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**Death and the Times:
Depictions of War Deaths in the United States and
Israel From Vietnam and the Six-Day War
to Iraq and Lebanon**

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Abstract

Why has support for casualties in foreign wars declined in the United States since Vietnam? We compare *The New York Times'* very different depictions of war deaths in the Vietnam and Iraq wars. Then we offer an explanation for why there has been this fundamental transformation in the ways in which American war dead are regarded and valued. We find that the change is in retrospective interpretations of the war and in memorials to the Vietnam dead after that war ended rather than in public evaluations of the geopolitical interests of the U.S. or prospects for victory in either Vietnam or Iraq. We trace the deepening personalization of war dead to specific political and cultural events within the United States rather than positing a general change in Western attitudes toward death and war. We conclude by speculating on the implications of that change for future wars and propose a research agenda to extend our findings to other countries that have fought wars in recent decades.

Keywords: war, casualties, media, United States, Israel

At the end of the 100-hour Gulf War, in which 148 U.S. troops died, President George H.W. Bush exulted, “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all!” (Herring 1991, p. 104). While Bush himself did not explain what he meant by the Vietnam syndrome, it has been understood variously as (1) an unwillingness to tolerate casualties in a long or inconclusive war, or (2) an aversion to any American casualties at all. The former meaning animated the Powell Doctrine, formulated by then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell, who argued that the U.S. should fight a war only if it used overwhelming force to secure limited objectives, thereby minimizing casualties while winning a quick victory. From this perspective, the Gulf War ended the Vietnam syndrome by proving to the American public that their government could fight a war without getting bogged down, enduring heavy casualties, or being defeated as it was in Vietnam.

A more expansive version of this interpretation of public opinion argues that the public becomes opposed to casualties when they sense that the war is lost, rather than as an automatic response to the mere number of war deaths. This argument (Feaver and Gelpi 2004; Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2009), based on an analysis of poll numbers, suggests that the public tolerates high casualties as long as they perceive the U.S. to be winning the war. Once defeat or stalemate became likely, following Chinese intervention in Korea, Tet in Vietnam, or the rise of anarchic violence and civil war in Somalia and Iraq, the public turned against those wars. Conversely, “when military operations were perceived as successful, presidents appeared to receive an increase in support as casualties increased...[but] presidents did not receive this boost if the operations were considered unsuccessful” (Feaver and Gelpi 2004, pp. 141-42).

Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler (2009) argue that the Iraq War supports their model. Initially, a majority of Americans supported the war, even though casualties were higher than in any other war since Vietnam, and the 486 dead in 2003 was more than triple the total 148 combat deaths in the entire 1991 Gulf War (Icasualties 2008). Support fell as casualties climbed and the war stalemated, the same pattern Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler found for other wars. However, the public response to the seeming success of the “surge”

in 2007 is ambiguous. On the one hand, the fraction of Americans who believed the war was going well increased during the “surge,” even as casualties in 2007 were the highest of the war and the total headed toward the 4000 mark. However, the percentage of Americans who believed the war was “a mistake,” “not worth it,” or a “wrong decision” was the same in late 2008 as it had been before the surge. Even the possibility of victory did not convince the majority that the casualties were justified. (For a summary of poll results see <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq.htm>).

Feaver and his colleagues demonstrate that support for wars rises and falls with the perceived success of combat operations, and that the general public as well as civilian and military elites calibrate the casualties they find acceptable to the importance of the military objective. However, their model does not address the long-term decline in tolerance for casualties. Feaver et al. might be correct that the U.S. public is still not totally adverse to any war deaths, but the number of casualties deemed acceptable is far fewer than for wars in past decades. Feaver and Gelpi (2004:114-21) report on a 1999 survey that raises various hypothetical situations and find that the median response of the “mass public” (i.e. civilians not currently in the military or in elite civilian government positions) is that 100 deaths would be an acceptable cost to defend Taiwan or intervene to bring democracy to the Congo, while 500 deaths were acceptable to remove WMDs from Iraq. These responses are greater than zero but far less than the number of casualties in Vietnam or Korea before the public turned against those wars, and much less than would be needed to achieve those objectives, or proved necessary to prosecute the Iraq war.

Feaver et al.’s argument finds support from the polling done in Israel in the wake of its two invasions of Lebanon. (Israelis were not polled on their opinions of the 1973 or earlier wars.) After a quick initial military success, the 1982 invasion became, bogged down in an extended occupation of southern Lebanon that ended in 1985, to be followed by the occupation of a smaller “security zone” until 2000. A 1985 survey found only 27% of Israelis felt the First “Lebanon war was worth the price,” and only 7% thought Israel should reinvade South Lebanon and hold territory if “terrorists shell settlements [in Israel] again” (Arian 1995, pp. 76-77). The Israeli public’s overwhelming opposition to

committing its army to Lebanon coexisted with a continuing unwillingness to make territorial concessions to Palestinians. The percentage of Israelis who responded “nothing” to “what is the greatest [territorial] concession that you would be willing to make” was 50% in March 1981 but fell only to 42% in July 1984 after the losses in Lebanon (Ibid, p. 96).

The Israeli public’s simultaneous ability to want to hold on to the occupied territories and yet not fight further wars might appear to be a case of magical thinking, but thirty years later those dual desires have in large part been fulfilled. The one subsequent instance when Israel endured significant casualties in a short period of time, the Second Lebanon War of July 12 to August 14 in which 121 Israeli troops died, illustrates the Israeli public’s deepening intolerance for casualties. Public support for the war was very high at the outset, with 86% in support of the war, and 58% “in favor of fighting ‘until Hizbollah would be wiped out’” in a July 17 poll (Ben Meir 2007, pp. 90-91). (Since 15% of the adult population of Israel is Arab, and was heavily against the war, this is close to unanimity among Israeli Jews.) However, less than a month later, as casualties topped 100, “polls reflected a dramatic turnaround....a Dialogue poll taken August 9-10, 2006 found that only 20 percent of the overall Israeli sample felt that ‘Israel had won the war’; 30 percent felt that ‘Israel had not won the war’; and 43 percent said that ‘there was no winner and no loser’” (ibid, p. 93). The decline in support for the war or belief in its success was not gradual; rather, “the approval rating of the government’s performance [during the war was] mainly a function of the number of casualties” with significant drops on days immediately following battles in which eight soldiers and twelve soldiers and two civilians respectively were killed (Ibid, p. 95).

