is on a dirty floor somewhere in a house in Mogadishu. Because of the terseness of his comments, and perhaps because he is the only prisoner, if there is shame associated with the images it is not linked to him, but to the nation. How did the world's mightiest army allow one of its own to be captured by a disorganized band of urban fighters? If the Gulf War prisoners were "anti-heroes," then Durant again provides a heroic image of an American captive, certainly one that must be returned. The nation is shamed as long as he is in captivity—another subtle allusion to Vietnam.

The other set of images, in each case shown inside the relevant newsmagazines, is still shocking today. In one, an American body,⁶¹ face obscured, is shown from the waist up, stripped, being pulled through the streets by a group of Somalis with their backs to the body, who, in fact, appear fairly nonchalant about the entire affair. In the other image that received wide play, a body, clearly American only because it is stripped and therefore obviously white, is hog-tied, surrounded by celebrating Somalis. Consistent references in captions to this as a "humiliation" again appear to refer to a humiliation for the nation, not for the dead men.

Upon closer examination, a wide variety of compositional elements in both these photographs are of interest. One element is the obvious fact, particularly given the racial difference between the bodies and the Somalis, that this is Vietnam redux. It is impossible to look at these photographs without noticing the racial aspect. These are white bodies surrounded by victorious blacks. The racial aspect is ironic given the use of frame grabbing, a technique first put into widespread use with the Rodney King episode, for the images in a sense invert that earlier set of images, here showing a white body being beaten by black ones. The photographs work as enthymemes. This effect is enhanced by the fact that, if Desert Storm has been critiqued as being a "Nintendo war," at least in the way it was covered, that is certainly not the case here.

Another aspect of both photographs is that the faces of the bodies are obscured. These could be any soldiers, any soldiers at all. The commonality of the men creates a part of the photographs' power, as it did for another well-known photograph of American fighting men, the famous photograph from Iwo Jima, taken on Mount Suribachi, of which Janis E. Edwards and Carol K. Winkler note: "the rank and file Marines' obscured faces and diverse backgrounds form a representation of the common citizen warrior, enhancing the 'ordinary' quality of the image."⁶² The effect here is somewhat different. It is not just that the soldiers could be any Americans, something less and less likely as we move further and further from the draft. It is also that this could be the fate awaiting any American soldier as we move into areas where we may not be welcome, if we make the mistake of being the "world's policeman." This is not necessarily something that happens to bad soldiers, or mean soldiers, or soldiers who abuse the local population. This is now something that happens to merely unlucky soldiers, random soldiers. The general notion of all soldiers as potential martyrs for the state is enhanced by the very unpredictability of the fate of any given soldier on any given day.

The composition of the photographs has other, more subtle aspects. One is that it draws upon Christian iconography. In both photographs the body is centered, with the Somalis standing around it. In the first particularly, where the body is being dragged through the street, the body is completely stretched out, arms straight out from the body. The only obvious wound, other than bruises and dirt, is one gash, located just where the chest becomes the torso. The body appears similar to representations of the laying out of Christ's body after the Crucifixion. The symbolism is not obvious (it would not work if it were) but subtle.⁶³ That does not mean that the symbolism is not there or that it does not affect the viewer. The use of such iconography is not new in combat photography, even if its use in the past has been somewhat more heavy handed.⁶⁴ The impact of the photographs is quite astonishing. Little wonder that the *New York Times* held that "the American public was right to want to scuttle the Somalia expedition *as soon as American corpses appeared on the television screen.*"⁶⁵

What is amazing about such quotations, and there are many like this one, is that the argument is not being made that we pulled out from Somalia because of what happened, but that we pulled out because of the *photographs* of what happened. It is the reaction to the images, not the news of the event per se, which is represented as having raised the ire of the nation. These images are so powerful that, whether demonstrable or not, the press almost immediately began to make the assumption, as did Congress, that the images, in and of themselves, would produce undeniable demands for a change in American policy.

The irony is that the polling data suggest that this demand for change was not, in fact, the case. What the data suggest is that after listening to the pundits proclaiming that surely Americans would demand a pullout from Somalia, a large portion of the

public began to believe that “the public” as a construct—out there somewhere, separate from themselves—would indeed demand a change, even when they themselves did not support an immediate pullout. It was a perfect example of a self-fulfilling prophecy taking place, as the following reports illustrate.

While the images of dead American soldiers in Mogadishu made the U.S. public more eager to withdraw U.S. troops from Somalia, the public has not reacted by wanting to withdraw U.S. troops immediately. Only a minority of Americans want to withdraw immediately.⁶⁶

A majority of Americans assumes that the public as a whole is more eager to withdraw in the face of troop fatalities than they themselves are. This suggests that the public is overestimating its own reactions. . . . The present PIPA poll suggests that the public has begun to misinterpret itself through this widespread image.⁶⁷

President Clinton’s rhetorical responses to the images are an odd mix. On the one hand, in his address to the nation, the president goes to great lengths to justify the mission in Somalia, both in its initial and current iteration. He proceeds to note that a pullout is not possible immediately and to announce the decision to send in additional troops and equipment—although their mission will apparently be little more than to buy time and to protect American personnel already in place. On the other hand, the overall goal of the United States, it would seem, is to find other nations willing to take over the job the Americans had been doing. The photographs themselves are barely mentioned, the president saying only: “This past weekend we all reacted with anger and horror as an armed Somali gang desecrated the bodies of our American soldiers”—hardly a call to arms.⁶⁸ The emotions associated with the event are not those one would expect, nor does this description match much of what was being said in the press. Regarding Warrant Officer Durant, unnamed and hence presented as an abstract figure rather than a specific individual, the president says only that those “holding an American right now should understand, above all else, that we will hold them strictly responsible for our soldiers’ well-being. We expect them to be well treated, and we expect them to be released.”⁶⁹ What is striking about the phrasing here is the complete lack of agency on the part of the United States. What actions are we prepared to take? We are prepared to have expectations, no more. There is no call for specific rescue attempts, no threat regarding what would happen if our expectations should be unmet, and indeed no specific agent to whom the claim is addressed.

What the mission in Somalia makes clear is the importance of the frame placed around such an event, particularly by political leadership. Alternative discursive choices made by President Clinton and his advisors could have resulted in quite a

different outcome. It is not my intention to take a position on whether staying in Somalia or attempting to escalate military activity in Mogadishu proper would have been good policy options. My point is that those were most certainly policy options that could have been made available had political leaders desired to keep them on the table.

