

【연구논문】

A Factual Myth: American Soldiers, Project 100,000, and the New Standards Men

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Introduction

Welsh politician Aneurin Bevan once remarked that “politics is a blood sport.”¹⁾ Although MP Bevan was referring to British politics, the same observation can be made about some of the political brawling that occurs within the American political system. In its *simplest* form the role of the out-of-power political party in the United States’ two-party system is that of opposition to all or nearly all of the majority party’s policies.²⁾ This tactic is utilized in order to

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- 1) Aneurin “Nye” Bevan (1897-1960) was a Welsh Labour Party politician, party leader, minister in the British government and member of Parliament. He is considered the primary architect of Britain’s post-World War II National Health Service.
 - 2) The timeframe selected to illustrate this process was a period when the Republican Party controlled both houses of Congress as well as the White House. Under those conditions they were generally considered the party in control of the national government while the Democrats were the out-of-power

erode the credibility of the majority party's performance. The focus is on failure. Eventually, the American voter becomes disenchanted with the performance of the majority party and in a subsequent election shifts their support to the out-of-power party. With the defeat of the majority party in the election, the parties change roles and the cycle of in-and-out, majority or minority, oppose-or-support continues.

Such a political dynamic was operating in full form in the period immediately preceding and after Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003.³⁾ At that time, the Republican Party controlled Congress and a Republican president sat in the White House. Thus, it was only natural for members and supporters of the opposition, in this case the Democrats, to launch various attacks on the government's policies in order to erode support for Republicans and to gain support for their own respective party. With a presidential election looming in 2004 and the sitting president, George W. Bush, beginning to lose support in national polls, the stage was set for a multi-prong attack on the administration's handling of both foreign policy and domestic issues. There was nothing unusual about this. That is the nature of the "blood sport" as it has been played in American politics since the

party. In actual practice, however, the division of power between the two major U.S. political parties is rarely that clear cut. For example, at present (the end of 2012), the Republican Party controls the House of Representatives whereas the Democratic Party controls the Senate and the White House. The general perception is that the Republicans "lost" the most recent election and are the party in decline (hence, the "opposition") whereas the Democrats made gains and thus are the party whose power is in an ascendant phase - thus making them the "majority party" insofar as their approach to political tactics and the "blood sport" of political sloganeering, hyperbole, and campaigning is concerned.

3) Operation Iraqi Freedom was the U.S.-led coalition military operation in Iraq. It was launched on March 20, 2003.

beginning of the nation.

One of the lines of attack on the government consisted of an attempt to undermine public support for continuing military operations in Iraq. As part of that strategy, various elite figures made public statements that collectively contributed to the construction of a negative narrative about the prospects for meaningful success in the Iraqi theater of operations.⁴⁾ That there were problems occurring in Iraq during that period is beyond argument. Therefore, there were significant and continuing discussions within the government regarding how to turn things around. One line of reasoning from the Democrats was to terminate involvement in Iraq, cut our losses, and withdraw. The administration, however, was seeking ways to stay the course. It was under these conditions that a *factual myth* evolved which had an impact on these deliberations.⁵⁾

In this paper, an attempt is made to examine one sliver of the extremely complex opposition narrative—a *factual myth* created regarding

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- 4) This statement should not be construed to imply that all of the public figures commenting on Operation Iraqi Freedom were part of a coordinated information operation. Also, it is worth noting that public and political support for the overarching “War on Terror” remained strong. However, since the Bush administration did a very poor job communicating to the American people the essential purposes of Operation Iraqi Freedom it created an opening for successful attack by those opposed to OIF, the administration, or both.
- 5) A *factual myth* is a powerful mixture of truth and subtle distortion. In the realm of politics, a *factual myth* has its greatest impact on “low information voters” that rely on public figures insofar as their opinion about political subjects is concerned. Only upon examining a *factual myth* more closely is it possible to discern minor discrepancies in the link between the *facts* and the *myth*. Therefore, the term *factual myth* is used to describe a *non-truth that can be supported with true facts*—in this case, the former Project 100,000 which permitted mental and physical “inferiors” to serve in the U.S. military. A more comprehensive explanation of a *factual myth* is provided later in this paper.

US military operations in Iraq during the period before and after Operation Iraqi Freedom. Specifically, this paper's focus is on the American public's beliefs regarding the quality of the US military personnel then serving in the Iraqi theater of operations.⁶⁾ This paper suggests that a *factual myth* developed in some portions of the American public's mind that the soldiers serving in Iraq were mentally and/or socially inferior to their civilian American peers. The source of that perception in the public's mind, in part, came from the public statements of some of American society's elites.