Perhaps opposition on the part of Americans and Israelis to wars their governments initiated is a reflection of a general unwillingness to tolerate casualties regardless of the goal or success of the war. This interpretation of the polling data builds on the notion that in an era when parents have ever fewer children and virtually none of them die before adulthood, death in war is unacceptable regardless of the stakes or the prospect for success. “Most twenty-first century Westerners do not see death on their

streets. They do not butcher the animals they eat. And they do not lose a large minority of their children to disease and hunger before the age of twelve” (Hanson 2010, p. 242). DeWinter (2007) argues that “Today’s parents often have no more than two children, some may have only one son. His life is so precious that it has come to seem unbearable for him to be killed in battle.” As a result, Western nations practice “risk-transfer war” in which the cardinal rule is to minimize one’s own casualties even if it increases civilian casualties in the foreign lands where Western nations fight (Shaw 2005). This view animated policy during the Clinton Administration, which quickly withdrew troops from Somalia after eighteen Marines were killed there in 1993, refused to send U.S. forces to Rwanda to stop the 1994 genocide, and intervened in the former Yugoslavia in 1995 and 1999 only with high altitude bombing missions that posed virtually no danger to U.S. pilots.

Some authors see this aversion to casualties in all wars as specific to the United States (Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2009, chapter 1, review the authors who make this argument), while Shaw (2005) and Joseph (2007) argue that all Western nations are unwilling to tolerate casualties and as a result adopt strategies (most notably bombing) that increase deaths among enemy soldiers and especially civilians in order to prevent any casualties among their own soldiers.

This article begins the task of testing these two theories-- (1) that publics continue to tolerate casualties if the war is successful, and (2) that tolerance for casualties has fallen (perhaps to zero) regardless of the stakes or outcome-- by examining media depictions of war deaths in the only two Western countries that have initiated foreign wars in the past forty years: the United States and Israel. We do not examine Britain and Australia, which have fought as little brothers in U.S. initiated wars, nor do we examine the Soviet Union/Russia, all of which would be appropriate subjects for future research and would help determine if the changes traced in this article are specific to the United States and Israel or reflect a broader Western or global change.

First, we compare the very different depictions, by both *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*, of war deaths in the Vietnam and Iraq wars. Second, we trace the

evolution of war casualty coverage in *Yedioth Ahronoth*, the largest circulating Israeli newspaper, from the Six-Day War of 1967 through the 2006 Lebanon War. We then tie those transformations to specific political and cultural events within the United States and Israel, which we show can explain the timing and nature of the changes in newspaper coverage of American and Israeli war deaths. We conclude by speculating on the implications of that change for future wars.

Depictions of American Casualties during the Vietnam War

Our contemporary understanding of public opinion during the Vietnam War is refracted through post-war novels and films, the continuing fetishization of soldiers still classified as Missing in Action, and, above all, the Vietnam War Memorial. As Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz (1991) find (and we will discuss in more detail below), the American public was uncertain and in conflict over how to understand the Vietnam War and to remember the dead in the immediate post-war years. Congress sought to resolve the dispute with a “requirement: that the Memorial make no reference to the war, only to the men who fought it” (pp. 391-92). The Vietnam War Memorial did not end debate over the war itself, but it decisively shaped the American public’s image of the war dead. For that reason, if we want to realistically compare the American public’s support for war casualties in Iraq with the Vietnam era we need to begin the task of excavating contemporaneous accounts of the war and determine the extent to which the *Times* devoted attention to lost lives, and to the grief of soldiers’ families, friends and communities, as opposed to the progress of the war effort.

Sources

We begin our analysis in this article with *The New York Times*. We do so because, then as now, the *Times* was the most influential newspaper in the United States. Its coverage sets the standard for the journalistic profession. We recognize that the *Times* attracts a wealthier and better educated readership than most newspapers in the United States, and of course it is a local paper and is written in part to reach appeal to a

readership that during the Vietnam era even more than now was largely concentrated in the New York metropolitan area. For these reasons, we will compare the *Times* with the *Chicago Tribune*. The *Tribune* was and remains the leading newspaper in what was the second largest American city throughout the Vietnam War. Whereas the *Tribune* was consistently pro-war in its editorial policy throughout the Vietnam War, the *Times*, within the confines of mainstream American political opinion, was anti-war. This will allow us to test whether pro- and anti-war sentiment affected coverage of war casualties.¹

Methods

We read coverage of war casualties in *The New York Times* for the years 1965 to 1975. The year 1965 was when the U.S. first sent significant numbers of troops to Vietnam and in which there were large numbers of casualties. Only 401 of the total 58,193 Vietnam War deaths occurred before 1965.

Articles corresponding to the initial years covered, 1965 to 1968, were located using *The New York Times Index*. We read every microfilmed article listed under headings: “VIETNAM_Military Action” and “VIETNAM_United States Personnel.” For coverage during years 1969 to 1975, articles were located using Proquest Historical Newspapers virtual database. The search algorithm for 1969 follows:

ABS(vietnam) AND TEXT(casualties) OR TEXT(casualty) OR TEXT(death) OR TEXT(dead) OR TEXT(killed) OR TEXT(losses) AND PDN(>1/1/1969) AND PDN(<12/31/1969). Results turned up articles dated between January 1, 1969 and December 31, 1969 that include "Vietnam" in the document abstract and at least one of the following terms in the document text: casualties, casualty, death, dead, killed, losses. We repeated the search for each year, 1970 to 1975.

