

Propaganda and War

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Abstract

From a psychological perspective, I theorize that propaganda in wartime works insidiously by tapping into people's prejudices and stereotypes and galvanizes belief in an immense conspirational network in which the "other" is given an ominous character. Individuals see the psychological characteristics of the other ("enemy") as personal, pervasive, and permanent. That is, the other side ("enemy") is collectively demonized by way of stereotypes (i.e., generalizations about categories of people and their beliefs) and simplifications (i.e., reducing events and their causes to one or two variables) while one's own side is seen as wholly good. I describe how the mass media heightens the impact of propaganda by fostering a strong feeling of community and using cults of experts to structure bias, among other things.

Keywords: Propaganda, war, mass media, persuasion, prejudice, stereotypes

Introduction

"Warfare is the way (Tao) of deception" (Sun-tzu)

General Terminology

What is propaganda? As discussed here, propaganda is a form of psychological persuasion that is pitched to the masses—the body politic. On the other hand, psychological persuasion is a collection of psychological techniques constructed so as to change people's beliefs and attitudes. It operates by influencing the targets of some "message" (a product advertisement) to take the originator's point of view as well as to engage in some course of action (buy a product). An instance of psychological persuasion is the multibillion dollar advertising industry that entices consumers to buy advertised products and use them in their daily lives. It is psychological because the goal of the message is to change people's beliefs and attitudes and to do so in a way that affects their subsequent behavior. For instance, a sporty vehicle is marketed to a consumer in a way that will make him or her feel more masculine or feminine and exude sex appeal and she or he will want to drive the car daily to impress others. Psychological persuasion accomplishes its goals by targeting two inherent features of the human cognitive system, the way people think and the way people feel or emote [21]. With regard to the way people think, individuals typically engage in stereotypical ways of thinking and acting that have not been

subject to critical thought and this forms the basis of prejudice and stereotypes[16]. According to the concepts and methods of psychological persuasion, when you are able to get a person to act from their ingrained beliefs and attitudes you have effectively captured their minds because you have short-circuited critical thought. In a nutshell, critical thought entails examining the basis of one's thoughts and how one arrives at one's decisions and for what reasons.

With regard to the way people feel or emote, individuals often act upon their emotions without reflection. For instance, supermarkets typically rely on the fact that 50% of store purchases are impulse buys and display products in such a way as to maximize their effects at checkout counters (tabloids, mass-market magazines, candy, small gadgets, and so on). As we shall see below, these basic principles of psychological persuasion that were initially constructed for the commercial markets are used to inform the manufacture and dissemination of propaganda in wartime.

Historically, psychological persuasion has been made use of by governing groups since the beginning of the formation of states or societies of over one million individuals [8] and has been used off by all such societies worldwide in recent human history [28]. Its use in wartime most likely originated in the early writings of military tacticians in China in the fifth century B.C. or earlier [27]. Indeed, as Napoleon opined, power is rooted in opinion and political bodies in wartime manufacture consent [4] among the body politic in order for governments to legitimate and carry out their intended goals. Surprisingly, propaganda has been most effective in democratic regimes in which tolerance of, and respect for, different opinions and ways of life is the core of democratic thought and behavior. Propaganda, however, eviscerates democracy because its purposively unstated goal is to provoke active or passive participation without democratic deliberation, the political core of a free society. That is, as a form of mass persuasion, propaganda is most effective when it short circuits critical thought by presenting itself as natural, as the only way to think or act with regard to a set of opinions, beliefs, values or goals.

Propaganda accomplishes its goals through several means. It may create a political climate favorable for attitude change so-

called pre-persuasion or pre-propaganda as in a nation-state extolling the virtues of patriotism, modify opinions directly through the use of the print and non-print media or political propaganda or it may accomplish its aims furtively by disguising its true goals in such a way that the democratic public is only dimly aware that it is being propagandized—overt or “white” propaganda such as justifying war to advance capitalism—only to further a more covert agenda—referred to as covert or black propaganda—as in securing the commercial interests of oil companies in other parts of the world. Historically, propaganda in wartime has descended from the upper echelons of government or vertical propaganda but it may just as equally arise from below in the internal dynamics of an organized group or institution or horizontal propaganda such as a quasi-government think tank, newspaper editorial board, activist political group or the like [9].

