

Politics and propaganda

Weapons of mass seduction

NICHOLAS JACKSON O'SHAUGHNESSY

Manchester University Press

Part IV

Marketing war

8

Nine-eleven and war

By the time of the Afghanistan war the United States had run down its propaganda apparatus yet faced selling the war to a sceptical world. The Taliban dystopia and the cave dwellers of Al-Qaeda seemed quicker off the draw, merchandising to an appalled international community their theatre of nihilism with its unique terrorist video mini-series and its star, Osama bin Laden. His multiple role articulations, saturated with symbolism, sought to terrify, but also to recruit. Thus the United States needed to evangelise war, and created the Office of War Information to lead a global campaign. Something was achieved, but at the ephemeral level, with no sign of recognition of the magnitude of the propaganda task or of the manifest need for deeper forms of cultural engagement.

Selling terror

The visual rhetoric of Osama bin Laden

This chapter argues that the propaganda strategies of Osama bin Laden were not primarily verbal, but based on a surprisingly modern insight into an aspect of the contemporary condition, that is, the response of most of the world's youth to the generation of visual imagery. His notorious videotapes privilege image over language; they rest on the recognition that the sign symbols that have had most impact are the visual, not the verbal, the moving image, not the printed word. The argument is that Bin Laden uses in particular four techniques to great effect:

- 1 *The attribution fallacy*. The United States is to blame for all the frustrations experienced by the Islamic people of the Middle East.
- 2 *Resonance theory*. Those grievances that Arabs hold most deeply, against

which they feel helpless, are made luminous by Bin Laden's broadcasts, which surface all resentments in a graphic way such that they smoulder in the minds of their viewers.

- 3 *Role playing.* Serial semi-ritualised enactments that elide in the role of warrior-priest.
- 4 Bin Laden's broadcasts focus on the most venerable of propaganda themes, that of atrocity-revenge, the appeal of which is universal in every culture.

The war against the Taliban/Al-Qaeda was a physical war underwritten by a propaganda war. The United States saw with increasing clarity that it faced a persuasion task that was epic in scale: an international coalition had to be formed and sustained; the government of Pakistan had to be persuaded, since its support was crucial – but not too crudely, lest it be sabotaged by extremists; the Middle East and by extension the Muslim world had to be neutralised, and convinced that this was not the beginning of a war against Islam; Afghans themselves needed to realise that the war was not against them but against the Taliban. Failure in any one of these key persuasion tasks would have negatively affected the conduct of the war. Failure in all of them, though perhaps inconceivable, would have been devastating. There was dawning recognition that what we faced was the most bizarre public relations campaign in human history: the terrorists began to speak, publicly and often. The marketing of terror, whether by the Tamil Tigers, ETA or the IRA, had not really been done before. For no terrorist organisation had ever 'talked' like this or sought an alibi for so spectacular an act of genocide. The terrorist act itself had in the past been its own articulation.

Attribution fallacy

Bin Laden's thesis was that the United States and its surrogates were murderers of the innocent and murderers of the faithful. The Palestinian cause was a comparatively late co-option into the Bin Laden *oeuvre*, but it performed sterling service: his is a curious perversion of the culture of blame, the fallacy of projection-attribution. The United States and the multiple evils he invested it with became an explanation for all the Arabs' collective failures and frustrations, and the simplicity of this thesis, its status as a universal explanation for perplexing phenomena, made it classic propaganda, for it asserted no troubling tax on the intellect. The videos surprised commentators with the technical sophistication of their rhetoric and assumption of their viewers' modern imagistic literacy. Beyond this, serial role enactments by Bin Laden provided the core structuring device for the terrorist miniseries.

In contrast the strategic objective of US communication was to neutralise international Muslim and especially Arab Muslim public opinion (which rarely translated into overt support for Bin Laden). It was an opinion that the events of the second Intafada, by that stage over a year old, had worked up into a frenzy of loathing, of Israel and, by extension, the United States. Al-Jazeera had relayed nightly images of the suffering of the Palestinians, and it seemed that the United States was bereft of Arab friends: 'it would be very hard for an American official to go on Middle East radio or Al-Jazeera to say anything that will not get the opposite response to that which is intended' (Professor Shibley Telhami, *New York Times*, 11 November 2001). Arab opinion was further alienated by the treatment of Iraq, and specifically by the deaths of medically neglected Iraqi children.

Bin Laden as a communications phenomenon is the product of two technological aspects of the late twentieth-century communications revolution, video and satellite, and one entrepreneurial, the establishment of a pan-Arab news medium, a clone of CNN, at the end of the twentieth century. Al-Jazeera was originally a defunct project of the BBC and lays claim to BBC values. After its initial failure, it was subsidised by the Emir of Qatar. Al-Jazeera has proved to be both a product for an eager market and a political revolution. No longer, with supranational media, could Arab governments control the supply of information; such media are market-driven, not government-prescribed, and the United States resented Al-Jazeera, denouncing the alleged bias of its coverage (*Daily Telegraph*, 11 October 2001).