¹ Our findings in this article could be tested against evidence from other newspapers. It would be good to sample small-town newspapers, although that is difficult since they are not indexed. The South has always been more militaristic than other regions of the United States, supplying a disproportionate share of volunteers and career soldiers, so it would be worthwhile testing whether war casualties were covered differently in that region. Another possible extension of this research would be to sample network news broadcasts and see how war casualties were presented there.

For each article found via index and database, we recorded the publication date, page and column numbers, and byline (if provided). We coded each article for whether it included any mention of a US combat death and whether any dead soldiers' names were given, and if those soldiers were identified as being from the New York or Chicago Metropolitan areas. We also coded if biographical details of the dead soldier were given and if any information was included indicating how the soldiers died. We noted if the article included reference to the reactions of fellow soldiers or of relatives and non-relatives at home. We recorded mentions of both the sufferings of injured soldiers and of the burials of or memorials for the dead. Additionally, we noted if an article was accompanied by a picture of a soldier who had died.

Our goal was to trace changes over time, to see if coverage along any of these dimensions ebbed and flowed along with casualties or if there was a turning point at which the type and intensity of coverage changed for the duration of the war.

The Dead in Vietnam

In both the *Times* and *Tribune* coverage of the Vietnam War, little attention is paid to the suffering and deaths of soldiers. Even in 1968, the year when according to Feaver and Gelpi (2004) the January Tet Offensive convinced the American public that the war was lost, only 23% (167 out of 730) of the *Times* articles, and 17% (77 out of 457) of the *Tribune* articles even mentioned fatalities, and those that did reported antiseptically about the fatal incidents.

Prior to Tet, articles that included information about fatalities typically did so using statistical description only and first mentioned the larger number of enemy deaths before turning to U.S. casualties. The focus of those articles was on whether the battles were furthering a U.S. victory and they largely ignored the sufferings and deaths of U.S. soldiers. One such *Times* article begins:

United States Marines killed 162 enemy troops in a fierce six-hour fight near the demilitarized zone yesterday, a United States spokesman said today. Eight marines of the Fourth Marine

Regiment were killed and 39 wounded in the fight two miles northeast of Conthian, he said. ("Marines Kill" 1968:1)

Even in the wake of Tet, the *Times* largely maintained its focus on enemy body counts and antiseptic descriptions of battles. Thus a report on a decline in U.S. casualties was analyzed for what it might mean for the future course of the war. No mention was made of what the lull in fighting might mean for the troops or their loved ones at home:

Action on the ground in South Vietnam continued at a slow pace today as military authorities reported for the fourth week a decline in the number of Americans killed. In the week ended Oct. 12, a military spokesman said, 167 United States soldiers died in combat. The figure brought the total number of Americans killed in the war since January 1, 1961, to 28,825. The decline in number of American deaths is being watched carefully as speculation increases about fighting lulls and peace moves. (Ayres 1968:1)

Details are absent, and no further information is given about the 167 soldiers who were killed in that week.

Only beginning in 1969 did a majority of the articles on the war mention fatalities, a pattern that held for the rest of the war. More vivid methods for conveying soldiers' sacrifices, such as pictures of the dead or articles about memorials for the dead, became *less* common in the years following Tet. Between January 1, 1969 and December 31, 1971, for example, only one article featuring casualties included a photograph of soldiers.

Table 1. Count of *New York Times* articles by year and analytic category

	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	Total
Articles on Vietnam war	626	922	971	730	609	391	514	423	197	125	143	5651
Include any mention of dead U.S. soldiers	63	82	86	167	383	332	318	299	72	63	71	1936
Front page articles [from total mention u.s. dead]	15	30	27	44	30	20	24	20	12	9	6	237
Mention name of dead (From NY metro only)	8 (8)	10 (6)	21 (18)	58 (25)	201 (198)	128 (108)	135 (101)	96 (83)	33 (30)	21 (17)	15 (14)	726 (608)
Include biographical information about the dead soldier	0	0	4	10	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
Include description of how a soldier died	22	32	38	36	48	38	42	39	39	36	38	410
Include reference to reactions of fellow soldiers	2	2	4	9	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	21
Include reference to reactions of families at home	0	0	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
Include reference to friends or other non-relatives at home	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Mention sufferings of injured soldiers	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Mention burials of the dead	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Mention memorials or commemorations of the dead	0	0	2	24	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	29
Include picture of soldier(s)	2	1	1	5	0	0	1	0	0	2	2	14

Table 2. Count of *Chicago Tribune* articles by year and analytic category

	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	Total
Articles on Vietnam war	217	379	377	457	432	353	322	391	228	96	196	3448
Include any mention of dead U.S. soldiers	23	33	40	77	83	42	39	49	6	3	1	396
Front page articles [from total mention u.s. dead]	8	11	13	22	24	17	13	11	1	0	0	120
Mention name of dead (From Chicago Areas Only)	2 (2)	4 (2)	4 (3)	10 (7)	22 (17)	4 (3)	4 (2)	9 (1)	2 (1)	1 (0)	1 (0)	63 (38)
Include biographical information about the dead soldier	1	2	2	7	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	23
Include description of how a soldier died	8	8	10	13	9	6	11	15	2	1	1	84
Include reference to reactions of fellow soldiers	0	0	1	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	6
Include reference to reactions of families at home	0	0	0	3	2	1	1	3	0	0	0	10
Include reference to friends or other non-relatives at home	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Mention sufferings of injured soldiers	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	4
Mention burials of the dead	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	4
Mention memorials or commemorations of the dead	0	0	0	7	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	9
Include picture of soldier(s)	0	1	1	3	2	0	1	3	0	0	0	11