From a psychological perspective, I have suggested that propaganda in wartime works insidiously by tapping into people’s prejudices and stereotypes and galvanizes belief in an immense conspirational network in which the other is given an ominous character. Individuals see the psychological characteristics of the other (“enemy”) as personal, pervasive, and permanent (Arab states engage in “terrorism”). The other side (“enemy”) is collectively demonized by way of stereotypes and simplifications—psychodynamically, paranoid projection—while one’s own side is seen as wholly good. This process of stereotyping or making overgeneralizations about categories of people and their beliefs and simplifying or reducing events and their causes to one or two variables has been described, within the psychodynamic framework, as a form of paranoid projection when it is inflamed by deep fears and hatreds. According to this psychodynamic perspective, one projects one’s negative feelings onto others, but the basis of these underlying feelings is paranoia or a pervasive distrust or suspiciousness of others without sufficient basis in fact [1]. The mass media, including both print and nonprint media (television, radio, Internet, social media, newspapers, and magazines), moreover, heightens the political impact of propaganda by fostering a strong feeling of community among the body politic. There is a strong economic motivation for this strategy. Mass media outlets gain viewership and increase revenues by parading before the public video clips and stories of war and destruction. Cults of experts consisting of elite groups of individuals who share a similar and often narrow perspective—typically, academics, journalists, media personalities, and government officials—

further structure bias by crystallizing public opinion [12]. The participation of the mass media is then further used by nation-states and political and policy groups in a continuing cycle of propaganda and counter-propaganda in the service of wartime interests.

Commonalities Between Civil and Wartime Propaganda

General definition. The Committee on Public Information (CPI) was established in April of 1917 when leading figures from the advertising, newspaper, and publicist (PR) worlds as well

as members of academe, were brought together on President’s Woodrow Wilson’s behalf to advance US interests at the beginning of World War I [US Committee on Public Information, 1972; 14]. Under the general chairmanship of George Creel, a journalist, the avowed purpose was to package and sell the war effort to a diverse body politic as well as to ensure the self-censorship of the print media. One member of the CPI, Edward Bernays, a publicist, immediately saw the possibilities of adapting public relations to both peaceful and wartime interest.

“Public relations is the attempt, by information, persuasion, and adjustment, to engineer public support for an activity, cause, movement, or institution” [4].

Public relations was just another name for psychological persuasion of the masses—propaganda—and what Bernays saw was its dual applicability to both selling product to consumers as well as selling a war to the American people and its allies. Indeed, by persuasion Bernays meant the use of tactics, strategies, and appropriate timing applied to various public appeals using diverse thematic content and visual images and symbols, that is, information. By adjustment he meant influencing the actions and attitudes of the public. Bernays was among the first to articulate the notion that the public relations industry could apply these same principles developed in selling product and style to consumers into fashioning public opinion in the service of wartime interests. For Bernays, propaganda was the engineering of consent, planned and executed according to scientific principles based on the then emerging empirical social and behavioral sciences of the day.

These scientific principles of persuasion today include the concepts of reciprocity, consistency and commitment, social proof, likeability, authority, and scarcity [7]. Reciprocity refers to the psychological tendency to comply with another’s request when they have initially complied with ours because we feel a natural obligation to reciprocate. That is, we feel naturally obligated to others because they have stuck out their neck for us in the past. Consistency and commitment refer to the tendency to want to appear consistent with our earlier held beliefs. That is, once we form an opinion or take a stand on some issue, we will act in a way that is consistent with our prior commitment or what is known as a consistency bias. Former presidential candidate, Al Gore, for many years ago reportedly espoused opposition to women’s’ rights to choose but when he changed his beliefs later in his career he acted as if he had always held these beliefs (pro-choice values) demonstrating a retrospective or consistency bias. Social proof refers to the tendency to be influenced in our opinions by what other people believe, that is, mass psychology or the herd instinct. Likeability refers to the psychological tendency to comply with the requests of someone we like or know. It has been shown to be affected by the physical attractiveness of others, our similarity to them, their familiarity to us, and whether we have received compliments from them in the past, among other things. Authority refers to the deep-seated tendency in human nature to feel a sense of duty or obligation to obey authority. It is often captured and symbolized in professional titles, clothes, and other symbolic trappings of everyday life. Lastly, the scarcity principle

refers to the psychological tendency to value something more when its availability is limited and may be potentially lost, such as freedom.