Initially, this paper addresses the question of whether elite opinion influences public opinion. A small, representative sampling of elite comments that had the power to shape the public opinion environment during the period immediately before and after Operation Iraqi Freedom is subsequently provided. This sampling of statements by various elites from different segments of society represents *part* of the construct that became a *factual myth*. Information produced by the Department of Defense (DoD) regarding the actual quality of US military personnel serving in the US armed forces is briefly examined to buttress the claim that statements regarding the inferior mental and social quality of then serving service members were erroneous or false. Then a legitimate basis is provided for the *factual myth* narrative. This was a DoD program that deliberately brought into the United States military mentally and physically deficient recruits who were derisively referred to as "McNamara's Moron Corps" by

6) In all cases examined during the period, when negative comments were made by public figures regarding the quality of the women and men serving in the US military, the statements generally included references to Iraq but not Afghanistan.

detractors of the program.⁷⁾ Finally, in the conclusion, possible ways for the American public (or the political opposition) to resist *factual myths* in public discourse in the future are provided.

Whether Elite Opinion Affects Public Opinion

When it comes to *opinion leadership*, researchers have “... learned over the years that the media, elected officials, and citizens influence each other’s beliefs and behaviors in very complicated ways”.⁸⁾ Adam Berinsky noted a “charitable view” in foreign policy literature in the early 2000s which held that the general American public relied upon a rational “cost-benefits” approach to develop their opinions about

7) The program “Project 100,000” was an initiative of Defense Secretary Robert McNamara. It ran from 1966 to 1971 and introduced into US military service approximately 354,000 young men who under normal circumstances would have been considered mentally or physically “inferior” and unqualified for military service. The mentally deficient men who served in this program were officially referred to as “New Standards Men”.

8) D. J. Schildkraut, “The More Things Change...American Identity and Mass and Elite Responses to 9/11,” *Political Psychology* 23 (2002): 511–535. 517. Schildkraut reports mixed results regarding whether elites drive public opinion or not, citing research supporting the idea that elites shape mass opinion, but other studies suggest that elite opinion *follows* public opinion, while yet other studies suggest a more complex, reciprocal exchange of influence between the two groups, in which case a search for patterns indicating what conditions determines who influences who and under what circumstances is required. Foyle found differences between studies based upon quantitative analysis and case studies. Douglas Foyle, “Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Elite Beliefs as a Mediating Variable,” *International Studies Quarterly* 41 (1997): 142. However, Berinsky’s more recent work refutes these differences and points to the legitimacy of “elite cue theory.” See A. J. Berinsky, “Assuming the Costs of War: Events, Elites, and American Public Support for Military Conflict,” *Journal of Politics* 69 (2007): 975–997.

involvement in war.⁹⁾ This “rationality” perception somewhat dovetailed with John Mueller’s earlier idea that there is an inverse relationship between public support for a war and casualties - referred to by many as the “casualties hypothesis”.¹⁰⁾ However, in a study comparing American public opinion during World War II and the Second Iraq War, Berinsky found that large segments of the population had very limited knowledge of some of the most basic facts of those conflicts. Instead, he proposed an “elite cue” theory to explain how changes occur in public opinion during a war. He concluded that “The mass public is rational only to the extent that prominent political actors provide a rational lead.”¹¹⁾

Other researchers also conclude that, “[r]esearchers have long recognized that Americans tend to remain uninformed about politics, especially foreign affairs.” And “... we know that Americans who are uninformed take cues from opinion leaders, and that often it is the *interpretation of the events by elites*, rather than the events themselves, that help shape public opinion” (emphasis added).¹²⁾ Gaines et al, also identify “40 years of research demonstrating that

9) Berinsky, “Assuming the Costs of War,” 975.

10) Ibid., 976. In a study of the Korean and Vietnam wars in 1973, John Mueller examined the relationship between public support and casualty levels, finding a relationship whereby public support dropped by 15 percent while casualties mounted from 100 to 1000 and then dropped an additional 15 percent as casualties climbed from 1000 to 10,000. Bruce Jentleson, “The Pretty Prudent Public: Post Post-Vietnam American Opinion on the Use of Military Force,,” *International Studies Quarterly* 36 (1992) 49.

11) Berinsky, “Assuming the Costs of War,” 975.