Photographs in and of themselves are not enough to shape public opinion or to provide the basis for interpretive critique. The discourse that accompanies the photographic image provides a frame, a context, a suggested reading. Obviously there must be something in the image that makes alternative interpretations plausible and coherent. If alternatives suggested by political leadership cannot be supported by the image, they will not work. But as I have argued throughout, most images are, at least to an extent, ambiguous, with a range of interpretive options available to the rhetor called upon to respond to them. Certainly this has been the case historically.⁷⁰

The polls taken at the time imply that the audience's initial reading of the photographic imagery from Mogadishu did, in fact, support an alternative course of action. Rhetoric focusing on the demand for retribution, on our unwillingness to let anyone, anywhere, get away with desecrating the bodies of American martyrs—perhaps especially martyrs for peace—had initial support, as reported by Steven Kull and Clay Ramsey:

Furthermore, the same polls found majority sentiments in support of increased involvement, at least in the short run. CNN/USA Today, ABC, and NBC, respectively, found 55%, 56%, and 61% favored sending more troops. ABC found a full 75% favored going after the Somali warlord Aideded with a 'major military attack' if the American prisoners (*sic*) could not be released through negotiations.⁷¹

The official response to the Mogadishu images did not account for timing. Snapshot polls are dangerous bases for policy; initial responses are not necessarily the responses that will stick. This is particularly true if an administration is given time to make its case over a period of days. The reluctance to allow issues and responses to "ripen" is sometimes argued to be another side effect of the 24-hour news availability that has, for all intents and purposes, killed the old "news cycle." The pressure is to issue a response, to do something, as soon as the event is made public. Yet in this instance waiting just two weeks would have permitted the administration to operate within a profoundly different public climate, for as Kull and Ramsey note:

The PIPA poll findings suggest that the sentiment in favor of immediate withdrawal is also waning. . . . [Polls taken 10–12 days later found] a 13 point drop. . . . Thus based on their own reports, 22 percent of the sample indicated that they had changed their mind—a striking number given that people generally resist appearing inconsistent.⁷²

Such a sustained focus on the Mogadishu case is of particular importance. While we are familiar with the use of linguistic metaphors, recent work has made clear that visual images can function as metaphors as well.⁷³ Historical evidence, though incomplete, indicates that the power of the imagery from Mogadishu continues to haunt the way policymakers think about foreign military intervention today. The initial part of the mission, Operation Restore Hope, and its success are forgotten. When people refer to “another Somalia” they clearly mean “another Mogadishu.” The mission exerts far more power over decision making than one would expect or could explain were it not for the photographs. Over and over, when the possibility arises that American military force might be used in combat, that possibility is judged in the public sphere against the likelihood of “another Somalia,” as the following quotations illustrate:

Ironically, when opinion turns against such cases, this may not only divert attention and limit willingness to support “A list” interests but may also undermine support for action in other, more serious humanitarian crises. One of the direct effects of the Somalia disaster was America’s failure . . . to support and reinforce the United Nations peacekeeping force in Rwanda that could have limited a true genocide in 1994.⁷⁴

An invasion of Haiti had, a Pentagon official said, “too much of a Mogadishu possibility.”⁷⁵

For Albright, the Balkans were not the Pentagon’s “Vietmalia,” the preposterously cautious legacy of Vietnam and the American deaths in Somalia in 1993.⁷⁶

Well before Yugoslavia, in Somalia, President Clinton had to deal with the powerful images of a military action that produced U.S. casualties, and a captive who came to symbolize the conflict: army helicopter pilot Michael Durant.⁷⁷

“Clinton’s been really leery of anybody in uniform getting killed ever since Somalia.”⁷⁸

Without a narrative framework that brackets off Somalia as an exception, or a willingness to articulate individual interventions on a case-by-case basis as “not Somalia” (the way they must still be defined as “not another Vietnam”), these three images will continue to exert a strong negative constraint on foreign policy.

The irony, of course, is that while policymakers react to such images, their fear is based on a series of false assumptions. Polling data indicate the public did not, at least initially, read the Mogadishu images in the way attributed to them. Critical interpretations of the images themselves make clear that they are not unidirectional: each contains some “interpretive give,” the ambiguity that allows for contested interpretations to be fought out in the public sphere. As with Desert Storm, what is

said about the photographs could have mattered as much as the photographs themselves. A presidential address announcing that no one could be allowed to treat “our boys” this way and a demand for increased retaliatory action in Mogadishu may well have succeeded.⁷⁹ While I am not suggesting this as a course of policy action, the fact that a polar opposite reading *could* have succeeded makes clear the point about visual imagery. The range of readings of a specific image, especially given contextual factors, may sometimes be narrow, but it is never singular. Because the images were interpreted in a specific way at the time, and because that interpretation is apparently presumptive today, the images serve as a constraint on subsequent actions.

Kosovo

American military operations in Kosovo clearly demonstrate the influence the Mogadishu images continue to exert on senior policymakers, seven years after the fact. While policy is driven overall by casualty shyness,⁸⁰ a close examination demonstrates that the fear is not just that combat casualties will erode public support, but that Mogadishu-like images of even a single casualty could have the same effect. Two policy choices were made regarding the structure of military operations in Kosovo, both of which were discussed in terms of the feared impact of the likelihood of American casualties and POWs on public support for the operation. The choices are related but defensibly distinct. The first choice was to pursue a military campaign based on an air war. While the likelihood of the presence of American ground troops seemed to change day by day, as did the condition under which ground forces would be deployed (“permissive environment,” Kosovar protectorate, demonstrated inability of the air campaign to restore refugees to their homes?), the essential argument behind their absence remained the same. Few believed that an air campaign alone would be sufficient,⁸¹ and indeed, in the aftermath of the peace settlement the argument was made that that interpretation of events was correct.⁸² Wrote *Newsweek* in the aftermath, “\$2 billion B-2 bombers may be able to punish from the air but it takes GI boots on the ground to secure the peace.”⁸³

Why, then, was the army staying out of combat (as opposed to humanitarian) operations? Sending in American ground forces to force the issue in Kosovo, whether north through Albania or south through Belgrade, would take a lot of troops, would be dangerous, would take time, and would not receive the support of the American people. Ground troops could not be used until the environment had been cleared by air power because to do it any other way—even if necessary to stop the very actions in Kosovo that triggered military conflict to begin with—would have come at a price the American people would not support.⁸⁴

This argument is based on the fear that the number of casualties taken would exceed the number of casualties the American people would accept. It harkens back

to the assumptions I briefly mention above: do not initiate the use of military force if you cannot be assured of the support of the American people. It is based on hard core quantitative data regarding what the American people are or are not likely to accept.⁸⁵ Even the deployment of peacekeepers to Kosovo after the cessation of hostilities is described as keeping both sides from killing one another “at an acceptable cost. That cost is measured in dollars alone. There is no acceptable cost in U.S. lives in Kosovo.”⁸⁶