Social science research has isolated four key factors of effective persuasion [21]. How an issue is defined and discussed or pre-persuasion; likeability, trustworthiness, and authoritativeness of the source or source credibility; effectiveness of the method used to communicate an issue or the message; and the emotional appeal of the message in galvanizing public response and action. Hence, propaganda is most effective when it galvanizes human prejudice as in likening the qualities of someone to Mussolini or a Hitler, appears authoritative as in the use of a blue-ribbon commission to achieve some end, communicates a powerful message such as the “war on drugs”, and makes a strong emotional appeal such as atrocity stories of women and children so people are aroused to action. Indeed, the iteration of simple slogans, messages, and images has been known since ancient times to be effective in influencing individuals as well as provoking the public at large [28].

Classic Definition Of Propaganda

The classic definition of propaganda emphasizes the importance of mobilizing the psychology of the masses as well as their active or passive participation in an action or cause.

“Propaganda is a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization” [9, p. 61].

First, raw public opinion must be crystallized into explicit opinion or ideology that constricts the range of emotion or thought [9]. The latter are congeries of predigested ideas—such as prejudice directed toward a certain group or its beliefs—that divert attention away from their actual origin, value or truth. This narrowed range of thought promotes stereotypical ways of thinking. It induces a strong sense of community and the participatory opinion that accompanies it: “Nobody listens to anybody else, everybody talks and nobody listens” [9, p. 214].

Contemporary definitions of propaganda echo a similar theme of manipulating mass psychology to some desirable end on the part of the propagandist.

“[Propaganda is] the mobilization of information and arguments with the intent to bring people to a particular viewpoint” [3, p. 43]. “[Propaganda represents] instruments of psychological warfare aimed at influencing the actions of human beings in ways that are compatible with the national interest objectives of the purveying state” [27, p. 32].

Even historical accounts of propaganda emphasize a similar theme of wielding public opinion in the service of maintaining the social order.

“Man’s cradle must be surrounded by dogmas and when his reason awakens, he must find all his opinions already made, at least those concerning his social behavior” [Joseph de Maistre quoted in Kumar, 17].

In all of these accounts, the psychological manipulation of the public to serve the interests of the state is central. This is especially true of Military propaganda in wartime.

Military propaganda in the US operates in a much narrower range of belief manipulation than that of general political propaganda. It typically includes command and control warfare (C2W) including electronic warfare (EW), operations security (OPSEC), military deception, perception management, and psychological operations (PSYOP) (Secretary of the Air Force [SAF], 1992). I will briefly describe all six based on limited access to nonclassified military documents. However, PSYOP closely aligns with the kind of psychological persuasive techniques discussed above.

C2W (including EW) serves “to deny information to, influence, degrade, or destroy adversary command and control capabilities” (SAF, p. 5) while maintaining effectively one’s own command and control. OPSEC “eliminates or reduces...the vulnerabilities of friendly actions to adversary exploitation” (SAF, p. 5). Military deception comes in many forms, but it generally serves to “mislead foreign decision-makers” (SAF, p. 5) at both the state as well as the military command and control levels. Perception management targets the “emotions, motives, and objective reasoning” (SAF, p. 6) of foreign publics and their leaders and includes PSYOP, which operates by “conveying selected information and indicators” (SAF, p. 6) to these very same groups in order to “induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behavior that are supportive of [state] objectives” (SAF, p. 1). It may accomplish this in several ways.

“Encouraging foreign governments’ willingness to negotiate conflicts, desist from intervening in existing conflicts, negotiate political and military issues, and concede to US negotiating objectives. [It may achieve this by] exposing and discrediting the objectives and subversive techniques of regimes and organizations hostile to the US (or its allies) and friendly governments” (SAF, p. 2). “[It may also] gain foreign understanding and acceptance of US objectives and operations [by] promote[ing] foreign cooperation with the US while denying such support to enemies” (SAF, p. 3).

Propaganda is thus central to modern military conflict. Early Chinese military tacticians, to be sure, recognized the importance of military deception: “Thus the army is established by deceit, moves for advantage, and changes through segmenting and reuniting” (Sun-tzu, p. 198). They also recognized the importance of state control and the promotion of the national interest through use of propaganda, nowadays largely accomplished through the mass media. The role of the mass media is important because most domestic propaganda or propaganda directed towards a state’s own citizens is largely carried out through the domestic mass media.

What Role do the Major Print and Non-Print Media Play in Propaganda?