12) Amy Gershkoff, and Shana Kushner, “Shaping Public Opinion: The 9/11-Iraq Connection in the Bush Administration’s Rhetoric,” *Perspectives on Politics* 3 (2005): 526.

most people possess very limited political knowledge.”¹³⁾ Other studies, which controlled for the importance of mission success, further supported the idea that leadership consensus conditions public support for military operations.¹⁴⁾ Finally, explaining that “[e]very opinion is a marriage of information and values” Zaller explained that *information* in that context referred “exclusively to the flow of political information in the media, including news reports, commentaries, and *elite leadership cues*” (emphasis added), while also referring to the findings of Philip Converse that “they [the American public] rely on ‘contextual information’ from elites about how different ideas ‘go together’ and thereby ‘constrain’ one another.”¹⁵⁾

The Decline of Public Support for Operations in Iraq

In the period following Operation Iraqi Freedom in early 2003, a pessimism regarding operations in Iraq began to develop.¹⁶⁾ Elites

13) B. Gaines, J. Kuklinski, P. Quirk, B. Peyton, and J. Verkuilen, “Same Facts, Different Interpretations: Partisan Motivation and Opinion on Iraq,” *Journal of Politics* 69 (2007): 975.

14) Richard Eichenberg, “Victory Has Many Friends: U.S. Public Opinion and the Use of Military Force,” *International Security* 30.1 (2005): 150. The point here is that where leadership consensus is lacking, e.g., there are elites openly withholding support or actively opposing such actions, public opinion is directly impacted.

15) John Zaller, “Information, Values, and Opinion,” *American Political Science Review* 85.4 (1991): 1215.

16) This information is presented merely to establish the context and the facts regarding the *factual myth* about the quality of US soldiers serving in Iraq. Ray Eldon Hiebert found the Bush Administration using essentially the same tactics (“framing the issues”) that created misconceptions in the public’s mind insofar as the administration prior to OIF “personalized” Iraq by demonizing Iraqi

from various walks of life began making statements to the effect that further effort in Iraq was hopeless.¹⁷⁾ The collective effect of these comments was a measureable reduction in the American public's support for the war. This shift in support, for example, led a commenter to observe in November 2004, "The 18 months since the launching of the second Iraq war have brought home, even to its advocates, that the United States has a serious legitimacy problem" and that "skepticism had deepened" about the wisdom of involvement in Iraq.¹⁸⁾ Richard Eichenberg noted:

From the moment the war began on March 19, 2003, until major hostilities were declared over on May 1 of the same year, support for the war among the U.S. public averaged 72 percent. After May 1, support for the war and occupation dropped steadily. Since major combat ended, average citizen support of the war has been 52 percent; by June 2005, however, it had dropped below 50 percent.¹⁹⁾

John Mueller noted in October 2005:

The only thing remarkable about the current war in Iraq is how precipitously American public support has dropped off. Casualty for casualty,

leader Saddam Hussein to justify OIF in the eyes of the American public. See Ray Eldon Hiebert, "Public Relations and Propaganda in Framing the Iraq War: A Preliminary Review," *Public Relations Review* 29 (2003): 244.

- 17) Part of the process involved comments about the quality of the US soldiers serving in Iraq; these comments characterized soldiers as exploited dupes and victims of the Bush Administration's international adventures.
- 18) Robert Tucker and David Hendrickson, "The Sources of American Legitimacy," *Foreign Affairs* 83.6 (2004): 18.
- 19) Richard Eichenberg, "Victory Has Many Friends: U.S. Public Opinion and the Use of Military Force," *International Security* 30.1 (2005): 140.

support has declined for more quickly than it did either during the Korean War or the Vietnam War. And if history is any indication, there is little the Bush administration can do to reverse this decline.²⁰⁾

With these comments it can be assumed that Mueller was conceding that his casualty hypothesis could not explain this drop in public support for OIF.

A Sampling of Negative Elite and Media Opinion

An examination of various media sources for the timeframe before and after OIF reveals a sufficient quantity of elite negative opinion about Iraq that could influence public opinion.²¹⁾ The sources of the message came from various elites in American society. For example, producer Michael Moore's film *Fahrenheit 911* painted military recruiters as conniving while characterizing the young potential military enlistees as "dupes".²²⁾ Kane found the stereotypes presented in Moore's film repeatedly echoed in the mainstream media:

- In the New York Daily News, Nov. 8, 2005: "Youth from low-income areas are far more likely to end up in the military."
- In the Washington Post, Nov. 4, 2005 (page A1): "[T]he military is leaning heavily for recruits on economically depressed, rural areas where youths' need for jobs may outweigh the risks of going to war."

20) John Mueller, "The Iraq Syndrome," *Foreign Affairs* 44 (2005): 8.

21) This paper focuses on elite statements only regarding the *factual myth* about US soldiers in Iraq and not other negative statements regarding OIF that may have been valid.

22) Tim Kane, "Stupid Soldiers: Central to the Left's Worldview," WebMemo, *heritage.org*, November 3, 2006, accessed January 3, 2012, www.heritage.org/research/nationalsecurity/wml244.cfm.