The second choice had to do with the actual conduct of the air campaign. Allied pilots operated under unusually restrictive rules of engagement; most controversial was not being allowed to release ordnance from below 15,000 feet. If one is using air power as a substitute for ground troops in a situation of ethnic cleansing, the doctrinal argument would suggest that attacks on Serbia proper (particularly institutions of government and the electrical power grid) are appropriate ways to proceed.⁸⁷ But such doctrinal positions do not preclude using lower-level tactics to impede Serbian military actions on the ground in Kosovo (or to improve the efficiency of the bombing campaign over Serbia). And they certainly do not dictate limits on the altitudes of attacking planes that leave them well beyond the reach of Serbian air defenses. Certainly any prudent air commander, or any designer of an air campaign, would take steps to avoid Serbian air defenses and to attempt to destroy them. The question is one of balance. At what point do the limits placed on pilots reach such a level that the desire to avoid risk to American pilots trumps the concern with their ability to complete their missions successfully? Edward N. Luttwak argues that the “seemingly miraculous immunity” from Serb air defenses was achieved by flying few sorties during the first weeks, targeting air defense systems first, thus losing the potential for shock effect, using high altitudes only, restricting operations if weather conditions were less than perfect, which precluded not bombing per se but “perfectly safe bombing.”⁸⁸ The question of limits on altitude remained in play in part because of the Serb choice not to engage their air defenses in a way that would make them easy to destroy, as happened in Desert Storm. Yet as Luttwak notes, even without the vaunted Apaches,⁸⁹ there were certainly planes in the area that were capable of low-level attack, but “[i]n the calculus of the NATO democracies, the immediate possibility of saving thousands of Albanians from massacre and hundreds of thousands from deportation was obviously not worth the lives of a few pilots.”⁹⁰ The limits on the way the missions were carried out clearly reduced their effectiveness, increasing mistakes (and hence civilian casualties,⁹¹) and by all accounts frustrating the pilots. And the pilots were not the only ones getting frustrated. Consider this scathing review from a major editorial page:

[The approach reflects] . . . the moral and operational bankruptcy of America’s de facto policy of zero casualties. Placing a near-absolute value on avoiding the loss of a single

plane or pilot makes it that much harder for air power to achieve this attack's ostensible humanitarian goal. . . . [T]he ironic result of that is to increase the necessity and likelihood of a ground deployment that will almost certainly result in casualties.⁹²

The irony, of course, was the additional concern that the visuals from mistakes in Kosovo might themselves implicate public opinion, again reflecting the fear of the impact images can have:

Mr. Milosevic has been careful to let the world's television cameras film only the limited damage from NATO's bombs and missiles, not the scorched earth and mass graves in Kosovo. Public opinion in the West . . . gets queasier at every incident involving unintended civilian casualties.⁹³

It is certainly not my point that American commanders ought be cavalier with the lives of their pilots. But there comes a point where the concern with the risks to pilots who are, after all, not just highly trained professionals but volunteers, has to raise some questions.

Is it really plausible that public support would be utterly shattered by, literally, any casualty figure over zero? Such an assumption on its own makes no sense—unless one assumes that the single casualty were to be accompanied by a devastating Mogadishu-style image. Where does this fear of imagery come from? Historical reluctance to show graphic photographs of American dead and wounded dates virtually from the point when technology made unposed combat photography possible. And, as discussed, there is still debate over the effect of the “living room war” phenomenon on public support for Vietnam. However, my argument here is that when policymakers think about the potential impact of images they are thinking, almost inevitably, about the images from Mogadishu. That the American pullout from Somalia is presumed a function of those photographs is clear in the historical literature. It may well have been the case that the United States would have pulled out of Somalia within the same time frame no matter what. But the decision to leave when we did, made as quickly as it was, is assumed to be a function of the photographs themselves.

Yet two years later, in October 1993, pictures of a dead American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu revived some of the same fears and concerns evoked by Vietnam. The Clinton administration's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Somalia as soon as possible was the more immediate result. As the *New York Times* put it, “. . . the pictures of a dead American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu seem to have made it all but impossible for Mr. Clinton to change many minds.”⁹⁴

In October 1993, when pictures . . . of a dead U.S. serviceman being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu . . . Operation Restore Hope . . . collapsed on *the sword of unpalatable media images* from a back street in a place few of those callers to the White House had heard of before.⁹⁵

Then on October 5, 1993, the American public was confronted by a *drastically different set of images*—that of corpses of American soldiers being dragged by Somalis through the streets of Mogadishu. At that moment a consensus crystallized in the minds of policymakers and pundits: the American public . . . would now be swept by a tidal wave demanding that the United States withdraw its troops immediately from Somalia. . . . [T]he halls of Congress echoed with legislators’ assertions that “the American people” were demanding an immediate exit. With allusions to the trauma of Vietnam and Lebanon, the same theme played throughout the media. Within less than *48 hours of the news reports* . . . [the president] committed himself to withdrawing within six months.⁹⁶

. . . the policy was derailed in October 1993, as is often said, *with the pictures* of a dead American body on macabre display in Mogadishu.⁹⁷

The American public’s impulse to help starving Somalis . . . vanished *in the face of televised pictures* of dead U.S. soldiers being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu.⁹⁸

Note that the argument is *not* that the loss of those two men—much less the 16 others who died that night—dictated the pullout. The argument is that the *image* is specifically what changed public opinion, and changed it irretrievably. To be clear, this is not an argument about what public opinion would or would not have tolerated, or about the quality of our predictive ability in the instance. It is an argument about what policymakers *believed* to be true about public opinion. In fact it is an argument about why they may have been suspicious about the formal polling results they were getting, and it is an argument that those perceptions can ultimately impact policy more than actual polling results.

The structure of the air war made clear that the issues raised by Mogadishu had not been resolved at the time America went to war in the Balkans. This lack of resolution, however, is ironic, for Kosovo serves also as a counterpoint to Mogadishu. For if the air war was haunted by a fear of imagery, ground operations demonstrated the impact discourse can have on structuring the public’s interpretation of images.

The conflict in Kosovo was in many ways unique. As has often been noted, it was NATO’s first war, it was a clear violation of a UN member state’s sovereignty, and it saw the culmination of the “zero casualty” fighting doctrine. And indeed, during the air campaign, there *were* no American casualties. If there were concerns after Desert

Storm that the military had created expectations it could not live up to, it is hard to imagine the constraints with which future military leaders may find themselves faced. It was a war in which public support waxed and waned, along with media attention and focus. And it was a war that everyone could find a way to hate; some thought it was a war that should have been fought by the Europeans, others that once we began it, we had to see it through, even if that meant 100,000 troops on the ground. Few believed the constraints placed on pilots appropriate, a belief that was strengthened with every accidental bombing of civilians.

It was ironic, in the midst of all this, that the first American service members put in the awkward position of personalizing this war were not captured airmen, but ground soldiers. When Staff Sergeant Andrew Ramirez, Specialist Steven Gonzales, and Staff Sergeant Christopher Stone were captured by Serb forces, the photographs of the three, once available, led the three major network newscasts.⁹⁹

Until now, the warfare in Serbia has produced a confusing collage of television images—refugees streaming across borders, allied planes lifting off for bombing runs, assorted demolished buildings, and talking heads pontificating from the safety of the studio. The media phase of the conflict came into much sharper focus yesterday, however, when the battered faces of three captured U.S. soldiers . . . became the dominant television image, dramatically driving home the concept of real risks to real Americans. “It gives [the war] a face, doesn’t it?” said Brookings Institution senior fellow Stephen Hess. “The media needed it. . . . You need it to frame a story.”¹⁰⁰

There was fear that the images released by Serbian TV would invoke those of Mogadishu. If one compares the image of the soldier in the middle of the threesome with that of Durant, the basis for that fear becomes understandable. Except for the difference in cropping, the images are virtually identical down to the specific location of their bruises.