Over the course of the Vietnam War, in which 58,193 U.S. troops died, the *Times* published names of the dead in 726 articles. Most of those articles, 608 (84%), mentioned soldiers from the New York area. Such articles were predominantly on inside pages, with a small headline “Casualties Are Listed.” The articles began, “The Defense Department today identified [number] servicemen killed in action in Vietnam. Among them were the following from the metropolitan area,” and were followed by a list of only those casualties from the metropolitan area. The vast majority of the dead, who were from elsewhere in the United States, were not named. Unlike in the coverage of the Iraq war, discussed below, there was no attempt by the *Times* to publish the name of each casualty from the entire nation. The *Tribune* published far fewer articles (only 63) mentioning war dead. Of those 38 (60%) were about fatalities from the Chicago area. The *Tribune*’s less exclusive focus on local deaths stems from its much heavier reliance than the *Times* upon articles from wire services which did not have local angles.

The dead soldiers remained statistics or part of a combat narrative and were rarely portrayed with human qualities. Soldiers’ names were often not included in articles that feature descriptions of a battle or incident. In fact, the *Times* included biographical information about only sixteen dead soldiers during the entire war; only two of those were from after 1968. For the *Tribune*, the numbers are 23 and 11, more but still insignificant in relation to the total number of deaths and the coverage of fatalities in the Iraq and Afghan wars. The grief of the dead soldiers’ families, friends and fellow soldiers was mentioned in only 27 *Times* articles and 18 from the *Tribune* during the eleven years. Other more graphic and intimate ways of presenting casualties remained rare throughout the entire war. There were only two articles on soldiers’ injuries and another two on burials of war dead in the *Times*, and four of each in the *Tribune*. During the entire war, the *Times* published photos of only fourteen dead soldiers and the *Tribune* of eleven whom they identified by name, as opposed to battle photos in which the dead were left anonymous.

Anonymity extended to cases where the casualties were caused by so-called friendly fire. An article entitled “U.S. Plane Bombs Marines in an Accident, Killing Six” notes a grim incident. The two-sentence article, appearing on page 10, reads:

A Marine F-4 Phantom jet accidentally bombed a unit of the Fifth Marine Regiment yesterday, killing six marines and wounding eight, a Marine spokesman said today.

The right-bomber had been called to provide close air support as the marines prepared to attack suspected enemy positions about seven miles southwest of Danang. (“U.S. Plane Bombs Marines” 1968:10)

Despite the significance of the event, only two inches of column space was dedicated to a terse report of the accident.

Articles that mention U.S. soldiers’ sufferings do so more to convey battlefield atmospherics, and to show off the reporter’s literary skills, than to bring the dying soldier and his sufferings to life. One such article, the longest story about an incident resulting in a single death in the entire eleven years of *Times* coverage we reviewed, reports the unfortunate death of a young corporal using unusually descriptive language:

A fragment from a North Vietnamese mortar round hit a marine corporal in the head one foggy morning recently on Hill 881 South near here.

The wound was serious. But the fog normally lifted about noon and no one was overly concerned about getting in a helicopter to take the young marine to a hospital. The men of the 26th Marine Regiment’s Third Battalion were angry that the corporal had been hit, but they were not too seriously worried about saving his life.

The fog didn’t lift. All during the afternoon, 30 mile-an-hour winds pushed the fog from the Balong Valley to the east and over the Khesanh base and Hill 881 South, four miles west. Medics on the hill did what they could to help the corporal. As night fell, they radioed the battalion doctor for advice.

Heavy fog continued throughout the next day. The corporal, long in a coma, began slipping. The supply of glucose being dripped into his arm began running out. Without it, he would die. Without hospital help, he would die anyway. (“Fog Fails” 1968:7)

With dramatic appeal, the narrative continues to describe a tense chain of events that inexorably led to the corporal's death. Such vivid writing was rare both before and after Tet. Yet even this article still maintains emotional distance by not including the soldier's name. The soldiers in almost all the other articles published over the course of the entire war were literally faceless since, as we noted above, so few of the dead were identified by name in photos. Even those dignified with mention of their names remained biographically and emotionally invisible.

The Dead in Iraq

Coverage of Iraq War casualties is very different from that of Vietnam. Certain types of articles that were totally absent from Vietnam coverage are common during the Iraq War. The *Times* and *Tribune*, along with many other American newspapers, ran multi-page sections showing the name and photo of each soldier who had died when deaths reached the 1000, 2000, 3000 and 4000 milestones in Iraq.

Personalized commemoration of U.S. war dead in Iraq began just 10 days into the war. The March 30, 2003 edition of the *Times* begins a regularly published segment called "A Nation at War: The Dead." On that day, the feature included 27 individual 1"x2" face shots of soldiers who had already died; some formally posed military portraits, others in cropped casual shots. Included underneath each photo are the soldier's name, age, hometown, rank and military service branch. In contrast to the *Times*' New York-focused Vietnam era coverage, American dead from the Iraq war are given equal treatment regardless of where in the United States they came from. Smaller announcements without pictures that list name, rank, and hometown were run every few days after that and have continued to record all casualties announced by the Department of Defense.

"The Roster of the Dead" feature first ran on September 9, 2004, one day after it was reported that U.S. war deaths passed the 1000 mark. This was a full page with a headshot of each of the first one thousand soldiers who died in Iraq. The introductory comment reads:

“The Department of Defense has identified the following American service members who have died since the start of the Iraq war in March 2003. The dead come from all branches of the armed services and represent the highest toll since the Vietnam War. Biographical information is online at nytimes.com/national.”