- In the Los Angeles Times, Sept. 24, 2005: “The [GAO] report appears to support the contention that service in the military reserves is most attractive to young men living in low- or medium-income families in rural communities.”
- And in the New York Times, Aug. 18, 2005: “Very few” of the soldiers fighting in Iraq “are coming from the privileged economic classes.”²³⁾

Opposition politicians also made comments supporting the narrative that the US soldiers in Iraq were mostly from a poor or disadvantaged background. US Representative Charlie Rangel, a Democrat and decorated combat veteran, proposed reinstating a military draft because he felt that disproportionate number of the poor and members of minority groups make up the enlisted ranks of the military, while most privileged Americans were underrepresented or absent.²⁴⁾ Mr. Rangel admitted, however, that his initial goal in making such a proposal was “to stir opposition to the war in Iraq.”²⁵⁾

The question about the intelligence of American soldiers became an issue during the 2004 presidential election campaign when US Senator and Democrat presidential candidate John Kerry, like Representative Rangel, told a group of university students, “You know, education, if you make the most of it, if you study hard and do your homework, and make an effort to be smart, uh, you can do

23) Ibid.

24) David Halbfinger, and Steven Holmes, “A Nation at War: The Troops; Military Mirrors a Working-Class America,” *New York Times* March 30, 2003, accessed January 11, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/30/us/a-nation-at-war-the-troops-military-mirrors-a-working-class-america.html?scp=19&sq=Rangel>.

25) Carl Hulse, “Military Draft? Official Denials Leave Skeptics,” *New York Times*, July 3, 2004, accessed January 11, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/03/us/military-draft-official-denials-leave-skeptics.html?scp=7&sq=Rangel>.

well. *If you don't, you get stuck in Iraq*" (emphasis added).²⁶⁾

In March 2006, actor/comedian/author Richard Belzer and host-moderator Bill Maher debated the issue with Florida Congresswoman Illeana Ros-Lehtinen, a Republican, on Maher's *Real Time with Bill Maher* program. Mr. Maher, who spoke in support of Mr. Belzer's contention that the troops in Iraq were not well informed about issues stated, "I think the point he's trying to make is that a 19-year-old is in that army because he probably couldn't find other employment."²⁷⁾

Eventually, in December 2005, the Department of Defense felt compelled to respond to the growing belief that American soldiers were of substandard caliber by issuing a fact sheet addressing the "Myths *versus* Facts." The fact sheet addressed the myths of the general public's perceptions that serving soldiers were of substandard caliber.²⁸⁾

The effect of these statements by various elites in American society contributed to the creation of a *factual myth* regarding the

26) David Stout, "Kerry Apologizes for Iraq Remark," *New York Times*, November 1, 2006, accessed January 10, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/01/washington/01cnd-kerry.html?_r=2&hp&ex=1162443600&en=8d19a4bd064e5354&ei=5094&partner=homepage.

27) Bill Maher, Richard Belzer, and Illeana Ros-Lehtinen, "Belzer & Maher Calling Our Troops Uneducated Idiots," last modified March 18, 2006, YouTube, accessed April 12, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?gl=US&v=MIPC3Ni_fCc.

28) It is beyond the scope of this paper to closely examine primary data to confirm the quality of the recruits serving in the U.S. military in the 21st century. However, for a comprehensive analysis of those characteristics see Tim Kane, "Who Are the Recruits? The Demographic Characteristics of U.S. Military Enlistment, 2003-2005," *heritage.org*, 26 Oct 2006, *The Heritage Foundation* 3 Jan 2012, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2006/10/who-are-the-recruits-the-demographic-characteristics-of-us-military-enlistment-2003-2005>.

characteristics of U.S. soldiers serving in Iraq that persists among portions of the American public to the present time.

The Origins of the Myth

In a 7 November 1967 speech to the National Association of Educational Broadcasters in Denver, Colorado, Defense Secretary McNamara announced a program for “contributing to the solutions of the social problems wracking our nation.” This program was Project 100,000.²⁹⁾ The Secretary described it as “[a] program to salvage the poverty-scarred youth of our society at the rate of 100,000 men each year—first for two years of military service, and then for a lifetime of productive activity in civilian.”³⁰⁾ This program deliberately brought into military service men who previously would have been disqualified for mental or physical reasons. Physical deficiencies were identified by qualified medical doctors who applied specified criteria to determine a man’s physiological qualifications for service. Mentally deficient recruits were identified by their substandard performance on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT).

The Armed Forces Qualification Test³¹⁾

Since 1950, the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT), part of

29) Speaking at the National Association of Educational Broadcasters Forty-Third Convention, Denver, Colorado, 7 Nov 1967. See McNamara, Robert S. “Social Inequities,” *Vital Speeches* 34 (1967): 98.