Selling terror

Yet US propaganda was not originally proactive but responsive. Operating under the auspices of a Taliban regime that did not even believe in television, Al-Qaeda generated a series of propaganda video-tapes whose rhetoric of defiance punctuated the conflict at regular intervals. The existence as a conduit of Al-Jazeera made this possible. These tapes (they included training videos and many images pre-dating Nine-eleven) were a rhapsody of hatred of America, some congealing round scenes plagiarised straight from the textbook of classic atrocity propaganda – in particular of the death of the Palestinian boy Muhammed Al-Durra. One target was recruits, another the court of Islamic opinion, another the West.

Propaganda themes of Osama bin Laden

The appeals of Bin Laden propaganda typify the genre rather than take it in new directions. They illuminate a universal-type structure recurrent in its history; the themes of atrocity, revenge, utopia, otherness and enemies, the

manichean order, and the uses of the attribution fallacy, fear appeals and manipulation summarise the Bin Laden text. Thus Bin Laden was not an innovator in the content of propaganda despite the originality in methods of delivery: on the contrary he emerges as a refresher of old stylistic clichés, the rhetorical debris of numerous revolutionary movements, agitation organisations and totalitarian regimes.

Fear appeals

There was, of course, Nine-eleven. If terrorism was an extreme form of propaganda, Nine-eleven was the most extreme expression of terrorism ever invented. Bakunin spoke of the 'propaganda of the act', a sentiment with which Bin Laden would certainly agree: 'these young men . . . said in deeds in New York and Washington, speeches that overshadowed all other speeches made everywhere else in the world. These speeches are understood by now by Arabs and non Arabs – even by Chinese' (*The Times*, 14 December 2001). Fear was a central theme in Bin Laden's anti-American strategy. Abu Gaith, his 'finger-jabbing' spokesman, promising atrocities against Britain and a 'storm of planes' against America (*Sunday Times*, 14 October 2001). However, fear appeals in propaganda can (and frequently do) have the reverse effect – not flight, but fight.

Atrocity propaganda

Atrocity propaganda is the most resilient of all propaganda appeals. The Nazis used alleged Polish atrocities against ethnic Germans to justify their invasion of Poland in September 1939. The irony of this atrocity propaganda – it is, after all, the main mobilising device and the emotional core of the Bin Laden case – is that it is presented as essentially ancillary to the extinction of 3,000 civilians, from all nations. The enormity of the crime was followed by the enormity of the lie. An organisation that had just murdered two giant buildings now sought to portray the United States as the international psychopath. If credible, its power is beyond doubt, motivating armies to action and civilian populations to suffer deprivation. Bin Laden narratives are a continuous recitative of atrocities, real and imaginary. The chances, for example, of being sexually violated by Israelis are theoretic, yet here he goes: 'Your sister goes to bed honourable and wakes up violated, raped by Jews.' Bin Laden supplies us with a cacophony of images of pity, rage and terror. This stream of pictures is elaborated by devices such as fast cuts, superimposition and diagonal lines:

then comes Mohamed Al-Durra. Cue to machine-gun fire. Diagonal lines rend the screen to reveal a father's stricken face. 'Mohammed,' intones a deep, robotic voice, as the face of Mohamed Al-Durra, mouth open in terror, flashes before us. Cut to Israelis bombarding a building on which Osama has super-

imposed the pitiful image of the boy huddling against his father – an image flashed a dozen times during the twenty-minute duration. (Magnet 2001)

Revenge

Revenge has a powerful presence in cultural texts, one that is venerable, the great theme of Jacobean drama (*The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The Duchess of Malfi*), and universal, a permanent item of Hollywood merchandise and of the dramaturgy of most cultures. It is scarcely surprising that Bin Laden should seek to exploit the power of revenge as an emotional appeal.

Bin Laden's rhetoric was, fundamentally, a rhetoric of revenge, of justified punishment for unjustified crime: the 11 September attacks were the return for decades of 'humiliation and disgrace'. He chose themes that would resonate with an international Islamic target audience, and Palestine was grafted on to his key concern, the violation of the land of the Prophet. 'I swear to God that America will not live in peace before peace reigns in Palestine, and before all the army of the infidel depart the land of Mohammed, peace be upon him' (*Daily Telegraph*, 9 October 2001). The call is to revenge:

Bush senior and Colin Powell all appear on the screen. With cowboy timing a watching figure reaches into his robe to grab a gun. He crouches and fires at the screen, in time to a martial rhythm. Smoke obliterates the face of Colin Powell. Cut to Warren Christopher and President Clinton. Boom! Cut to a close-up of Clinton, wearing his habitual self satisfied smile. The gunman's shadow blocks out Clinton's face. Kerpow! (Magnet 2001)

The ultimate call to revenge in almost any culture, the supreme talisman of vengefulness, is a murdered child, and the livid pain of the bereaved parents. 'Cut to the boy's lifeless body . . .'