Some observers of the mass media have claimed that the major news media, both print (newspapers and magazines) and nonprint (TV, radio, Internet, social media) consistently demonstrate a pro-government bias [3,6,11,19]. That is, the mass

media are closely aligned with state interests and, particularly in wartime, are the major vehicles for the dissemination of domestic propaganda such as CNN reporting during the first Gulf War. At first blush, this may seem like a startling claim, but there is ample support for it. Major news media are owned by large corporations. In the US, twenty-nine of the largest media conglomerates account for more than half of the output of print and broadcast news and entertainment. Four major wire services worldwide account for 80% of the output of international news of which three are US corporations. Approximately two-thirds of these US media conglomerates are controlled by families or small groups of individuals that possess a large percentage of voting stock in the company. These large media companies, moreover, have strong ties to government including inclusion of former government officials on their governing boards and in their management hierarchy known as the so-called “revolving door” of politics and business, substantial collusion with political lobbying groups, the close partnership between corporations and government in the granting of government licenses and franchises, as well as the extensive monied contributions of large corporations to political campaigns [2,19]. Major advertisers, which are major US corporations, substantially influence programming given that these very advertisers sustain media companies through their crucial economic support [12]. Indeed, the US alone accounts for close to half the world’s advertising revenues [19]. Thus, the political and economic interests of advertisers, media companies, and the state are inextricably linked.

One important study demonstrated that there was systematic and persistent influence by management over 50 years, not just on the editorial page of a major newspaper where it would most likely occur, *The New York Times*, but in the choice and tone of news coverage [5]. The latter included the placement, tone, and repetition of facts; the inclusion of important subsidiary facts that accompany a news story and facilitate its understanding, as well as the framework of analysis in which the facts are situated [9,11,12]. Then, too, there is often outright misrepresentation and distortion of the facts, evidence from contrarian news sources that are often ignored such as international newspapers and alternative media, and the generally acknowledged submissiveness of the mass media to the power of government propaganda [6] acknowledged by many from the front ranks of journalism [18,10,23]. Thus, the major news divisions of the most influential media companies don’t report so-called “facts,” since the “facts” themselves are framed within the politics, ideology, and business climate of modern media companies. How could this be so? Typically, it has been observed that the press do not challenge official statements because:

“[Government and corporate sources are treated] as factual because news personnel participate in upholding a normative order of authorized knower’s in society...in which officials have and give the facts, reporters merely get them” [12, p. 19].

One of the most efficient ways to control news representation, particularly in wartime, is to flood the various news channels (e.g., television, radio, magazines, newspapers, and the Internet) with so-called “facts” and then lets groups of experts or individuals

articulating the consensus of those in power shape bias so that the public receives a constricted range of opinions on an issue [e.g., Should we go to war with Iraq or not?; 22]. Indeed, flax or negative responses to the mass media (e.g., Letters to the Editors), actually facilitates propaganda because it allows the public to feel like they are participating in a national debate, while in fact they are not, since their opinions appear on the margins of the mass media, for instance, buried on the back pages of the major newspapers [9, 12].

The Uses of Propaganda in Wartime

The general submissiveness of the mass media to government propaganda has been acknowledged in the US press since, at least, the Vietnam War and provides an important framework in understanding the role of propaganda in wartime. No doubt, press complicity in government propaganda has had a long history. During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), for example, George Orwell, the noted journalist and author who fought in the war against the fascist Spanish government, detailed the many forms of press and government propaganda on both political parties of the right (Nationalists) and of the left (Republicans) who challenged Spain’s elected rule. He concluded that the press simply repeated whatever they heard that fit within the framework of the official version without questioning the actual facts [20]. Ironically, he noted, war propaganda: “Comes invariably from those people who are not fighting” (p. 65). On Orwell’s view, propaganda in wartime reflects the press’ complicity in upholding a normative order in which the “facts” are simply what the government says they are.

During WWII, the prominent American journalist, Walter Cronkite, acknowledged that there were not any problems of access of the press to GIs and military officers since it was just assumed that “generals and high public officials tell the truth” [10, p. 124].

“We were right with the soldiers—no problem with access whatsoever. We talked to them; they talked to us, G.I.s and officers alike. The military did not make any attempt to monitor the interview we got with the men. There was nothing like that during the Gulf War [in 1991], where they had a senior officer standing by whenever we talked to a G.I. or an officer” [10, p. 21].