30) *Ibid.*, 99.

31) The information in this section comes primarily from the ASVAB website of the Department of Defense at <http://www.official-asvab.com/researchers.htm>.

the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) has been used by the Department of Defense as one means of evaluating the potential of a person's qualifications for military service. The AFQT measures verbal and math abilities. The AFQT was specifically created as a screening device. The scores are generated as percentiles ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 99. The AFQT number represents the percentage of examinees in a reference group that scored at or below that score.³²⁾ An examinee with an AFQT score of 99 would be in the top 1 percent of the examinee group. In the initial quotas established by DoD Secretary McNamara for Project 100,000, at least 50 percent of the New Standards Quota was to be met with men scoring in the AFQT range 10 to 15.

AFQT Category	Score Range
I	93-99
II	65-92
IIIA	50-64
IIIB	31-49
IVA	21-30
IVB	16-20
IVC	10-15
V	1-9

Source: Official website of the ASVAB

Figure 1. AFQT Categories and Score Ranges

Accessed 24 March 2012.

- 32) The reference group used is a nationally representative sample of 10,000 youth ages 18-23 who are administered the test. The DoD periodically updates the sample by administering the test to a new group in the appropriate age cohort. During the period in which Project 100,000 was implemented, the normative base was the World War II mobilization population—meaning all men under arms in December 1944. Janice Laurence, “Performance of the All-Volunteer Force,” Rand Corporation, PDF, undated, page 4, accessed March 10, 2012, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG265/images/webS0838.pdf>.

The AFQT referenced above is a *part* (measuring just verbal and math skills) of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). Although the ASVAB is a military enlistment test used to determine whether an applicant is qualified for military service, it is also used for a variety of purposes to include use by civilian students and counselors for “career exploration and vocational guidance.”³³⁾ As such, the ASVAB provides a yardstick for researchers to use to compare military recruits - all of whom must complete the ASVAB - with the general population.

Why Project 100,000

In January 1961, President John Kennedy assumed office. Unemployment that year was 6.7 percent.³⁴⁾ In September 1963, the president established a task force on the subject of manpower conservation. The president’s creation of the task force was based upon his *New Frontier* agenda of ending poverty in America. He wrote, “Today’s military rejects include tomorrow’s hard-core unemployed.”³⁵⁾ The task force was composed of the heads of select Departments of the Executive Branch.³⁶⁾ They produced a report

33) Official Site of the ASVAB, *ASVAB FAct Sheet* accessed on 24 Mar 2012. http://www.official-asvab.com/docs/asvab_fact_sheet.pdf and Milton Maier, William Sims, *The ASVAB Score Scales: 1980 and World War II*,” Center for Naval Analysis, July 1986,. accessed 24 Mar 2012. <http://www.cna.org/research/1986/asvab-score-scales-1980-world-war-ii>.

34) Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed on March 24, 2012, http://www.bls.gov/cps/prev_yrs.htm.

35) W. Willard Wirtz, Robert McNamara, Anthony Celebrezze, and Lewis Hershey, *One-Third of a Nation A Report on Young Men Found Unqualified for Military Service*, President’s Task Force on Manpower Conservation, 1964, 41.

36) Its members were the Secretary of Labor, W. Willard Wirtz (Task Force

titled, *One-Third of a Nation, A Report on Young Men Found Unqualified for Military Service*.³⁷⁾ It was determined that one-third of all the young men turning 18 years of age in the nation were considered *unqualified* for military service. About half of that number were rendered unqualified for medical reasons while the remainder were unfit for military service due to mental deficiencies. A national survey by the task force found that of persons who had recently failed the mental test for military service, a major proportion of the young men were the products of poverty. The report further stated that most of those young men had inherited their poverty from their parents “and unless the cycle is broken, they will almost surely transmit it to their children.”³⁸⁾

Although the *One-Third* task force did not recommend utilization of the Department of the Defense for the purpose of manpower conservation, in 1964 Secretary McNamara proposed the establishment of Special Training Enlistment Program (STEP).³⁹⁾ STEP was a plan to annually enlist 15,000 men and to send them to special, intensive educational training prior to their starting basic military training. The program required funding by Congress, which refused; Shapley characterizes as evidence of the resistance of the career military to

Chairman), Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, Anthony J. Celebrezze, and the Director of Selective Service System, Lt. General Lewis B. Hershey. *Ibid.*, 5.

37) The title of the report was inspired by a statement by President Franklin D. Roosevelt who spoke of seeing “one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished.” *Ibid.*

38) *Ibid.*, 7.