Tony Schwartz's (1973) resonance theory of communication sheds light on why such appeals may work. Schwartz argues that a persuasive text is a co-production, the author merely surfacing emotions and sentiments already present, and using the viewer as work force. Resonance, this smouldering in the mind, was what Bin Laden was trying to achieve. To give legitimacy, coherence and direction to his youthful Islamist targets, he focused on Palestinian woes, on Iraqi children, larded with quotations from the Koran and expressed in felicitous Arabic, and these resonated: 'among Bin Laden's attractions are his simplicity, eloquence and apparent sincerity, and the assumption that he has renounced his wealth for a life of piety' (*Sunday Times*, 14 October 2001).

Purity and contamination

Notions of purity are common in propaganda, and ideas of ideological, racial and imperial purity have been among its themes for the past two

centuries. Communism, for example, sought to burnish ideology by a serial creation of enemies who threatened that purity – bourgeois revisionists, Stalin's kulaks. The Nazi pamphlet 'Keep your blood pure' (Herzstein 1978) epitomises this need for the absolutist insistence of some kind of unreasoning perfection.

The video rhetoric of Bin Laden was larded with notions of purity and contamination. In this one regard alone it resembles the rhetoric of Hitler, who created similar metaphors of plagues and so forth. The idea of purity is intimately connected with the concept of utopia, or the perfect society, and this indeed, with increasing zeal, was what the hosts of Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, were trying to bring on earth – the rule, in fact, of the pure.

Fantasy

We err if we treat the Bin Laden videos as conventional arguments or messages. Rather, their imagistic hyperbole is an invitation to world Islamic and specifically Arab opinion to consume a heady narcotic of dominion and the absolute, and in this they merely perpetuate the emotional core of propaganda activity in the twentieth century, from Mussolini's New Rome to Mao's Cultural Revolution or, less illiberally, De Valera's Land of Saints and Scholars.

The other

Recruitment videos denounced Americans and Jews as 'monkeys and pigs', demanding the murder of all 'infidels' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 21 October 2001), and this is made possible by the manufacture of a dehumanised 'other': those killed on 11 September were simply 'the enemy'. The magnitude of their egocentricity – the pain and death of Mohamed Al-Durra are 'real', those of the children in the airliners a statistic – is beyond the self-understanding of the authors of these images.

Manichean universe

There was the establishment of the necessary context of the manichean universe, a world divided between the 'camp of the faithful and the camp of the infidel'. This imagery of a manichean world with its binary oppositions is a common appeal in many polemical forms of persuasion, typically associated, for example, with cults where there is the confrontation of the elect and the condemned, those people outside the cult: Calvinism was a mainstream religious example. That enemy is not only the United States, against which all good Muslims must rise up, but also corrupt Arab regimes, the Koran-cursed hypocrites who 'back the butcher against the victim'.

Power, impact

US commentators began to fear the Bin Laden videos. Bin Laden began to seem a professional in the arts of propaganda. Commenting on his power to deliver almost instant rebuttal of George W. Bush, Frank Rich of the *New York Times* thought that 'through mature presentation, brazen timing and a cunning message, he upstaged the President of the United States on the day he sent American troops into battle'. According to Rich, he may be a cave dweller but, we keep being reminded, he is no caveman (*Guardian*, 15 October 2001). Many feared he was 'winning the propaganda war in the Muslim world' (Anton La Guardia, *Daily Telegraph*, 9 October 2001). The power of the videos in fact resided in convincing Westerners of their power, not in persuading Muslims. Journalists wrote that Bin Laden was 'now the most popular figure throughout the Muslim world' and similar meretricious nonsense. Journalists began to speak of poor exposition of the US case. The US government sought to suppress the Bin Laden videos (*Guardian*, 15 October 2001) so that five major networks all agreed to limit their coverage of Bin Laden's media forays (*Guardian*, 12 October 2001).

What was the real impact on the intended target, Arab public opinion? It is in fact difficult to gauge the real extent of Arab anger. Feroze Zakaria, editor of *Newsweek International* (*Daily Telegraph*, 1 December 2001), even claimed that 'after the first few days, these protests were tiny, often made up of just 1,000 people'. He concluded that 'most Muslims are struggling to combine their faith with modernity and have not given in to fantasists of a medieval Utopia'.

Bin Laden propaganda techniques

Visual rhetoric

These tapes constituted a language of imagery which was instantly recognisable as universal code and therefore transcended the linguistic barriers of the spoken word. According to Julia Magnet (2001), 'Bin Laden has hi-jacked sophisticated techniques for his video: it's as if Guy Ritchie, Stallone and Spielberg have banded together to make Jihad, the movie.' The brief views television audiences were accorded of the tapes made for a prevailing image of naivety. Not so, according to Julia Magnet. Bin Laden's media team have mastered the techniques of the MTV generation. 'Now, in a parody of the American flag, a puzzle of horizontal stripes emerge from each side of the screen, finally connecting to reveal two fighters facing down Warren Christopher. Bang, bang! Whoosh – the images disappear and the screen spins round to reveal . . . Osama bin Laden.' Julia Magnet points out the technique of repetition – images of Israeli brutality appear 'over and over'.