But, during the invasion of Grenada and during the Gulf War there were significant restraints put on the press because of a long history of distrust between the military and the media bred during the Vietnam War. In the case of Grenada, no correspondents were involved at all at the outbreak of the invasion (a news blackout) and there is to this day no independent film record of the Gulf War. Following the Grenada invasion, a National Media Pool was established. There were many subsequent complaints by the press that during the Gulf War and the US-Iraq War in 2003, that the pooling and embedding of reporters did a disservice to accurate news coverage. For instance, during the Gulf War, public affairs officers (PAOs) gagged troops in the field seeking to speak to war correspondents and prevented reporters from pursuing stories on the front lines. There was (a) censorship-by-delay so that press missions to the front lines were scrubbed or thwarted,

(b) censorship-by-intimidation so that soldiers were prevented from speaking to the press, (c) interference with pool reporters reporting the war, (d) military censorship-of-pool dispatches, (e) censorship by the arrest of reporters who did not stay within the restraints of the military, as well as (f) self-censorship [18]. Military briefings fostered the flow of “correct” and sanitized information and halted speculation about ongoing military operations.

“With a compliant news system there is little or no effective information free of government beliefs, so official failures go uncorrected, faulty strategies continue, incompetents remain in leadership, and there is growing likelihood of public demoralization and civil disorder...By maintaining total control of the initial image in a military action, the government can create the framework into which the public thereafter fits subsequent information” [18, p. xiv].

This government framework of the “official version” disseminated by authorized knowers (government officials) has been commented on by the press, particularly at the beginning of wartime conflict. For instance, at the commencement of a military attack there is the characteristic “demonization” of the enemy [10, p. 215]. What this suggests—central to Orwell’s seminal observation—is that the press, en masse, typically at the outbreak of military conflict, endorses the “official version” and that compromises their critical function of reporting and analyzing the news. Government propaganda, in a nutshell, has then effectively eviscerated debate and the press has passively complied, whatever the wisdom of the state’s views.

With “embedded reporting” introduced during the US-Iraq War in 2003, war correspondents became even more isolated within a military unit in the field without any way to tie emerging events and military engagements in disparate regions together:

“So there was no big-picture reporting that came out of the embedded reporters” [10, 2003, p. 221].

War correspondents could only report on what was happening in their immediate operational precinct without any means to unpack, dissect, and foreground their small military operation within the wider ground or air assault.

“Some in the press have attributed these restraints to the lingering fallout between the press and the military since the Vietnam War: The shibboleth of the press losing Vietnam ‘should be put to an end’” [10, p. 29].

Peter Arnett, the well-known TV journalist commented on this fact.

“The administration’s efforts to discredit the Saigon press corps went hand in hand with an elaborate public relations campaign, designed to convince Americans victory was near” [10, p. 177].

This “Vietnam syndrome” has emanated from a deep distrust between the press and the military and a strong desire of the latter to censor, in various ways, the ability of the media to gather news about the war on the battlefield.

“We in the press have been accused, often unfairly, of creating and influencing policy. This accusation was lobbed a lot during the Balkan War. My honest opinion is that we do have an effect, sometimes negative and sometimes positive, but we cannot make policy unless there is a policy vacuum” [10, p. 215].

As Morley Safer, the former TV journalist, noted, “I think the effect of good reporting is to be a watchdog” [10, p. 143]. The role of the press in wartime is thus made clear.

“If you didn’t have an independent and free press, you’d have propaganda—ours, theirs, whoever’s. You need a free press to sift through the propaganda and tell the story of what’s going on, whether it’s going well or badly. We are the brokers of information, and if we don’t exist, a nation, a civil society, a democracy is poorer” [10, p. 217].

Nonetheless, image propaganda and censorship are extensive during wartime and demonstrate the press’ complicity in state propaganda. For instance, powerful images such as “tales of Fascist barricades made of the bodies of living children” [20, p. 65], mutilated babies in WWII Belgium [18], and removal of babies from incubators in hospitals by the Iraqis during the Iraq-Kuwait War [23], were commonplace and often subsequently found to be untrue as noted by the former veteran TV commentator, John Chancellor, of NBC.

“The conflict brought with it a baggage train of myth and misconception, exaggeration and hyperbole...Accounts of Iraqi atrocities were accepted without question. There was the tale of premature babies thrown out of incubators in a Kuwait hospital and left to die. It never happened, although other sickening atrocities took place regularly during the Iraqi occupation...There were facts misperceived, truth bent out of shape and a fog of myth and misconception” [18, 76].