Yet these images had virtually no impact or influence on public attitudes toward operations in Kosovo.¹⁰¹ Why did these images have so much less effect than those from Vietnam or Mogadishu? First, as with Desert Storm but unlike Mogadishu, they were captured in the context of a fight with a specific and already demonized enemy. The three were not taken by a complex or diffuse network of “clans” but by agents of a specific political leader who could be identified by name. Second, they were not taken *after* the humanitarian crisis had all but ended, but in its midst. Unlike those of Mogadishu, these images competed directly with the images of humanitarian crisis that were simultaneously raising public support for American action. The enthymeme was clear: Why were they in a position to be taken? First, because the United States was trying to stop this specific suffering in this specific place. Second, there was no need for abstract arguments about the potential for a country to fall *back* into anarchy; the anarchy was happening before our eyes, and

with a sinister twist. Third, the fact that the soldiers were able to walk in to be videotaped demonstrated that they were obviously in better physical shape than Durant had been during his captivity, and, most obviously, there were no companion images of American corpses. Finally, in this instance, the administration took advantage of the interpretive space provided by the photographs.

The critical statement made by the president is in sharp contrast with what was said regarding Durant's captivity in Somalia. The sound bite most often quoted was: "President Milosevic should make no mistake—the United States takes care of its own." Secretary of Defense William Cohen was even more specific, saying, We "will do everything in our power to secure their safe return."¹⁰² Consider the difference between these statements and those made previously. Rather than "anyone" holding American soldiers, the government identifies Slobodan Milosevic specifically and by name. Rather than merely "expecting" the release of the soldiers, the United States makes threats, implicitly in Clinton's comment, quite explicitly in Cohen's.

Nonetheless, the ghost of Mogadishu was present for many:

While the sight of the captured servicemen could increase public interest in Kosovo, it also conjures up memories of Michael Durant, the U.S. Army helicopter pilot who was captured in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1993, and of two other servicemen whose bodies were dragged through the streets. Television images of the injured American captive have been cited as a catalyst that soured public opinion on the Somalia mission, and U.S. forces pulled out within months of their airing. . . . Now, the question is whether pictures of three U.S. prisoners in Serbia could prompt the nation to question the wisdom of a campaign about which it is already ambivalent.¹⁰³

CONCLUSIONS

On one night in October 1993, 18 American servicemen were killed in a single firefight on the streets of Mogadishu. Within days, President Clinton announced that the United States would be withdrawing from Somalia. What is striking about the historical representations of these events is the consistency with which the impetus behind the withdrawal is articulated as being *not* the 18 deaths that took place that night, but the disturbing images of several of the corpses released over the next several days. The idea that the images of the dead were the impetus, not the deaths themselves—the two who were photographed, and not the 16 others who were lost that night but not photographed—has not changed in the intervening years. It would be hard to find a more powerful example of the role images can play in the shaping of policy. For as shocking and distressing as the images are, they are still images, over and against 18 actual lives lost. How is it that the images are believed to have played more of a role than the actual casualties, and to have more of a hold on the American imagination?

This question is of far more than academic interest. The belief that the images of Mogadishu had such a powerful effect on American public opinion that a president's hand was forced is widely held. Historically questionable, based on assumptions about the way imagery works that are also questionable, this belief has gained greater and greater currency in policy circles. As a result, the concern that the use of military force in humanitarian crises may produce comparable images to those from Mogadishu is having direct effects on the conduct of American foreign policy. A more sophisticated understanding of both imagery and the interaction between imagery and discourse could increase the options available to senior leadership during a crisis and make it less likely that responses will be generated based on either false predictions or self-fulfilling prophecies regarding public responses to hypothetical images.¹⁰⁴

Photos are exigencies: a rhetorical exigence is a moment that demands a response, calls forth a response. As Stephen Livingston notes, it is the nature of that response that makes the difference:

Yet in the long-run, pictures may not matter as much as context and leadership. The key variable may be the presence of a clearly articulated policy and a public sense that the policy is "worth it." Colin Powell expressed this point: "They're (the American people) prepared to take casualties. And even if they see them on live television it will make them madder."¹⁰⁵

When the president responds in a way that offers flexibility, he opens a wide range of potential moves for himself. When he does not, he may be trapped by an interpretation that, though of his own making, he cannot call back. Consider President Bush's specific decision to remain at Kennebunkport after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. To return immediately to Washington would have created a sense of crisis that might have boxed him in or made him look out of control. He had learned well the lessons of President Carter's response to the Iranian hostage crisis, when Carter became, in a rhetorical sense, a hostage as well. When Korean Airlines (KAL) Flight 007 was shot down, and President Reagan was asleep, George Schultz immediately announced that this was a crisis of immense proportions, boxing in the rhetorical options the president would have available to him throughout. As *The Economist* observed:

Whatever one thinks of these claims, it is certainly true that Kosovo was a reminder of the president's considerable opportunities in foreign policy. Public support, even at the start, was mild and it eroded at the end. Congress was a shambles. . . . With no coherent alternatives being put forward by Congress and little clear public support one way or the other, the president can initiate and argue for whatever he wants: though what he wanted (such as no ground troops) was often dictated by what he knew the public would swallow.¹⁰⁶

Tet, and Lyndon Johnson's response to it, is in many ways an exemplar case, particularly given the need to frame and interpret photographic images. Peter Braestrup, in perhaps the most definitive analysis, argues: "For two months the President had left a vacuum—which others hastened to fill. Thus, simply to describe [the coverage of] February-March 1968 as willful or ideological ignores . . . the President's own failure to respond decisively. . . . Tet was a self-inflicted wound."¹⁰⁷ Beyond presidential responses, the images presented must be understood within a specific historical context. In September 1943 the first photographs showing dead Americans from World War II were published. "Rather than depress Americans, the photograph [of three dead on Buna Beach in the Pacific] seemed to inspire them. They did not see only the loss; they saw instead, as directed, the death of men fighting for 'freedom.' And, to them, the fact that men had died for it made freedom only that more precious, that more essential, that more urgent."¹⁰⁸

The impact the Mogadishu images have had on American foreign policy is clear. But their impact is not inescapable or inevitable. It is based on the incorrect assumption that people can only read images unidirectionally. No matter how similar, no matter how powerfully one text evokes another, every image is unique. Each comes from a different historical situation, is placed within a different story, and offers an ambiguous text that can be exploited by astute commentators. Images matter profoundly, but so do their contexts and the words that accompany them. The implications of this shift in interpretation are potentially profound. Mogadishu, or the mention of a potential parallel with Mogadishu, need not be a straightjacket or a deterrent to the use of American power. Rhetoric, whether discursive or visual, has real power in the way events play out. What this article makes clear is that rhetoric (and therefore rhetorical analysis) also has power in the way policy is shaped and defined. In a recent book on the conflict in Kosovo, the authors note that when the president spoke to the nation on the night the air war began, he immediately ruled out the use of ground forces. This was done, they argue, due to fears that leaving open the possibility of ground force participation would sacrifice domestic public and congressional (and allied) support for the air war. But "publicly ruling out their use only helped to reduce Milosevic's uncertainty regarding the likely scope of NATO's military actions,"¹⁰⁹ and possibly to lengthen the air war as a result. Yet, they report, National Security Advisor Sandy Berger, "who authored the critical passage in the president's speech, maintains that '*we would not have won the war without this sentence.*'"¹¹⁰ It would be difficult to find more direct evidence for the profound impact and influence public rhetoric and debate have—and are understood to have—on policy, policymaking, and policymakers at the highest level. That means that rhetorical analysis can have a role to play and a voice at the table *before* policies are determined. Academic rhetoricians, through their choice of projects and the formats in which they publish, can stake a claim to having an important voice at the table—and they should do so.