Manipulation

Bin Laden's expositions were hardly concerned with any objective notions of truth, referring for example to America killing Muslims and desecrating holy places for 'eighty years' (*Daily Telegraph*, 9 October 2001). They are, moreover, highly manipulated, since the same incidents are filmed from different angles, thus giving the impression of a moving sequence of atrocities.

The many roles of Osama bin Laden

Julia Magnet (2001) discusses the austerity of his physical performance which enhances an image of power more than elaboration would have done, power, in abeyance, subordinate to the iron will: 'his body language is gentle and controlled: only his right hand moves, and then never further off than six inches from his body. Rarely does he shake his fist, a gesture familiar in all propaganda. When he does, it is with weary anger: his cause is so self-evident that he does not need an indignant mime show.'

Cultural theorists have spoken of the dramatic performances of Clint Eastwood as 'the artful withholding of speech rather than the artless inability to speak' (Kellner 1995), and the same description could be applied here. Much of the impact of Bin Laden's theatre is contained in the characteristic Bin Laden facial mask. This otherworldly pose, this pseudo-mysticism, was integral to Bin Laden's dramaturgical synthesis of actor and holy man. Julia Magnet again: 'it is the eyes that grab you: otherworldly, luminous eyes that remind me of Charles Manson. They never meet the camera. It is as if he doesn't see this world – only the spiritual dimension.'

For the novelist John Le Carré (2002) he is the consummate narcissist: 'his barely containable male vanity, his appetite for self, and his closet passion for the limelight. And just possibly this will be his downfall, seducing him into a final dramatic act of self-destruction, produced, directed, scripted and acted to death by Osama bin Laden himself.' For Le Carré, Bin Laden is a man of 'homo-erotic narcissism'. And an actor: 'posing with the Kalashnikov, attending a wedding or consulting a sacred text, he radiates with every self-regarding gesture an actor's awareness of the lens. He has height, beauty, grace, intelligence and magnetism, all great attributes unless you're the world's hottest fugitive and on the run.'

Bin Laden had a wardrobe of serial roles, semi-ritualised enactments, articulated by stage props. He was, of course pre-eminently Bin Laden the soldier, the guerrilla freedom fighter, 'dressed in green fatigues with the white Muslim headscarf and a rifle propped against a rock behind him – the image of a believer and fighter' (*Daily Telegraph*, 9 October 2001). Then he was the Saracen sheikh, mounted in flowing robes on a white arab steed, the desert prince who would destroy all who threatened his honour and that of his kind. Or he was the scholar, staring at the camera against

a rich backdrop of religious texts. Then, another frequent act, he is the holy man, the visionary, wrapped in some private knowing, his spirit soaring to the promise of paradise. Or there is a synthetic role, the holy warrior-priest, 'citing Islamic scripture, his rifle leaning against a rock beside him, every inch the austere holy warrior'. This combination would seem alien to Western eyes today, where soldier and priest appear antithetical functions, but if we reach back far enough in Western history we see unitary instances of it, as for example in the Templar knights, literally fighting priests.

Bin Laden could be regarded as possessing some affinity with the characteristics of the 'feminine rhetorician' conceived by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, who argues that this is the most persuasive style in a television-arbitrated communications milieu, contrasted with the older histrionic-declamatory 'masculine' style as practised by for instance Benito Mussolini. Though lacking in her normative characteristics of intimacy and self-disclosure, Bin Laden is certainly the antithesis of declamatory.

Limitations of the tapes

Bin Laden's videos represent the tactical mobilisation of religion and tradition. Many in the West were culturally deaf to their imagery and, of course, ignorant of the power of Bin Laden's spoken Arabic. The complete tapes were viewed only by the Arab audiences of Al-Jazeera. What we saw in the West were effectively edited fragments, condensed images of an enemy posing to taunt us, and then little after the US government had asked for their cessation. Thus the narrative strengths of the videos had been denied us, or any sense of their sophistication.

In summary, there were two targets of persuasion, the international court of Islamic and specifically Arab opinion, and the United States and its allies. For Islamic opinion, the aim was to create an enemy, a dehumanised 'other', and to do so through mobilising the agency of atrocity propaganda and the concomitant emotions of anger and frustration, within the creation of a broader manichean framework of a world polarised between good and evil, the sacred and the contaminated. The United States, the other target, was the subject of fear appeals, there would be more demonstrations of the terrorists' power. The tapes also, it must be remembered, were a form of taunt to embellish the insult to US pride of Nine-eleven. What America saw served to enrage, not intimidate, and led to acceptance of military losses, the fear of which had previously immobilised US power.