39) Albert Blum, “Soldier or Civilian, The Question of Deferments,” *Human Resource Management.*,” 5., (1967): 3.

accepting any mentally deficient recruits.⁴⁰⁾

In response to the demise of the STEP proposal, Secretary McNamara ordered the lowering of AFQT standards in April 1966. This approach did *not* require Congressional approval. He announced the program in August 1966 and it was in operation by October of that year.⁴¹⁾

In creating the program, Secretary McNamara established quotas requiring each of the military services to accept an established percentage of men who scored in mental group IV on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. Previously, men in this category were rejected for military service. The quotas were adjusted periodically but for the duration of the program, the United States Army was the service required to accept the largest percentage of men in the lowest mental category (see Table 1).

40) Deborah Shapley, *Promise and Power: The Life and Times of Robert McNamara* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 385. For an interesting overview of the political aspects of the blocking of the STEP program and Secretary McNamara's response (Project 100,000), see John Worsencroft, "Salvageable Manhood: Project 100,000 and the Gendered Politics of the Vietnam War," (MA thesis, University of Utah, 2011), 32-36. As Shapley discusses, the cost for remedial training for each sub-standard recruit was estimated at approximately \$5,000. That plus the extra time required in training before the recruit was minimally qualified to enter mainstream military training caused several high-ranking members of the military to generate significant resistance from within the bowels of the Pentagon. These high ranking members of the military used their contacts in Congress to generate considerable opposition to McNamara's proposal in Congress due to the perception that the military was being tasked to spend DoD dollars on a program more suitable for some other department of the executive branch.

41) Shapley, *Promise and Power*, 385.

Table 1. Mental Group IV Quotas as a Percent of Enlisted Recruits
by Fiscal Year (FY)⁴²⁾

Fiscal Year	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	DoD Total
FY 1967 ⁴³⁾	25.9	15.0	18.0	15.0	22.3
FY 1968	24.5	17.0	21.0	17.0	22.2
FY 1969	24.0	18.0	24.0	18.0	22.1
FY 1970	24.0	18.0	24.0	18.0	22.1
FY 1971	24.0	15.0	20.0	15.0	20.5
FY 1972 ⁴⁴⁾	24.0	15.0	20.0	15.0	20.5

Source: Department of Defense

With the initiation of Project 100,000 the military services began accepting men who would have been disqualified in the past on the basis of failure to meet minimum mental qualifications or who had physical defects that were easily corrected within a short period of time.⁴⁵⁾ The program was referred to as *Project 100,000* since the

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- 42) Mental Group IV personnel are those who score between the 10th and 30th percentile on the Armed Forces Qualification Test, described *supra*. The allocations to the Navy and Air Force - generally considered the two most technically oriented services, were driven, in part, by a desire to offset the probability that many of the New Standards Men in the Army would find themselves in jobs exposing them to direct combat and the likelihood of higher casualty rates. *Ibid.*, 386.
- 43) The fiscal year ran from July 1 to June 30 in the 1960s. For FY 1967, when the program was initiated, the quota was applied only from October 1966 to the end of the fiscal year in June 1967.
- 44) July 1971 to December 1971 when the program ended.
- 45) Over 80 percent of the medically unqualified men who were accepted into military service under Project 100,000 were either overweight or underweight cases. The remainder possessed one of fifteen correctable medical conditions such as a deviated nasal septum which was medically corrected while the man was in the service. Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, United States, Department of Defense. *Project 100,000: Characteristics and Performance of "New Standards Men,"* Department of

ultimate goal was to accept 100,000 of these type of men each year. Between October 1966 and December 1971, approximately 354,000 men entered the various branches of the US military under Project 100,000. The men who were admitted to military service under this program who would have previously been classified as mentally unqualified were referred to as “New Standards Men.”

The New Standards Men *did not know* that they were participants in Project 100,000.⁴⁶⁾ They did not know that they were part of a social experiment. Project 100,000 was a “blind experiment run on a 1.5 million-member organization.”⁴⁷⁾ The DoD project director decided also to keep commanders of New Standards Men “ignorant of which men they were.” New Standards Men were identified by special identifying numbers in their personnel file. No one in their immediate chain of command knew of their status.⁴⁸⁾ Nevertheless, commanders and supervisors of soldiers knew that the program existed and when they identified a poorly performing soldier, that soldier was considered a member of McNamara’s “moron corps.”⁴⁹⁾

Project 100,000 was implemented by the Department of Defense in October 1966. The United States Congress, in the DoD Appropriations Act of 1972 prohibited the establishment of quotas for military service based upon mental categories. As a result, in December 1971, DoD terminated Project 100,000.

Defense, 1969, 9.