NOTES

1. There is not much difference between video and stills for most of the kinds of stories I address here. The print outlets increasingly use “frame grabbing,” a technique in which the stills used are taken from single frames of already released videotape, and in which it is left obvious through a variety of techniques that the videotape is the original source of the image. Widespread use of this approach began with the Rodney King episode, where the video, of course, was the story. It is a way, I believe, for print outlets to subtly convey to consumers their recognition that audiences already have a familiarity with a story and have written the story accordingly—making it worth reading (buying) even by audiences that already know the general outline. This is a function of print outlets’ need to adapt to the ubiquitousness of around-the-clock cable news services that, for many stories, pressure network news outlets to either go “wall to wall” (as they did during the Gulf War) or to at least expand coverage.
2. As Moeller notes, “the importance of editorial decisions in the makeup and layout of a photo-essay cannot be overstated.” Susan D. Moeller, *Shooting War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1989), 388.
3. Moeller references a series of particularly powerful photographs from Vietnam that were published with the right side cropped out because there was a photographer standing there carrying several cameras. “*Life* (but no more so than the other photomagazines or newspapers) had an investment in making it look as if the photographs of war that the press published every day, every week, or however often were taken by an omniscient observer” (*Shooting War*, 395).
4. “The effects of the casualty minimization imperative in situations not involving supreme U.S. security interests are likely to be pervasive.” Jeffrey Record, “Force Projection/Crisis Response,” in *Turning Point: The Gulf War and U.S. Military Strategy*, ed. L. Benjamin Ederington and Michael Mazarr (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994), 157.
5. That the public does not use this method of interpretation is evidenced in part by the recent work of the Triangle Institute for Security Studies (TISS), a massive study of “elite” and “mass” attitudes of both military and civilian populations on a variety of issues, which makes clear that fears of “casualty shyness” are, to put it mildly, exaggerated. As the published form of the project summary states, “the notion that the American public is unusually casualty shy—widely believed by policymakers, civilian elites and military officers—is sheer myth.” Peter D. Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, “The Gap,” *The National Interest* 61 (Fall 2000): 35. This essay began as the communications contribution to what was designed as a multidisciplinary research project bringing together a variety of perspectives to analyze the implications of this single data set. The project ultimately received a great deal of national attention from the media, the military, members of Congress, and the executive branch. It was for that audience as well that I have made the conscious decision to use research materials in the humanities defined as broadly as possible despite the availability of excellent source material within our own community. A version of this research report written so as to speak to the results of the TISS study can be found in *Armed Forces and Society* 27 (2001): 205–30.
6. Much of this work is extremely dense theoretically, and the bulk of it takes the position that the fact that the views of combat are mediated through technology (the gun camera video) serves to distance the observer from the reality of combat. See the work of Paul Virilio, particularly *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1989). Much of this literature links the phenomenon to modernism. See Bernd Huppauf, “Modernism and the Photographic: Representation of War and Destructions,” in *Fields of Vision: Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology, and Photography*, ed. Leslie Devereaux and Roger Hillman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 94–126. This argument is also the basis for any number of cri-

- tiques of the media coverage of the Persian Gulf War. See the collection edited by Lauren Rabinovitz and Susan Jeffords, *Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994) for typical samples.
7. This focus is the basis for much work critiquing coverage in the West of the Gulf War. The argument is that images intentionally occluded the presence of non-American bodies, as if they did not exist or did not matter. Often the suggestion is one of racist overtones. See Allan Sekula, "War Without Bodies," *Artforum* 30 (1991): 107–10, or David Prochaska, "Disappearing Iraqis," *Public Culture* 4 (1992): 89–92.
 8. The literature on casualty shyness tends to be dominated by polling studies. See Alvin Richman, "The Polls—Poll Trends: American Support for International Involvement," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 57 (1993): 264–73; Bruce Russett, "Doves, Hawks, and U.S. Public Opinion," *Political Science Quarterly* 105 (1990–91): 515–34; or Bruce Jentleson, "The Pretty Prudent Public: Post Post-Vietnam American Opinion on the Use of Military Force," *International Studies Quarterly* 36 (1992): 49–74.
 9. Hence increasing calls for the teaching of "visual literacy." See Paul Messaris, *Visual "Literacy": Image, Mind, and Reality* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994).
 10. Polls suggested that support for the mission in Kosovo increased the more the story was redefined as one about the suffering of the refugees. That finding has to include the importance of the visual component of those stories, although I found no polling data that split the difference that finely. See Richard Morin and Claudia Deane, "Attitudes Harden Against Milosevic; Public Support Grows for Ground Troops," *Washington Post*, April 8, 1999, <<http://lexis-nexis.com/univers>>.
 11. For a broad-based introduction, see Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *The Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998).
 12. Graham Clarke, *The Photograph* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 27.
 13. I am indebted to Ron Carpenter for this insight.
 14. For a detailed presentation of a system designed to literally read images—although for the most part focused on non-photographic imagery—see Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
 15. Camera angle alters the "point of view" of the reader of the image. It is a truism within this field, for example, that using a low angle "(shooting from below) [makes] the person(s) in the shot appear more powerful, menacing, threatening . . . and, conversely, using a high camera angle (shooting from above) [makes] the person(s) in the shot appear weaker, and so on." Messaris, *Visual "Literacy": Image, Mind, and Reality*, 7.
 16. Moeller, *Shooting War*, 12.
 17. Clarke, *The Photograph*, 34.
 18. Clarke, *The Photograph*, 23. In context the author is discussing the fact that, for documentary photography, black and white imagery is perceived as more authentic, color as suspect. While this may be true for print photography (although technical innovations permitting newspapers to move to color images may be changing this) and is true for imagery regarding specific periods (note the decision to make *Schindler's List* in black and white precisely because our images of World War II are dominated by black and white), it is doubtful that this remains true for video journalism.
 19. Moeller, *Shooting War*, 15.
 20. Clarke, *The Photograph*, 150.
 21. Moeller, *Shooting War*, 9.
 22. Moeller, *Shooting War*, 14.