The limitations of persuasion? Selling war

On 6 October *The Economist* spoke of 'another sort of war [that] is already under way . . . it is the propaganda war. That word has come to have a derogatory meaning, of the dissemination of untruths. In this case, America's task is (in truth) to disseminate truths, about its motives, about its intentions, about its current and past actions in Israel and Iraq, about its view of Islam.' One month after Nine-eleven and anxieties were beginning to surface about the effectiveness of the US case presentation: 'the propaganda war is in danger of being lost and America knows it. Its planes may control Afghan skies, but on-air supremacy was relinquished' (*Sunday Times*, 14 October 2001).

The United States had an actual communications problem that was external, and a potential communications problem that was internal. The public mood of horror, this sense of a shared universal victimhood, evolved quickly into patriotism, but America's governors could at any point have mismanaged that great swelling of loyalty and lost US confidence. That – after a shaky start – they did not do so is tribute to their propagandist skills, but their failure to similarly impress the larger world is testament to the limitations of those skills. Thus, communication as understood by US leaders in this crisis reflected the world from which they were drawn, that of the political campaign, and the consumerist context they had grown up in. Veterans who ran war rooms of presidential campaigns played a key role, and the lessons learnt in these areas – on anticipation, opinion research, energy of riposte and the production of eloquent visual imagery – defined the character of the US response from then on. The former political consultant John Rendon was brought in as a kind of propaganda subcontractor (Franklin Foer, *New Republic*, 20 May 2002). Within its conceptual limitations this approach worked, delivering a message of the day and targeting such Taliban allegations as downed US Chinooks and US atrocities at Mazar-i-Sharif.

This was a communications approach to win battles and not wars: no strategy, only tactics. The challenge is permanent attitude change in the Moslem world, the recognition that alienation of such magnitude cannot be assuaged by propaganda and marketing as usually conceived. So this becomes a timely case study about the limitations of conventional propaganda, since political initiative now becomes a necessary condition for its effectiveness: policy and propaganda are not conceptually discrete but interwoven. Ideas and initiatives may be communicated well or badly, but without them all we have is empty words. And a more mature idea of propaganda, which elevates it above the sloganeering ethos of campaign political marketing, is to seek cultural engagement, a missionary idiom which aspires to proselytise through classroom and library rather than sound bite and video postcard.

Internal: tactics of the home front – of symbols and myths

The visceral response of US government and people alike to Nine-eleven was to be the tactical mobilisation of culture and tradition, the bedrock of patriot propaganda in any era, the myths and the symbols that evoked the nation's self identity and gave it meaning. When nations are at war such totems are re-endowed with legitimacy and become once again the public currency.

The FBI employed one of its oldest tactics, the traditional Most Wanted list, this time of Al-Qaeda suspects. Bin Laden and his right-hand man headed the bill (*Daily Telegraph*, 11 October 2001). This, and George W. Bush's demand for Bin Laden to be caught 'dead or alive', in the language of the old west, connected the struggle with the honour and simple certitudes of the old frontier. It was a rhetoric as welcome as it was necessary, despite early errors – christening the war Operation Infinite Justice, the reference of George W. Bush to a 'crusade', picked up by Bin Laden in his references to the 'alliance of Jews and Crusaders'. The internal dialogue with the US public was managed in ways that exploited the traditional symbols of the American nation, for example 'this battle is being fought with weapons like \$1 bills stuffed into envelopes by American children and mailed to the White House to help Afghan children' (*New York Times*, 14 October 2001). Then there were the resonant public symbols: Bush in flak jacket, Bush addressing the troops, the photographs of the firemen raising the stars and stripes in duplication of Iwo Jima, and the translation of their image into bronze, and into history. There were the humiliation rituals of Camp X-ray.

Private propaganda

Even individual Americans could and often did conduct a private propaganda war, with the core signature, the Stars and Stripes, flying from countless cars or homes and, frequent if not ubiquitous, the super-patriotic T-shirts. Another form of private propaganda lay in the area of caricature, cartoon and assorted iconography: 'it was the first move in an unconscious and subterranean propaganda war: the process of making the architect of the world's worst terrorist atrocity into a comic cult' (*Daily Telegraph*, 22 November 2001). The internet teemed with attempts to belittle Bin Laden via humour, such as the widely circulated Harry Belafonte parody ('Come, Mr Taliban, hand over Bin Laden, air force come and they flatten your home'). There were on-line games and commercial paraphernalia (*herobuilders.com*). In World War II humour, whether in films like *The Great Dictator* or cartoons like Donald Duck in *Der Fuehrer's Face*, was a defence mechanism, neutralising the threatening individual by placing him within

the menagerie of popular media caricatures. The artefacts and images were not all amusing. Plaster statues of New York fireman began to appear, some with an angel at their side.