Another regularly published *Times* feature, “A Nation at War: Images of War,” is a series of photo essays showing battlefield life. Different from the combat photos of Vietnam, these full-page spreads include photos of soldiers displaying weapons, medical personnel treating wounded Iraqi soldiers, grieving military personnel at a service for three dead marines, and a photo of dead bodies waiting to be claimed in a refrigerated truck. This feature began March 23, 2003 and ran every day until April 12, 2003 except for March 26-29.

The *Times* maintains a web page that allows readers to search for the dead by name, state or hometown. Additionally, photos of all the dead are ordered by their date of death in Iraq, following the temporal organization of the Vietnam War Memorial. A “Their Stories” tab links readers to a page with photos of nine of the dead and links to audio clips of a military colleague talking about the soldier and/or their death (http://www.nytimes.com/ref/us/20061228_3000FACES_TAB1.html).

Each day the Defense Department releases the names of the dead, the *Times* prints a box with the names, age and hometown of those fatalities. In contrast, such listings in the *Times* during the Vietnam War did not include the ages of the dead and were limited to those from the New York metropolitan area. Television news broadcasts did feature weekly casualty totals throughout the Vietnam War, but only the numbers were given, and the main purpose was to contrast the U.S. numbers with the heavier losses of the South Vietnamese allies. (The rare weeks when U.S. deaths exceeded those of South Vietnam were political setbacks for the Johnson Administration. Nixon’s Vietnamization policy ensured that U.S. casualties would always be well below those of South Vietnam). In any case, enemy deaths were always far higher than those of the allies. The point of

the exercise was to demonstrate that U.S. casualties were relatively low even if after Tet the high enemy casualties no longer were taken as a sign of impending U.S. victory.

Weekly body counts have not been broadcast during the Iraq War. Instead, coverage focuses on individual fatalities, humanizing them with biographical details, and conveying the loss in the grief of loved ones. *Times* coverage of Iraq focuses on the cost of the war to the injured and dead themselves and to their fellow soldiers, families, friends and communities. There are numerous and lengthy articles on soldiers' efforts to recover from physical injuries and from post-traumatic stress disorder in contrast to two articles on soldiers' injuries during the entire Vietnam War. Families' grief, which merited only five *Times* and ten *Tribune* articles during Vietnam, is a common feature in Iraq War coverage.

A front-page article from Sunday, November 2, 2003 is emblematic of the *Times*' attention to the war's human cost. The headline, "Deaths in Iraq Take a Steady Toll at Home," and subhead, "22 times in last 2 weeks, a Grim Knock at the Door," highlight the article's themes. The article opens with four profiles of soldiers who died which, however brief, present more personal detail than almost all the articles on Vietnam war dead:

- Lt. David Bernstein, a soldier's soldier who was killed two weeks ago and buried on Friday at the United States Military Academy here. As his mother sat with a folded flag in her lap and his father accepted a Bronze Star, even the Green Berets cried.
- Sgt. Aubrey Bell, the 280-pound Alabama National Guardsman who drove a fork-lift and ate mayonnaise sandwiches, and who was shot to death in front of a police station.
- Pvt. Rachel Bosvelt, the 19-year-old military policewoman who loved to draw forest scenes and was silenced by mortars.
- Sgt. Paul J. Johnson, a paratrooper who could imagine no fate better than leaping into the night sky, who died after being burned by a bomb. (Gettleman 2003:N1)

The body of the article presents more biographical information along with emotional accounts of how relatives and neighbors reacted to news of the soldiers' deaths. Because readers of the article have a sense of the soldiers' human qualities, the descriptions of the knock at the door and of the other rituals involved in notifying

families of the death carry greater emotional weight (“Deaths in Iraq Take a Steady Toll at Home” Jeffrey Gettleman November 2 2003 p. N1).

While articles describing the soldiers’ suffering were rare during the Vietnam war, the *Times* began writing about U.S. soldiers’ physical and mental injuries only three months into the Iraq war. One article, accompanied by a photograph of a young soldier whose face reveals the weariness and seriousness of a much older man, focuses on the effects of combat fatigue on a 24-year-old soldier fighting in Iraq.

It was only after the fighting stopped that Pvt. Christopher L. Labler began to feel the symptoms, though of what he did not know at the time. He became withdrawn. He lost his energy and his appetite. Worst of all were the image that flashed through his mind. They were not nightmares, since to have nightmares you have to go to sleep. And he could not. (Myers 2003:A1)

The article continues by visualizing for the reader the traumatic stimuli, detailing the soldier's nightmare visions: bodies torn apart beyond recognition by explosives. A personalized account of war's psychological toll, the article tells the story of one representative soldier, whose prospects appear grim as he is ordered to return to the battlefield despite his psychological trauma. Though focused on a single soldier, the article notes that “hundreds of soldiers” suffer similar symptoms.

A similar feature, published seven months later and including a full photo-shoot, announces the “permanent scars of Iraq” and begins similarly and is rich with description:

Robert Shrode can’t sleep. At night, in the fly-speck town of Gurthrie, Ky., in the rented farmhouse he shares with his 20-year-old wife, Debra, he surfs the Internet, roams the house. He lies down and gets up again. He drinks a beer and stares out the window at the black field beyond. Hours pass. He can’t sleep. Before the war, he could have six beers and sleep like a baby, but now that works against him. Drinking may help get his head to the pillow, but it also ratchets up the nightmares. For a while, he sweated out his bad dreams on the living-room couch, and it drove Debra crazy. She would come down from the bedroom, touch his shoulder, ask what the problem was. Shrode would just turn his back to her and not say a word. Now she knows better than to ask,

though occasionally when the silence between them gets too deep, she'll put it out there, What're you thinking about? 'Iraq,' he'll say. And then the silence falls again." (Corbett 2004:34)

This lengthy feature in the *New York Times Magazine* includes two full-page portraits and three other photographs of the article's subjects. It explains the excruciating struggle of young soldiers and their immediate families as they attempt to sort through the psychological costs of war. The intimate narrative exposes suffering by detailing, in the soldiers' own words, their angry outbursts, violent nightmares and destructive behaviors which the article presents as direct consequences of their combat-related trauma.