46) McNamara, “Social Inequities,” 102.

47) Shapley, *Promise and Power*, 385.

48) *Ibid.*, 385.

49) Lawrence Baker and William Strauss, *Chance and Circumstance: The Draft, The War and the Vietnam Generation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 127.

The Outcome

In September 1968, in a speech before the National Security Industrial Association in Washington, D.C., then Secretary of Defense Clark M. Clifford called Project 100,000 “a spectacular success.”⁵⁰⁾ However, the facts tend to dispute the Secretary’s characterization of the results. The New Standards Men were admitted to military service via revised entrance standards that had been significantly lowered. Although entrance standards were lowered, *performance standards were not.*⁵¹⁾ One general finding of an early study specifically focused on New Standards Men was, “a general finding ... [of] a significant and meaningful relationship between aptitude as measured by AFQT and success in training.”⁵²⁾ It was found that low AFQT subjects were slower to respond to training, required more training time, needed more guidance and repetition of instruction. Although it varied by task, the low AFQT subjects required “from two to four times as much training time, from two to six times as much prompting, and from two to five times as many trials to reach criterion.”⁵³⁾ Another DoD report generated after the program ended provided the following statistics:⁵⁴⁾

50) Clark Clifford, “The Defense Establishment,” *Vital Speeches* 35 (1968): 36.

51) Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, *Project 100,000*, vii. This report was produced by a member of the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) a nonprofit corporation established in 1969 to conduct research in the field of training and education. It is affiliated with George Washington University.

52) *Ibid.*

53) Howard McFann, “Progress Report on HumRRO Research on Project 100,000,” Presentation at Headquarters U.S. Continental Army Command Fort Monroe, Virginia February 1969. Available at <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/691633.pdf>

54) Rand Corporation, *Project 100,000 New Standards Program*, Rand Corporation

- 94.6% of the New Standards Men completed basic training compared to 97.5% for the control group.
- The attrition rate of New Standards Men in skill courses was 10%, compared to 4% for control group men attending the same courses.
- New Standards Men were more successful in courses that stressed practical work and did not require significant reading and mathematical abilities.
- 37% of the New Standards Men and 23% of the control group men were assigned to combat type skills.
- Most New Standards Men were assigned to occupations which are considered “soft-skill” areas in the military services.

Of the approximately 354,000 young men who entered the service as New Standards Men, about 2,100 were killed in combat in Vietnam. That is a percentage *lower* than the combat casualty rate found in the general population then in the military service.⁵⁵) One explanation for the lower casualty rate was that the type jobs that the New Standards Men qualified for were in the support or combat support branches of the service rather than the combat arms.

The Factual Myth

At the time immediately before and after OIF, statements made by some elites regarding the mental skills of serving soldiers were not accurate. There is certainly truth in the statement that some American soldiers with significantly substandard mental capacities served in the

Monograph MG265, PDF, undated, pages 3-6, accessed March 10, 2012., <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG265/images/webG1318.pdf>.

55) Dunnigan, James F., and Albert A. Nofi. *Dirty Secrets of the Vietnam War*(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 5.

United States Army. People making the claim that some soldiers were mentally deficient could point to Project 100,000 as one powerful example to buttress their claim. However, only upon closer examination it would have become clear to the general public that mentally inferior soldiers *had once* served and fought in combat in the service of their country, but only decades earlier. It did not justify the conclusion that *contemporary* soldiers were mentally deficient since facts existed indicating that serving members of the armed forces as a group were higher scoring on the ASVAB and higher performing by other measures than their peers in civilian American society.⁵⁶⁾

The *Factual Myth* and Project 100,000

If viewed on a continuum, a *factual myth* would place on the “weaker and softer” end of a continuum of political tools available for use in the “blood sport” of American politics. That is because a *factual myth* relies on anticipated responses from others that politicians do not directly control. It is a tool for use primarily in the new media such as Internet-base blogs, news aggregators, Twitter, and other non-traditional methods for disseminating news and elite opinion to voters and citizens who are not stalwart supporters of a particular political persuasion. The basic *factual myth* is originally disseminated by public elites, but dissemination and defense of the myth relies on anonymous supporter-defenders throughout the Internet who make the correlation of the statements of the elites with the

56) Kane, “Who Are the Recruits?” For example, the reading level of 2004 recruits was a full grade higher than that of a comparable youth population.

remote, tenuous factual information. If the correlation is subsequently discredited, it is the Internet poster, not the elite who bears the loss of credibility.