23. Clarke, *The Photograph*, 146
24. Clarke, *The Photograph*, 19
25. David Mrozek, *The U.S. Air Force After Vietnam* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, 1988), 1.
26. Lest I be accused of the error of confusing the country for the experience, I note upfront that I will often use “Vietnam” as stylistic shorthand. I mean by it our understanding of the American experience in the Vietnamese conflict.
27. See Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), or John Carlos Rowe and Carl Berg, eds., *The Vietnam War and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
28. For an articulation of the process by which the Reagan administration was able to rhetorically redefine Vietnam see George Dionisopoulos and Steven R. Goldzwig, “The ‘Meaning of Vietnam’: Political Rhetoric as Revisionist Cultural History,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (1992): 61–79.
29. See Cori E. Dauber, *We Don’t Do Mountains: Image and Argument in American Military Doctrine* (forthcoming).
30. There are multiple problems with this interpretation of the American public’s reaction to casualties in Vietnam and the relationship between casualties and public support. For one thing, for “the American public, MACV’s casualties were measured . . . against previous American casualty rates. The jump in U.S. KIAs during Tet led Americans to question just what the United States had to show for all the national treasure it had poured into Vietnam.” In other words, the absolute numbers of casualties in and of themselves were not as strong a factor in diminishing public support as was the constant increase in casualties with little apparent gain in return in the context of constant reassurances that victory was in sight. Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 250. It is additionally the case that, as many have argued, Vietnam casualties were taken in a context of extremely limited efforts to raise public support for the conflict—and therefore small efforts to justify what casualties were being taken. See, for example, George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).
31. This is also an entirely separate question from the debate over whether the American press “stabbed in the back” the war effort. That is to say, whether press reports accurately depicted the situation on the ground or biased the American people, intentionally or not, against the war, is related but distinct. Whether, for example, American reporters stated in words that the result of Tet ’68 was an American victory or not, the photographs of dead Viet Cong within the ambassadorial compound in Saigon are often noted as the ultimate example of the capacity of images to triumph over words. “When the shooting stopped after nearly six and a half hours, the embassy grounds looked like a battlefield. . . . United Press International’s Kate Webb said the compound looked like ‘a butcher shop in Eden.’ . . . Television cameras managed bites of the action that reached some 14 million Americans watching 10 million screens for the January 30 evening news. Commentators trying to keep up with the incredible footage got most of the story wrong—but their words were largely ignored by an audience mesmerized by the carnage.” Frank E. Vandiver, *Shadows of Vietnam: Lyndon Johnson’s Wars* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 281. Yet Peter Braestrup (xiii) reports no empirical evidence linking coverage of Tet to changes in public opinion. *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*, abridged and updated ed. (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1994).
32. Heavy censorship of images existed during World Wars I and II and, even when lifted during World War II, footage of actual combat was highly unlikely. Thus although images of combat casualties were not new, regular images of combat itself arguably were.

33. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, "The Uses of Military Power," News Release 609–84 (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, November 1984.)
34. In George Bush's oft-repeated phrasing, "[t]his will not be another Vietnam. Never again will our Armed Forces be sent out to do a job with one hand tied behind their back." "Remarks to the Reserve Officers Association, January 23, 1991," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George Bush, 1991* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992), 63.
35. It is ironic that the doctrine calls for public support before hostilities begin; yet in point of fact that did not happen in Desert Storm. Once the air war began, support surged, but polls prior to that indicated an extremely divided population, and those figures did not move much over the course of Desert Shield. John Mueller argues that since "Bush successfully started the war and since the public enthusiastically rallied to him after it began, quite a few analysts, sometimes using selective data, have retrospectively concluded that Bush convinced the public of the war's wisdom before he began it. A more thorough assessment of poll data, however, suggests that . . . opinion during the prewar period, quite remarkably perhaps, generally changed rather little . . ." Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), xv. Indeed Mueller argues on page 62 that while "the military often claims that a central lesson from the Vietnam experience is that forces should not be committed to war unless they go in with solid public backing in advance [the] troops had that backing in Vietnam, but not in the Gulf War." For an analysis that tracks the Bush administration's "justification of the week" for the Gulf War, evaluating each for its rhetorical potency, see Carol K. Winkler, "Narrative Reframing of Public Argument: George Bush's Handling of the Persian Gulf Crisis," in *Warranting Assent: Case Studies in Argument Evaluation*, ed. Edward Schiappa (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 33–56.
36. See "The President's News Conference on the Persian Gulf Conflict, January 18, 1991," <<http://csdl.tamu.edu/bushlib/papers/1991/19011800.html>>.
37. Michael Slater, "Losing the Next War," *Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 119 (November 1993): 47.
38. Record, "Force Projection," 157.
39. Record, "Force Projection," 158.
40. Jeff Barnett, "Trends in Air Force Strategy and Structure: The Three Revolutions" (Department of the Air Force, AF/XOXWP, n.d., briefing, Air Force Historical Research Agency archives), 9.
41. Larry Welch, "Air Power in Low- and Mid-Intensity Conflict," in *The Future of Air Power in the Aftermath of the Gulf War*, ed. Robert Schultz Jr. and Robert Pfaltzgraff Jr. (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, July, 1992), 154.
42. John Warden III, "Employing Air Power in the Twenty-First Century," in Schultz and Pfaltzgraff, *Future of Air Power*, 60.
43. Mueller, *Policy and Opinion*, 79, argues that the casualties resulting from the attack "inspired no notable change in this attitude. Overwhelmingly, Americans said the shelter was a legitimate military target and held Hussein and Iraq responsible for the civilian deaths there."
44. This claim demonstrates the difficulty in dealing with such recent material. The claim is drawn from "dueling memoirs." When the order to cease fire was given by President Bush to the Commander-in-Chief Central Command (CINCCENT), General Norman Schwarzkopf (via the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell), the Army's VII Corps had not actually completed a critical maneuver. It is unclear whether Schwarzkopf knew that; whether, if he knew it, he communicated that information clearly to Powell; or whether, if he did so, Powell in turn communicated it accurately to Bush. As a result it is impossible to determine how great a role the photographs played. If the critical players all knew VII Corps' actual position and still gave the

order to cease fire, then clearly the argument for the policy impact of the fear of particular images is stronger. In other words, it is more likely they were influenced by fears of public perception of a “slaughter.” If they did not know, but assumed VII Corps was in position, there was less reason to continue combat operations. The only way to settle the issue is by examining the written notes from the critical White House meeting at which the decision to cease fire was taken. Those notes are currently under Freedom of Information Act review, but the Bush Library believes that because they are notes from a presidential meeting, they are unlikely to be released to the public for several more years in any event. The memorandum is covered by the Presidential Records Act, 44 USC 2201–07, which incorporates the Freedom of Information Act 5 USC 552 Amended.