The *Times*, through its coverage of American casualties, offers a template for how the American public should think about the meaning and costs of the Iraq war. In contrast to coverage of previous wars, the *Times* gives priority to soldiers' death and injuries, and to the reactions of their comrades and families, rather than to the battles in which those losses occurred. Articles describing soldiers' physical and mental injuries, relatives' efforts to cope with those disabilities, and the endless grief of those who mourn the dead soldiers all convey to readers the enormous magnitude of the suffering the Iraq war causes in American soldiers and their families. Such coverage heightens readers' emotional connections with the dead, letting American casualties overwhelm any other meaning of the war.

Coverage of War Deaths in Israel

In Israel, newspapers were banned by law from publishing the names of the dead and injured during wartime. At the end of the 1967 and 1973 wars, newspapers published lists of casualties without biographical articles. The focus was on the collective achievements and sacrifices of the Israeli military. Beginning with the first Lebanon War, and continuing with casualties during the long occupation of southern Lebanon and from the Intifada, Israeli newspapers began to break the law (in part because, as the war dragged on, knowledge of casualties spread throughout Israel through informal means undermining the stated purpose of the law: to keep war information secret). Articles increasingly focused on the grief of family and friends rather than the soldiers'

contributions to the war effort. It became newspapers' standard practice to mark each casualty with detailed biographies and photographs.

Yedioth Ahronoth covered the funerals of many of the soldiers. Those articles were accompanied by photos of the graveside and of weeping relatives and friends of the dead soldiers. On June 9, 1982, all of page 2 of *Yedioth Ahronoth* was devoted to short obituaries and descriptions of the funerals of seventeen soldiers who had died at the beginning of the war. Each capsule biography included short quotes from friends or relatives evoking the dead soldier's best qualities: "the nicest and most loyal," or "one of the first to go up north" (*Yedioth Ahronoth* 1982).

The Israeli military itself changed policy with the Second Lebanon War of 2006, and "published on a daily basis the number of soldiers killed in action on that day. The media gave extensive coverage to the casualties, coverage that included the name of each soldier killed in action, his picture, interviews with his family and friends, the time and place of the funeral, and in many instances, coverage of the funeral itself. Especially when the number of casualties was high, at least by Israeli standards, coverage of the casualties overshadowed that of the actual events on the battlefield" (Ben Meir 2007, p. 87).

The articles become more detailed, and the pathos deeper in *Yedioth Ahronoth's* reporting of casualties from the Second Lebanon War. Some articles focus on grieving parents: "After his death his mother told us that when she accompanied him on the day he was first drafted, she began to cry. When he asked her why she was crying, she replied: 'I know you're willing to give everything and sometimes everything is just that – everything...'" (Mei-Tal 2006). Other journalists emphasize that the dead soldiers were parents. An article headlined, "Sergeant major Ron Mashiah – was killed in the sky of Lebanon and will never see his son," focuses on the cost of the dead soldier's bravery to his wife and unborn son: "The commander of Ron's squadron announced that whoever expects a child is entitled to avoid battle. Although his wife was 5 months pregnant, Ron wasn't going to give up: 'I've been training my whole life for this moment', he said".

Friends are quoted to provide insight into Ron Mashiah's character and his loving marriage (Froilich 2006).

The Language and Imagery of American War Deaths Before and After Vietnam

New York Times and *Chicago Tribune* articles on the Vietnam War gave far less attention to casualties and to the suffering those deaths brought to relatives at home than did the Times' and Tribune's (and other media outlets') coverage of the Iraq war. Contemporaneous coverage of the Vietnam War also stands in sharp contrast with how the American Vietnam War dead themselves have been depicted since the final Communist victory in 1975. Our task, in this section, is to place changing journalistic standards for reporting casualties in the longer historical context of American and Israeli governmental policies for memorializing the dead. We will also examine how those policies reflected and provided a terrain for popular mobilization around war casualties.

The most common explanation for the change in public attitudes toward war deaths blames or credits television. Called "the living-room war" by Michael Arlen (1966), in this view the public saw death for the first time in vivid and multicolored reality through television news reports from Vietnam. In addition, Vietnam was the only U.S. war in which the press was not censored. Yet the lack of censorship mainly allowed images of atrocities committed by U.S. troops to be shown, most famously in the photo of the nude Vietnamese girl running from a U.S. napalm attack and the video and Pulitzer Prize-winning photo of the Saigon police chief (a U.S. ally) executing a Vietcong prisoner (Hammond 1988; 1996 offers the most comprehensive history of U.S. media coverage of the Vietnam War). Arlen himself saw the television coverage of Vietnam as largely unemotional and focused on battlefield tactics, "a picture of men three inches tall shooting at other men three inches tall" (1966:201).

The focus, by Arlen and others, on television during Vietnam is technologically determinist and also ahistorical. It is important to remember that battle scene photographs, newsreels and films from previous wars, especially World War II, were

realistic and bloody. The U.S. government encouraged the publication of such images, hoping to convince the public of the brutality and inhumanity of the Japanese and Germans (Dower 1986; Roeder 1993). The U.S. military encouraged the showing of its World War II propaganda films, with their images of enemy cruelty, to the civilian population, while “the Vietnam films,” which were much milder in their depictions of the enemy, “were shown almost exclusively to the troops and not to civilians” (Springer, 1991, p. 96). World War II, and even Civil War, photos were much more similar in their close-up vividness and pathos to the ‘war porn’ of recent movies like “Saving Private Ryan” than the generally clinical and unemotional video and photographs from either Vietnam (Hammond 1988; 1996) or Iraq. The most charged images from the Vietnam and Iraq wars appeared in foreign rather than U.S. media; hence the impact that clips of wounded Iraqi civilians in “Fahrenheit 9/11” had on U.S. viewers who had never seen Iraqi casualties on American television. Indeed, the U.S. government as well as journalists were highly restrained in their depictions of the enemy in Vietnam, with very little focus on Communist atrocities during the war, just as images of Saddam Hussein’s poison gas and torture victims were shown far less during the Gulf or Iraq Wars than were similar images in the World Wars or Korea (for example, see U.S. Department of State 2003).