In the case of the *factual myth* described in this paper, it appears to have been a failure as measured by the results of the 2004 general election. Although the Democrats made some gains in Congress, they failed to unseat the sitting Republican president. A review of Internet forums from the 2003-2005 timeframe shows that “the masses” did not begin to discuss the *factual myth* to any great extent until after the general election. This serves to reinforce the fact that a *factual myth* is not one of the more powerful tools available for political factions to use on a political battleground. Elites made statements but the message did not take among the masses. For this tool to serve an effective purpose, it may be necessary to refine the process. The continuum of political tools (ranging from least significant to most significant) includes: minor false personal statements by a politician regarding their qualifications or background, political hyperbole, *factual myths*, covert media coordinated messaging campaigns, overt political campaigns, cronyism, outright lying about significant events, cover-ups, and corruption. Of these political tools only corruption and under certain circumstances cover-ups cross the line into illegal activity. The rest of the options mentioned may be morally deplorable to some, but effective tools for persuading “low information voters” to support a particular political choice.

To summarize, although not a strong tool, a *factual myth*, if employed in concert with other political tools, can serve to “flood

the zone” of political discourse and thus place the opposition on defense rather than offense. It is a low risk tool and thus multiple *factual myths* can be disseminated simultaneously. If nothing else, *factual myths* can serve as political distracters which overwhelm low information voters to such a degree that they tune out important relevant issues due to information overload.

Conclusion

This paper established that legitimate *facts* exist which at first look seem to confirm the *myth* proclaimed by some elites 2003-2005 of the mental or social inferiority of contemporary US soldiers. Project 100,000 and the New Standards Men were real programs involving real people—people who were mentally far below normal mental standards for Americans their age and frequently from a poverty background. That is the substance of a *factual myth*—a mixture of powerful truth and subtle distortion. Only upon examining a *factual myth* more closely is it possible to discern discrepancies in the link between the *facts* and the *myth*.

Factual myths constitute a real threat to the successful functioning of a large republic like the United States since most citizens do not have the time to investigate carefully the facts themselves. Instead, as shown in this paper, many citizens rely on cues from elites to assist them in determining the *facts* upon which they make their decisions about the wisdom of a particular act or policy of their government. When elites articulate *factual myths* they are contributing to the

spread of misleading information that affects the decisions of significant numbers of the American public. There is only one practical defense to an effective *factual myth* and that is better, more precise, more timely information provided to the masses in a format that they can easily assimilate. Although the Information Revolution provides some hope insofar as countering the creation and dissemination of *factual myths*, the ease and rapidity of global communication also facilitates the spread of new *factual myths*. An alternative defense to this phenomena would be a “wiser” public capable of better critical thinking. However, members of the general American public may not have the time, inclination, or desire to attempt that choice.

- 논문 투고일자: 2012. 10. 15
- 심사(수정)일자: 2012. 11. 13
- 게재 확정일자: 2012. 11. 22

Abstract

**A Factual Myth: American Soldiers, Project
100,000, and the New Standards Men**

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The term *factual myth* is used to describe a mixture of truth and distortion. *Factual myths* are significant since studies show that many members of the general American public rely on cues provided by elites to determine their support or opposition to the policies and activities of their government. When elites disseminate *factual myths* they do more than simply repeat a half-truth. They impact the democratic choices of significant segments of the American population.

Factual myths should be distinguished from opinions. *Factual myths* are statements made as *fact* that are non-truths. Not all non-truths rise to the level of *factual myths*, but when a sufficient number of elites parrot the same non-truths, a *factual myth* is created that once entered into the public mind is very difficult to change.

This paper illustrates the creation of a *factual myth* in American society in the period immediately before and following Operation Iraqi Freedom—the *factual myth* that US soldiers serving in Iraq were mentally or socially inferior to their peers in civilian society. Some of the people disseminating the *factual myth* probably believed its veracity because of a program operated several decades earlier by the Department of Defense that intentionally brought into military service men who were mentally unqualified to serve. This program, called *Project 100,000* by its originator Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, brought approximately 354,000 mentally deficient young American men into military service during the Vietnam War. Some of these men served honorably and well while others

failed. More than 2,000 of them died in combat. Many of these men, in their public interactions with others, unintentionally created a general impression of American soldiers as mentally inferior. It was an impression that persisted well beyond 1971 when the program ended.

Examples of elite opinion expressed in the period following Operation Iraqi Freedom which led to the creation of a *factual myth* regarding the quality of the soldiers serving in Iraq are provided. A review of the research which establishes that elite opinion influences public opinion regarding the public's perception of the validity of government actions and policies is covered. Then the basis for the *factual myth* is examined—Project 100,000. The paper closes with suggestions for mitigating the effects of *factual myths* in the future.

Key Words

New Standards Men, Project 100,000, opinion leadership, elite opinion, factual myth, public opinion