45. This is the photograph of Navy Lieutenant Jeffrey Zaun. It probably received as much attention as it did because it was the most dramatic photograph of an American, with the facial injuries clearly and dramatically visible, and it was seen the most because the single still was used as the cover for the *Newsweek* issue that week. *Newsweek*, February 4, 1991.
46. Elliot Gruner, *Prisoners of Culture: Representing the Vietnam POW* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 190.
47. Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 135.
48. Gruner, *Prisoners of Culture*, 191.
49. Gruner, *Prisoners of Culture*, 192.
50. Admittedly, Saddam, especially in the beginning, made a number of rhetorical missteps that aided the Allied cause in this regard. Patting little Stewart, the British hostage, on the head and asking if he was getting his milk was a classic misstep.
51. Gruner, *Prisoners of Culture*, 183. “Initial speculation about the POWs of the Gulf War made headlines when Iraqi Television released film footage of captured pilots. The media distributed and read these images in a variety of ways. Most often the images were shown as justification for the war.”
52. Bush, “Remarks to Reserve Officers,” 61. My emphasis.
53. Perlemutter discusses the relevant photographs at length. David Perlemutter, *Photojournalism and Foreign Policy: Icons of Outrage in International Crises* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994.) There is also an argument that it was powerful imagery that led us to intervene when we did in Somalia, although things were arguably worse at the time in the Sudan. See Joseph Nye Jr., “Redefining the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs* 78 (July/August 1999): 26.
54. Jonathon Stevenson refers to the intervention as President Bush’s “grand finale.” *Losing Mogadishu: Testing U.S. Policy in Somalia* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1995), xii.
55. The U.S. military was not shy about resisting what it saw as pressure to launch military operations in Bosnia. See Michael R. Gordon, “Powell Delivers a Resounding No on Using Limited Force in Bosnia,” *New York Times*, September 28, 1992, A-1. See also Kenneth J. Campbell, “Once Burned, Twice Cautious: Explaining the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine,” *Armed Forces & Society* 24 (1998): 357–74.
56. See Cori E. Dauber, “If Somalia, Why Not Bosnia? Argument Standards for a New World Order,” in *Argument and the Postmodern Challenge: Proceedings of the Eighth SCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation*, ed. Raymie McKerrow (Annandale, Va.: SCA, November 1993) 283–393.
57. See Terrence Lyons and Ahmed I. Samatar, *Somalia: State Collapse, Multilateral Intervention, and Strategies for Political Reconstruction*, Brookings Occasional Papers (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1995) for a history less focused on the military aspects of intervention.
58. See Elizabeth Drew’s *On the Edge* for an excellent history of events leading up to the Battle of Mogadishu. *On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency*, rev. ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

- Although she is inaccurate in some minor details (for example, referring to Chief Warrant Officer Michael Durant as a member of Delta when he was a member of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment), the overall flow of the chronology gets the job done.
59. Judging the “accuracy” of reports is never possible until documents are fully declassified. However, the most thorough account of the events of the battle, despite its journalistic/novelistic style, is available in a recently published book based on numerous interviews. See Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999).
 60. Television coverage was researched through the use of the Vanderbilt University Television News Archive, <<http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/>>.
 61. One reporter did a survey of metro dailies and found that the photograph of the corpse (he does not specify which of the series he is referring to) ran on the front page of 11 of 34, including the *New York Times* and *USA Today*. Fifteen put the photograph inside the front section, while another eight, including the *Baltimore Sun* and *Dallas Morning News*, declined to use the image at all. Lou Gelfand, “If You Ran the Newspaper,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, October 19, 1993, <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/univers/>>.
 62. Janis L. Edwards and Carol K. Winkler, “Representative Form and the Visual Ideograph: The Iwo Jima Image in Editorial Cartoons,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83 (1997): 298.
 63. I am indebted to Carol K. Winkler for this insight.
 64. Moeller, *Shooting War*, 242. “[In an image published in the February 20, 1945, issue of *Look* of an injured Marine, the] image is reminiscent of Renaissance paintings of the descent from the cross and the laying out of Jesus’ body. The wounded Marine’s vulnerability, the wound in his chest, and the cross around his neck make the allusion concrete. The caption of the image reinforces the sentiment: ‘Crucified to a stretcher by Japanese bullets during the invasion of New Britain, this Marine is given blood plasma. Have *you* donated any blood lately?’ This coupling of war imagery with religious iconography was practiced during World War I as well; in both wars, the power of certain photographs—of the wounded especially—was enhanced by the unapologetic borrowing of Christian symbolism.”
 65. *New York Times*, February 27, 1994, from LexisNexis. My emphasis.
 66. Steven Kull and Clay Ramsay, “U.S. Public Attitudes on Involvement in Somalia” (College Park, Md.: Program on International Policy Attitudes of the Center for the Study of Policy Attitudes and the Center for International and Security Studies, October 26, 1993), 3. They elaborate: “Some findings appear to indicate majority support for immediate withdrawal, but on closer analysis show something different. For example, in the October 5 ABC poll, respondents were asked to choose between the U.S. withdrawing its troops or staying ‘until there’s a functioning civil government there that can run things.’ Sixty-four percent opted for withdrawing. But when this 64 percent was asked how soon the troops should be withdrawn, only 58% answered immediately. Thus only 37% of the total sample opted for immediate withdrawal” (4).
 67. Kull and Ramsey, “Involvement in Somalia,” 5.
 68. William Jefferson Clinton, “Address to the Nation on Somalia, October 7, 1993,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: William J. Clinton, 1993* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994), 1703.
 69. Clinton, “Address on Somalia,” 1704.
 70. Edwards and Winkler, “Representative Form,” 301. “Without an alternative frame in which to interpret the event, the public might have considered the large number of casualties that the military leadership was willing to sacrifice in the capture of Iwo Jima . . . to be unacceptable. Placed within the frame of collective, heroic effort embodied in Rosenthal’s photograph, however, the battle of

Iwo Jima—expressed metonymically through the Mt. Suribachi flag-raising—comes to represent the success that is achievable through collective sacrifice. Viewed from this perspective, the cost of military engagement becomes an indicator, if not evidence, for the acceptability of U.S. risk-taking during wartime.”

71. Kull and Ramsey, “Involvement in Somalia,” 4.
72. Kull and Ramsey, “Involvement in Somalia,” 4.
73. Edwards and Winkler, “Representative Form,” 296.
74. Nye, “Redefining,” 32.
75. Drew, *On the Edge*, 428.
76. Roger Cohen, “Memory Goes to War: Madeleine Albright’s Foreign Past and America’s Foreign Policy, Review of Michael Dobbs’ *Madeleine Albright: A Twentieth-Century Odyssey*,” *The New Republic*, July 12, 1999, 32.
77. CNN’s *Inside Politics*, April 1, 1999, <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>>.
78. Jurkowitz, “Prisoners’ Images,” n.p.
79. I am grateful to Peter Feaver for this argument.
80. Or, more specifically, casualty aversion, the elite response to their own perception of casualty shyness.
81. See as an example, Richard A. Ryan, “Experts: Send in Troops,” *Detroit News*, April 18, 1999, <<http://lexis-nexis.com/univers>>.
82. “Messy War, Messy Peace,” *The Economist*, June 12 1999, 15.
83. Mark Thompson, “Boots on the Ground,” *Newsweek*, June 28, 1999, 34.
84. A sampling from opinion outlets makes the point: “This is God’s own partisan country, not the tank-friendly desert of Kuwait. Western public opinion, it was believed, had *no stomach* for the sorts of casualties that a ground war would have entailed.” “Kosovo, Continued,” *The Economist*, May 22, 1999, 20. My emphasis. “NATO leaders had entered the war confident that victory would come quickly through airpower without the *politically unpalatable* resort to ground troops—an idea Eliot Cohen has derided as ‘immaculate coercion.’” Peter W. Rodman, “The Fallout from Kosovo,” *Foreign Affairs* 78 (1999): 47. My emphasis. “Bill Clinton, Tony Blair and the other leaders of the West . . . launched the first war in history said to be in pursuit of principle, not interest. The trouble was that they had never intended to do more than drop a few bombs. . . . Then, when a few bombs proved inadequate, they found they had stumbled into a war they did not mean to fight, *at least with men who might get killed*. This is not the stuff of nobility.” “Messy War, Messy Peace,” *The Economist*, June 12, 1999, 15.
85. This kind of polling was regularly done in the Gulf War. See Mueller, *Policy and Opinion*, 92, for a sample of such surveys. His position is that support for military efforts is in fact tied to casualty rates. He argues (*Policy and Opinion*, 76): “In Korea and Vietnam, popular support, variously measured, followed the same trend: high at first, then declining. It seems clear that it was American casualty rates, not the length of the war, that determined the decline in these wars. . . . [I]n each case, support followed the same sort of logarithmic pattern in which support dropped some 15 percentage points whenever the casualties increased tenfold. . . . Essentially, therefore, the wars quickly lost the support of those who were only lukewarm supporters; harder core supporters did not become disaffected until casualty rates became considerably higher.” This analysis, however, is based on unique cases, takes no account of the contextual environment within which casualties occur, and cannot account for wars with much higher casualty rates with radically different contexts: for example, the Civil War and World War II. The question that still needs to be answered is