If we look at the long history of war dead imagery, a key turning point came with the U.S. Civil War. That was the first instance in world history where both sides relied on mass conscription to field their armies. “Citizen conscription...help[ed] consolidate a politically mass-mobilizing regime...by rendering all citizens formally equal...by integrating them and their state into a single polity...by politicizing them, their relations to one another, and to the state” (Kestnbaum 2002:131). It also transformed the commemoration of the dead. The Federal government in the 1867 National Cemeteries Act took responsibility for identifying and properly burying each of the Union dead as an obligation to both its citizen-soldiers and to their grieving families. Private burial societies fulfilled the same obligation for Confederate dead. The rituals of identification and burial individualized the dead at the same time as they became “a collective that

represented something more and something different from the many thousands of individual deaths that it comprised...The reburial movement created a constituency of the slain, insistent in both its existence and its silence, men whose very absence from American life made them a presence that could not be ignored” (Faust 2008:249). In other words, the Civil War dead were identified and individualized so that their families could take solace from the link between their deaths and the great national cause which their burial in military cemeteries symbolized. Dead soldiers in the Civil War, and in the World Wars as well, were individualized so that their contributions to the nation could be recognized.

Vietnam was different from all previous American wars, not in the public’s awareness of citizen-soldiers’ suffering and death, nor in the vividness of the images of battlefield violence, but rather in the unprecedented controversy over the worth and morality of the cause, and finally in the first U.S. military defeat. The Vietnam War Memorial proposed to resolve (or sidestep) the controversy by listing “names of all the war dead...It was different in that it combined the traditional idea of a stone monument to the war dead with the radical idea of excluding from it any prominent symbol of national honor and glory...To list the names of every fallen soldier, with no symbolic reference to the cause or country for which they died, immediately highlights the individual” (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991:388, 400).

The Memorial has been enormously influential in shaping how Americans think and emote and has become the template for all subsequent American commemorations of war dead. Indeed, the Memorial has displaced Arlington Cemetery, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and all other sites as the most visited memorial in the nation. In so doing, it has altered the relationship between the individual and the nation. Unlike the dead citizen-soldiers of all previous American wars and their families, whose worth and sacrifice were ratified by their connection to and subsumption in a national cause, the Vietnam War dead are just dead individuals whose lives are given meaning only in the memories and suffering of their families and friends.

Certainly many relatives remember the dead as patriots; the most common souvenir left at the Memorial is the American flag, but the focus on grieving survivors in retrospective coverage of Vietnam and of all subsequent wars downplays the solace of patriotism. This is seen in Jim Sheeler's *Final Salute*, a book length elaboration of his Pulitzer Prize winning series of articles for the *Rocky Mountain News*. Sheeler follows "casualty assistance calls officers (CACOs)," the men who knock on doors to inform the 'next of kin' that their relative has died in Iraq. Tellingly, this personal form of communication was adopted only toward the end of the Vietnam War (Sheeler 2008:39); before that, families were informed by letter. The timing of that change suggests that the Defense Department lost confidence that relatives would accept their soldier's death as the tragic fulfillment of patriotic duty. Nor have they recovered that confidence since. Indeed, the *Casualty Assistance Calls Officer Student Guide* advises CACOs to "avoid phrases or platitudes that might appear to diminish the importance of the loss...Pointing out positive factors such as bravery or service may be comforting later, but are usually not helpful at this time" (Commander 2008:2-11). There is no other mention of patriotism, service or duty in the *Guide*, which otherwise is filled with advice on how to cope with grief, arrange funerals, and offers a summary of survivors' benefits.

Later war imagery has reinforced the Vietnam Veterans Memorial template. The continuing search for Americans "missing in action" in Vietnam is animated by a desire to bring "closure" to their families. The point is to allow the families to properly grieve; the circumstances of their loss are relevant only to aid the recovery of their remains. A new trope was added with the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979-81. Americans tied yellow ribbons to trees to signify their desire for the safe return of the hostages to their families. Again, any geo-political meaning to the hostages' ordeal was submerged in the drama of the 52 individuals held in Teheran. The yellow ribbon has since become a symbol of concern for any Americans in danger abroad. Yellow ribbons were tied to trees, attached to cars and trucks, and worn on shirts during the Gulf and Iraq Wars.

The logic of using yellow ribbons to express concern for soldiers sent into combat by their own government is unclear since the ribbons suggest a surely unintended

equivalence between the Iranian radicals who held the hostages in Iran and the U.S. government that sent troops to the Gulf and Iraq. The crucial point, for those who display the yellow ribbons, is that Americans are in danger: the ribbons express above all else a desire that the individual soldiers return home safely from Iraq as the hostages did from Iran. Yet, if the American public's desire is merely for their soldiers' safety rather than for victory, then each casualty is seen as an unjustifiable loss, and those losses, as we have seen, are the main focus of the *Times*' coverage of the Iraq War.