Symbolism

There was a war to fight, but there were also the dead to be buried. The rituals and symbols of bereavement were a necessary way of adjusting to the scale of the loss, notably the decision of the *New York Times* to publish an obituary for every single one of the Nine-eleven victims (unintended propaganda, but as powerful as it was inevitably prolonged). Such images also constituted a motivation to continue the struggle. In all this mystical and brooding theatre of symbolism, one man stood out as its supreme practitioner. It was not only Mayor Giuliani's ability to find the right language to articulate what lay too deep for tears, it was his comprehension of why ritual and symbol would be of such supreme importance at such a time, why they were not merely desirable but necessary. And so his rigorous attending of the firemen's funerals, his visits to Ground Zero, his constant visibility self-cast as a figure of dynamism and hope, were enough, but he gave more. Ultimately that extra was sensitivity to symbolism of a high order, but also imagination in symbolic conception and elaboration. What better way, for example, to deal with the terrible fact that for many relatives there would be no body to bury than to offer them an urn filled with the dust of Ground Zero?

Censorship

Propaganda is the denial, as well as the provision, of information. It is the antithesis of the objective search for and exposition of truth, as pursued ideally by a scientist, for instance. Propagandists present a truth, rather than *the* truth. The facts they espouse are probably not wrong, they are merely the most benevolent retrieved from a *smörgasbord* of facts. Other data will be ignored, or even actively suppressed – that is, propaganda may be a coercive activity as well as a manipulative one. The imbalance of power between us and our leaders is exploited to the full. This is called censorship. The government argued that 'the shaking of his hands, the use of a particular verse of the Koran, anything in what he says or does could be a sign to someone somewhere that it is time to start a new phase of the attacks on America' (*Guardian*, 12 October 2001). Another aspect of this control was the strict limiting of journalistic access to the military, with none at all for special forces, with the media pushed to produce bland reports and presidential staff parsimonious in their contacts with journalists (*ibid.*). The trick was to tantalise with trivia.

External: tactics to persuade the world

By September 2001 the once great US global propaganda enterprise had shrivelled almost to extinction. The end of the Cold War had created a fresh mood and a new indifference. Radio Free Europe had lost over half its budget (*New York Times*, 11 November 2001). The US Information Agency had been shrunk and melded with the State Department (whose own public diplomacy fund was cut by 40 per cent in the Clinton years). The CIA no longer had 225, but twenty-five, propaganda personnel. In consequence there was no organised system that could swing into action once war was imminent (*ibid.*).

A problem facing any *ad hoc* group created to manage communications was global reaction to the human costs of the war. Civilian casualties would rank highest on the agenda of the United States' international critics, and US command of technology is a double-edged weapon: (1) it can save civilian lives but (2) there exists an imagistic gulf between the aerial armada of US weaponry and all those turbans and rifles straight out of *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (Paramount, 1935). America, the injured party, had much to fear from the global retailing of the imagery of destruction, since, whatever the strength of the cause, the picture of the richest fighting the poorest nation on earth was inherently difficult to negotiate, and contained always the possibility of losing control of the conflict's meaning and a metamorphosis from righteous revenge to 'David v. Goliath', especially with the Taliban's daily enunciated claim that the United States was bombing civilians. It was particularly important to convey the idea that civilian casualties would be minimal – that everything would be done to avoid them. The strengths of smart technology were talked up, though perhaps not as crudely as in the Gulf War with its antiseptic rhetoric of collateral damage. The impression given was that a smart bomb would knock first on the victim's door and introduce itself. This was the promise of a war that would, uniquely, be free of innocent victims, with the offer of a science of killing that would destroy every enemy – even dropping over Afghanistan spy satellite photographs of Mullah Omar's number plate.

The task of this *ersatz* machine of instant manufacture, paralleling the Office of War Information in World War II, was essentially then the conduct of a public argument both with Al-Qaeda and with the United States' less murderous critics via the management of riposte, information and generated imagery. The response, though vigorous, was at the tactical level: 'soon they had set up a round-the-clock war news bureau in Pakistan and a network of war offices linking Washington, London and Islamabad that helped to develop a 'message for the day' (*New York Times*, 11 November 2001). A top advertising executive, Charlotte Beers, whose brands had included

Head 'n' Shoulders and Uncle Ben's, was bought in to the State Department 'to try to make American values as much a brand name as McDonald's hamburgers or Ivory soap', and appointed Under-secretary of State to 'sell the war' (*ibid.*). She:

- 1 Put Arabic-speaking ambassador Christopher Ross on Al-Jazeera. With offices and an audience of 35 million in the Arab world, it was a powerful force.
- 2 Placed Colin Powell on Egyptian television.
- 3 Put an interview with Vice-president Cheney in Britain's populist *Sun* newspaper.
- 4 Sent a 'catalogue of lies' to Pakistan's newspapers refuting Taliban claims, for example that the United States deliberately bombed civilians.
- 5 Began addressing groups of exclusively foreign journalists, especially from Muslim countries (*ibid.*).