- why casualty figures dominate support in some situations and appear less critical in others. Mazarr et al. argue in *Desert Storm*, 86, that a “host of casualty estimates emerged, all based on the idea that the interests at stake in the Gulf had to be weighed on some political and moral scale against the number of Americans likely to die.” For examples during the conflict in Kosovo, see Morin and Deane, “Attitudes Harden,” n.p.
86. Thompson, “Boots on the Ground,” 34.
 87. Although the goal was not to stop ethnic cleansing, the doctrine was in fact applied during the Gulf War, when two air campaigns were conducted virtually simultaneously. One attacked the Iraqi army in the field while the other focused on Iraqi “centers of gravity” in Baghdad itself, most especially the electrical power grid. That is not to say that this choice has not become a subsequent subject of controversy, but at the time the doctrinal assumptions were the same. For a general overview, see Richard P. Hallion, *Storm over Iraq: Air Power and the Gulf War* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992). This is not a settled issue within the air force, however. See Major Robert Patterson and Major Suzanne Vautrinot, “Can Bombing Win Wars?” (Research paper for the Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, May 1993, Executive Summary).
 88. Edward N. Luttwak, “Give War a Chance,” *Foreign Affairs* 78 (July/August 1999): 40.
 89. The Apaches are army attack helicopters, designed as low-level tank killers. There was substantial controversy surrounding the request by the theater commander (an army officer) that they be deployed. Additional controversy ensued when it took far longer than expected for them to actually arrive, and even longer for them to be declared combat-ready by the army, which produced all kinds of speculation as to whether the army was dragging its feet about participating in what was seen as an air force operation. For an ongoing discussion of who held up use of the Apaches and what the possible reasons for that decision may have been, see General Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat* (New York: Perseus Book Group, 2001).
 90. Luttwak, “Give War a Chance,” 41.
 91. “Casualties of War,” *Newsweek*, April 26, 1999, 26: “In what seems to be a Catch-22, NATO pilots are told they must be certain of their targets before firing. And yet their commanders, under orders from Brussels and Washington to minimize pilot casualties, have forced them to fly too high to be sure. At 15,000 feet, says one U.S. flier out of Aviano, Italy, ‘you probably can’t tell the difference [between] a military truck and a truck full of refugees.’” Peter Berkowitz, “Liberalism and Kosovo. The Good Fight,” *The New Republic*, May 10, 1999, 20: “On April 14, American warplanes flying at 15,000 feet over Kosovo mistakenly destroyed a convoy of the very civilian refugees U.S. forces had been sent to the Balkans to protect. To avoid Serb anti-aircraft weapons, the United States used fast, high-flying planes (rather than the slower, low-flying aircraft designed for such tactical bombing). This protects our pilots but puts civilians at heightened risk by increasing the difficulty of identifying targets on the ground. It would seem that we are trying so hard to avoid the loss of even one American life that we have adopted tactics that considerably raise the chances that we will destroy Kosovar lives.”
 92. Editors of *The New Republic*, “Going to Ground,” April 19, 1999, 7.
 93. “Kosovo, Continued,” *The Economist*, May 22, 1999, 20–23.
 94. Stephen Livingston, “Clarifying the CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention” The Joan Shorenstein Center, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, June 1997, Research Paper R-18, 4. My emphasis.
 95. Philip M. Taylor, *Global Communications, International Affairs and the Media since 1945* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 92–93. My emphasis.
 96. Kull and Ramsay, “Involvement in Somalia,” 3. My emphasis.

97. Livingston, "Clarifying CNN Effect," 15. My emphasis.
98. Nye Jr., "Redefining National Interest," 32. My emphasis.
99. Mark Jurkowitz, "Prisoners' Images Put a Face on American Role," *Boston Globe*, April 2, 1999, <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>>.
100. Jurkowitz, "Prisoners' Images," n.p.
101. In fact, support for operations in Kosovo continued to rise after the POWs had been taken. By April 16th, 61 percent of polled adults were supportive of air and missile attacks, up from only 50 percent the night the bombings started. (The POWs were taken on March 31st). See Frank Newport, "Gradual Increase in American Support for Kosovo Involvement Continues, April 16, 1999 Poll Releases," The Gallup Organization, <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr990416.asp>>. It is likely that the cause for the increase in support was the interim shift in media focus onto the refugee crisis forming on the borders of Kosovo as the refugees were pushed out of the province by Serb forces. See Mark Gillespie, "Crisis in Kosovo: Questions and Answers About American Public Opinion, April 16, 1999 Poll Releases," The Gallup Organization, <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr990414.asp>>.
102. Both quoted on CNN's "Inside Politics," April 1, 1999, <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/univers>>.
103. Jurkowitz, "Prisoners' Images," n.p.
104. As the tone and tenor of this analysis have no doubt made clear, I bring a number of assumptions to the table, which it is appropriate to articulate explicitly. Obviously I hold that rhetorically centered analysis can contribute to the ability of those charged with making policy in foreign and defense affairs to make better policy. But I also believe that there are times and circumstances where "better" policy entails the United States deployment of combat forces. There are situations where only the United States has the equipment and personnel able to reach a crisis in time to make a difference, and a lack of trained, equipped combat personnel will inevitably mean that lives will be lost. I also believe that the attempt to square the circle by deploying combat personnel to situations where they will be at risk, while simultaneously attempting to ensure zero casualties, is a bankrupt policy. It is based on flawed assumptions about what public support is; about how it is created, sustained, and fractured; and about the role it plays in combat effectiveness. The result is likely to be missions so convoluted that, at a minimum, they are bound to fall short of objectives and, as events in Bosnia and Kosovo may well demonstrate, with an increased probability of exactly the type of "quagmire" outcome the original Weinberger Doctrine and demand for public support sought to avoid.
105. Livingston, "Clarifying CNN Effect," 5. There is a deep irony in Powell's making such a statement given his reported concerns during the Gulf War and prior to involvement in Bosnia and Somalia.
106. "The Victors of Kosovo," *The Economist*, June 12, 1999, 23.
107. Braestrup, *Big Story*, xii.
108. Moeller, *Shooting War*, 207.
109. Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 97.
110. Daalder and O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 97. My emphasis.