Such propaganda is effective because it relies on time-honored techniques of psychological persuasion: Reciprocity, consistency and commitment, social proof, likeability, authority, and the scarcity principle. For instance, people are influenced by such stories in the US press by the perceived consensus (social proof); the likeability and authoritativeness of sources (a top military commander, the president, the secretary of state); the perception that democracy, freedom, and capitalism may be undermined (scarcity principle); the desire to appear consistent and committed to those prior beliefs; and in the knowledge that American lives are being sacrificed for some more desirable outcome (reciprocity). Propaganda in wartime, nevertheless, possesses many nuances and may be employed with many diverse aims. In the Gulf War, for instance, propaganda was employed by the US military against the Iraqis, by the Iraqi military against the US, and by the US government on the home front through the use of defensive or domestic propaganda [15]. The latter included disinformation and overt white propaganda aimed at domestic interests as well as frank military censorship. Censorship by the military included body-count disinformation, failure to report self-inflicted injuries by soldiers to avoid continued military duty, as well as a failure to report psychiatric disabilities incurred during military action due to stress and trauma. In addition, on

the home front, there was extensive demonization of the Iraqi leader's character (Saddam Hussein) as well as a disinformation effort by the military to "vilify and dehumanize [other] adversaries," as well [15]. Much of this would be referred to by the US military as perception management and psychological operations. More importantly, domestic propaganda was largely carried out through the press.

"The mass media can be a useful tool in prosecuting a war psychologically" [18, p. 145]. "All institutions, governments and non-governments, manipulate the truth for their institutional reasons, just as people do for their individual reasons. Propaganda serves covert uses--you want to neutralize discussion, you want everybody to be on the same page and not question anything" (Jay Seitz quoted in Vedanta, 2003, p. A18).

From the perspective of psychological persuasion, this may include use of distraction from military casualties on both sides of the war or white propaganda, censorship of photography or videotaping in the field of combat, exaggeration of military successes in the field such as overhyped results of Patriot missile defenses during the Gulf War, as well as the inability of the press to access the crucial front lines to more accurately report the war effort [15].

Propaganda directed against the enemy, at least since WWI, has typically included extensive leaflet, radio, and loudspeaker campaigns directed against the opposing military in order to influence them to lay down their arms and surrender as was done in the Gulf War. Moreover, operational language employed at CENTCOM (central military command) briefings was often meant more to conceal than to reveal.

"Coalition aircraft serviced multiple targets, accurately deploying their payloads upon heavy concentrations of both hard and soft targets alike, without apparent collateral damage" [15, p. 225].

In such descriptions, the language is so general and devoid of meaning as to essentially provide no useful information. The press, nonetheless, constantly repeated this information during the Gulf War in their press dispatches, which found their way into the front pages of major newspapers and other major media outlets.

Implications and Future Directions

History is commonly viewed by the public as a conspiracy, that is, the motive force behind historical events is seen as a vast conspiracy perpetuated by some person, group or cabal (Hofstadter, 1966). History is seen as personal. From this psychological perspective, people attribute both acceptable and unacceptable aspects of the self to the enemy or what is referred to as paranoid projection. Hence, the public sees its own side as wholly good and demonizes the other side as wholly bad. These traits, moreover, are seen as pervasive in the character and culture of the other ("enemy"), as well as permanent. As a result, the other ("enemy") is collectively demonized by the way of cognitive stereotypes (rigid beliefs based on overgeneralizations about categories of people and their beliefs) and simplifications

(All "X" are terrorists) [25]. Propaganda, thus, works insidiously, that is, unconsciously or out-of-awareness, by tapping into the public's preconceptions: In the case of the Gulf and US-Iraq War, prejudices and stereotypes of the Middle East, Islam, socialism, and the Muslim faith on the one hand, and of America, democracy, and capitalism on the other. Propaganda foregrounds fundamental societal core values and inflames deep fears and hatreds rooted in history, culture, and geography.

In the more recent Afghanistan, Gulf, and US-Iraq conflicts, print and non-print mass media outlets gain viewership and increased revenues by parading daily before the public every twist and turn of military conflict within a framework of analysis shaped by the economic, political, and ideological interests of the mass media, which are closely tied to state interests. This characteristically heightens the persuasive force of propaganda and fosters a strong feeling of community among media participants (social proof). Cults of experts (academics, government officials, and media personalities) further structure bias by crystallizing public opinion. The participation of the mass media in the Middle East conflict, for example, is then used in a continuing cycle of propaganda and counter-propaganda by the US, Israel, the Arab states, and the European Union as well as other political and policy groups and countries with political stakes in the outcome.

As has always been true in the modern history of warring states, propaganda is central to the conduct of war. Yet, one could contend that only with the proliferation of independent media, situated in local communities rather than in corporate or government offices, will the work of propaganda be undermined, and the flourishing of democracy and debate be a real possibility.

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