As in a presidential election campaign, message co-ordination was paramount. The new White House 'war room' acted as message entrepreneur, for example 'that Al-Qaeda has hi-jacked a peaceful religion' (*ibid.*). The US government sought to manage expectations, including getting Americans to accept that many more Americans could die in the struggle (*Daily Telegraph*, 22 November 2001).

And then there was of course the enemy to fight. War is communication, and the techniques used by the United States did of course include the old psy-ops ones – leaflet drops, aerial radio stations. Since military activity is inherently propagandist, some missions were undertaken only for marketing purposes. According to one account, during the Afghan conflict 'every aspect of briefings can be part of the psychological warfare. At one briefing, officers showed night-vision video of an army Ranger raid in Afghanistan, in part to show that Taliban and Mr Bin Laden's terrorist organisation, al-Qaeda, that the US military could land and carry out operations on the ground.'

US long-term global strategy: cultural propaganda?

America's leaders ran the propaganda war like an election campaign, and its conduct illuminates the strengths and limitations of that ethos. It brings into particularly sharp relief the redundancy of political marketing-propaganda approaches when they are tasked with the deeper mission of permanent opinion change. A point-scoring public argument with the Taliban, with charge followed by counter-charge, may have been necessary but could never have been more than a holding operation.

Superficial?

Long-term more, much more, is needed. Even if America recognises this question there must be considerable doubt as to whether it possesses the answer. The international and Arab resentments were dealt with at the level of a PR campaign, but how could this, for example, go any way to combat the impact of the Pakistan madrassas with their 500,000 students? Changing attitudes, and even the values underpinning them, is a long-term proposition. Success or otherwise here would not be achieved by the overt polemicism, or explicit symbol systems that the public more customarily associate with the idea of propaganda. A 'hypodermic' stimulus-response model may be seldom applicable to any communication, since meaning is always negotiated in the semiotic process, but here in particular, where the antagonism is universal even if it is latent and passive, the only strategy worth talking about is a long-term and culturally oriented one.

Hollywood goes to war?

So now some Americans began to think of a deeper and more permanent form of propaganda to influence Middle Eastern opinion. There was talk about, and moves towards, enlisting Hollywood, with its semi-monopoly of global imagery. Why could it not illuminate the best in America rather than continually generate imagery of materialism, sex, violence and degeneracy (*New York Times*, 11 November 2001)? For one commentator, 'it is time for corporations to have a brand manager in charge of America'. Direct approaches were made by the US government to Hollywood. Officials talked 'with writers of big action movies as well as directors of music videos, experts in image manipulation' (*New York Times*, 14 October, 2001). Carl Rove, a senior adviser to George W. Bush, was to visit Hollywood. There were calls on Hollywood to develop movies that conveyed the goodness of Americans, for US corporations to market the values of family and community along with their products on shelves around the world (*ibid.*).

Hollywood may indeed be relevant in the drive for permanent attitude change. For it has always presented a fantasy America – originally one of American possibility, the wish-fulfilment of the émigré founders of Hollywood itself, then later a vision of a vibrantly decadent American dystopia. Neither was, or is, true. But a consistent theme of Hollywood down the years has been integration propaganda (in Ellul's terminology). One way forward would be to direct the same energy of inclusiveness towards Moslems as has been offered to other groups, and in truth this has begun to happen. The snarling, gun-toting Arab terrorists of such productions as *Navy SEALs* (1990) have begun to be replaced by more sophisticated portraits.

Cultural propaganda

The revival of foreign-language broadcasts was another idea, 'recreate the kind of propaganda campaigns that were waged against the Axis powers in World War II and against communism in the Cold War'. One commentator argued, 'it's time to bring back the idea of an Edward R. Murrow in Arabic, modernised of course, using satellites and short-wave' (*New York Times*, 11 November 2001). The projection of a more positive image of the United States gained urgency: news organisations 'should feature reports by Arabs through travel in America that can offer impressions that go beyond the stereotypes of narcissism and self-indulgence' (*ibid.*). There had to be a renewed commitment to ethics in international politics: 'we can't build civil society and democracy in these countries, but we have to stand for it. It has to be part of our flag. We have to be the standard bearer.'

Some ephemeral attempt was made to engage in these new forms of cultural propaganda. The best work of the CIA during the Cold War – its sponsorship of radio stations, or *The God that Failed*, or the great intellectual magazine *Encounter* – were recalled, even with affection (*New Republic*, 20 May 2002). The planned, though never executed, Pentagon Office of Strategic Information was aiming to fund US works in Arabic and more pro-Western English textbooks and Islamic theology courses, as well as computers and alternative curricula to counteract the madrassas. The proposed Arabic-language satellite channel was delayed.

Could it have worked?