The Personalization of Military Service and Remembrance in Israel

Israel is a much younger country than the United States and it adopted the already existing American (and European) practices of seeking to recover all war dead and to bury them in government cemeteries from the moment of independence. Israel is unusual among wealthy nations of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in that it still imposes military service on all its non-Orthodox Jewish citizens, and of course Israel is the only country ever to draft women. As it did in the United States and all other countries that impose the draft, conscription contributes in Israel to feelings of solidarity among citizens, which is then reflected in practices of recording and mourning war deaths. Funerals for Israeli soldiers were guided by military protocols and the dead were buried in military cemeteries with uniform gravestones. Beginning in the 1990s, funerals for dead soldiers became "more individualistic and emotional" and parents began to sue in court for the right to replace the "standard uniform text on the gravestones of fallen soldiers...[with a] personal formulation decided by the family" (Ben-Eliezer 2003, pp. 30, 31).

Beginning in the 1990s, individual preferences of young Israelis and their parents began to impose themselves on the conscription process. Israeli parents attempted to interfere in their children's military assignments and complained about perceived inadequacies in the Israeli Defense Force's efforts to guard soldiers' safety. This led then Chief of Staff Ehud Barak "to exempt large numbers of young people from compulsory service...under the rubric 'not useful'" and to try to identify young people eager to serve

in combat positions (and parents willing to support that decision) by “sending pre-draft young men a list of service options in which it marketed itself and especially the combat corps” (Ben-Eliezer 2004, pp. 55, 57). In other words, Israel’s universal draft has been replaced with a three-tier system, determined by the desires of draftees and their parents. Reluctant soldiers (or the children of whiney parents) are excused from service or released after a few months. A majority still serves, albeit in positions usually safe from harm, and a hard core of militarists serves in units designated to hold front-line positions in the occupation or in battle.

The saga of Gilad Shalit, held by Hamas since his kidnapping in 2006 until his 2011 release in exchange for 1027 Palestinian prisoners, including some convicted for murdering Israeli civilians, shows how resistant Israel is to casualties, and how the broad public in addition to Shalit’s parents believe it is the obligation of the state to protect soldiers rather than the other way around. Shalit became the focus of repeated demonstrations and mobilization. Polls showed a majority of Israelis were willing to pay “any price” (Hasson 2009) in return for Shalit’s return, and polls taken after his release show heavy majorities approved of the deal.

Conclusion: The Sentimental Culture of American Life

Dead soldiers have been individualized in stages since the American Civil War. Before then, casualties were known to their families and communities but often were unknown and unacknowledged by the nation. Even families were not always certain if a loved one who had left home had gone to war, nor if his failure to return meant that he had died in war or just preferred to make a new life elsewhere. (The plots of *The Return of Martin Guerre*, a 1982 French film, and *Sommersby*, its 1992 U.S. remake, both revolve around the uncertainty of whether a man returned from war is the actual husband who left years earlier or an impostor who replaced the real and presumed dead or missing Martin Guerre or Jack Sommersby.) The Civil War began an American tradition, quickly imitated by many countries in the world, of accepting a national obligation to recover and recognize each citizen who died for the nation.

Journalistic war coverage tracked the national government's stance toward its citizen-soldiers. During wartime the emphasis was on battlefield heroics and the course of the war. Families were expected to be stoic, and their almost total absence from the pages of newspapers reflected that. The *Times*' and *Tribune*'s coverage during Vietnam conformed to that century-long tradition, as did the absence of reportage of casualties during Israel's wars through the 1970s. In the previous sections we tracked the transformation of that tradition in the years after the end of the Vietnam War, and since the First Lebanon War in Israel. American coverage of casualties in the Iraq war is quite different from that of Vietnam. Now the soldiers appear as individuals, and the ways in which their lives and deaths affect those who love them are at the center of war coverage. Heroism is accompanied and often overwhelmed by sentiment in *Times* and *Tribune* articles on Iraq and coverage by *Yedioth Ahronoth* of Israel's two Lebanon Wars. Grief and loss are presented during the war rather than being reserved for post-war memorials.

The post-Vietnam approach to war casualties makes each death weightier to the general public and harder to endure or justify. That reduces tolerance for casualties, even if and when the war appears successful, as we saw above in the polling data on Iraq, and accelerates disapproval when the war is not a clear success, as we saw for Israel's two Lebanon Wars. As long as casualties are seen as unacceptable and drained of broader nationalistic and patriotic meaning, the sorts of war the U.S. or Israel can fight will be limited, as they were during the Clinton years, to low-risk high altitude bombing. Clinton's judgment that Americans would not sacrifice even a single life to stop genocide will shape future presidents in their foreign policy commitments, as it has for Obama in Libya and Syria; it will also limit the United States' ability to engage in counter-insurgency strategies that depend on close contact with civilians and thus exposing occupying soldiers to greater danger than high-altitude bombing and other such strategies which serve to antagonize local populations.

Israel, for the moment, seems to have devised a strategy that allows it to keep much of the West Bank, and to protect both Israel proper and the West Bank settlers from attack, at minimal risk to Israeli soldiers. The wall (or more accurately walls, since there

are barriers between settlements and the rest of the West Bank as well as along Israel's internationally recognized border) combined with the exercise of massive retaliation against Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon for attacks on Israel or Israelis, have reduced Israeli civilian casualties to almost zero in recent years. What Israel will do if that strategy is no longer adequate to hold the occupied territories and attain its other foreign policy objectives remains to be seen.

Whether the current American and Israeli aversion to casualties can be reversed in the future is an unknown. Terror attacks raised both nations' tolerance for military casualties, at least in the short-term, and perceptions of an 'existential threat' from abroad could potentially do the same. However, if either nation embarks on a future war, casualties will be presented to the public as they have been in Iraq and Lebanon, and that coverage will sap support for continuing the war. The new personalized and emotionally-laden presentations of war deaths serves to deepen citizens' emotional connections with the dead and their families, even when the dead soldiers are volunteers or career soldiers. Depictions of war dead also shape how the dead are mourned and remembered by their families, and undermine relatives' support for further sacrifices. The new Western ways of remembrance and mourning have changed, the 'western way of war' as much as any technological innovations.

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