Can much be realistically achieved via communication when two such different world views are in collision? Effective communication ties in with values, yet values themselves change only slowly over time. America is the author of the modern, and for traditional societies it is a threat in as much as it is the embodiment of the modern. Beyond this, there is a massive divergence of political and cultural perspectives between the Middle Eastern Moslem and the metropolitan United States. In Bosnia, Kosovo, Kashmir, in Gujarat, at Ayodh, in Chechnya and on the West Bank the Moslem sees everywhere impotence and the defeat of the Islamic cause and seeks a coherent explanation, and a culprit, for this defeat – and all of it against a historical background of a once dominant culture progressively disinherited since its political extinction in Western Europe in 1492. The United States becomes that explanation because a single, unitary, all-embracing explanation is urgently sought.

Yet for much of the Arab world the simple mantras of fixed hostility to the United States are probably a gross oversimplification of their private attitudes. 'Ambivalence' would probably nuance the character of their disquiet more effectively. The cultural totems of Americana are everywhere

on display throughout the Middle East, and attitudes to the United States compound acceptance with rejection. This raises at least the possibility that while effective propaganda can never win the Arabs over to America's perspective, it could at least neutralise most of them. To do this, though, would probably be impossible in isolation, but it could work in conjunction with a renewed series of US foreign-policy initiatives, ones founded more completely in multilateralism than in unilateralism.

9

Weapons of mass deception: propaganda, the media and the Iraq war

Within an overall discussion of the formal propaganda efforts of all participants in the Iraq war, this chapter applies a conceptual approach to communications aspects of the conflict, specifically the overlapping roles of myth, fantasy, rhetoric, deceit, the creation of enemies, and official manipulation. The Iraq war became a theatre of propaganda, and new developments such as the conceit of the 'embedded' journalist (when you wear the uniform you buy the values) and such technical advances as satellite-linked phones/cameras created a new kind of war, one synthesised out of hundreds of video fragments. The conflict was structured by the twin foundation myths of the Weapons of Mass Destruction and the links between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. This was a hybrid justification for war, and in the early stages propaganda sought (against an increasingly sceptical world) to embroider these justifications. Rhetoric and symbolism also played a key role in structuring and sustaining the debacle. The creation of Saddam's enmity was critical. Thus significant ideas on propaganda that have been clarified by the war include: the continuing part played by the rhetoric of enmity, the role of fantasy and willed belief in propaganda, the significance and completeness of the coherent organising/ integrating perspective, the on-going role of myth (not least how much can be fabricated in a conspiracy of false beliefs), the concept of emotional proof, the problem of imagistic control, and propaganda as the search for retrospective justification. The propaganda war pursued by the United States and Britain had its limitations, since in war press reaction can never be controlled, only influenced, and much of what is 'war propaganda' is actually an after-the-fact interpretation/definition of events, or sustained apologia.

Manipulation: the official propaganda war (1) The world

The British and US governments recognised that the propaganda war would be as critical as the physical war. International public opinion had to be at least neutralised if it could not be persuaded: 'faced with a sceptical audience at home, the government has invested almost as much thought in winning the propaganda war as planning its military operation' (*Daily Telegraph*, 20 March 2003). As a result the propaganda operation was enormous and, in the eyes of some, insidious. The task was much more difficult than in the case of Afghanistan. There the Taliban regime had allowed itself to become the launch pad for the worst attack on the United States since Pearl Harbor. The case for attacking the Taliban and destroying their regime, although not universally accepted, especially in Islamic countries, was relatively easy to defend and did not tax the art of the advocate. America could quite legitimately pose as aggrieved victim and carry forward the moral force of that role.

In Iraq the propagandists faced the supreme challenge to their profession, they had to make America's case effectively and credibly before a world that was at best sceptical, and at worst deeply hostile. The US case was vulnerable on so many fronts. US interests did not face a realistic threat from the Saddam regime; without the backing of the UN Security Council the war was in effect illegal; the United States was acting the bully in an illicit display of superior power; there was no just cause; the United States was indifferent to the loss of civilian life, was ultimately merely motivated by the need to secure its oil supplies, was only looking for an excuse to display its supreme military might in the aftermath of Nine-eleven, was a deviant member of the international community in exhibiting a consistent pattern of unilateral behaviour, was as a result arrogant and selfish and did not understand the ramifications of its actions, it falsely and with no good evidence portrayed Saddam Hussein as a godfather of international terror in order to justify its need for an enemy to attack. This, broadly, was the majority view of the United States in some countries, universally perhaps in the Middle East, but it was also the majority view in France and some other European countries, and it was the view of a substantial minority even in the British Isles. Where therefore could propaganda begin? What could it reasonably hope to achieve in the face of such hostility? In the view of one commentator 'one of America's most historic and bipartisan traditions is to do an execrable job explaining itself to the world. The average *Fortune* 500 company is far more sophisticated at getting its message across abroad than the US government has been' (Nicholas D. Kristof, *New York Times*, 8 April 2003).

A new kind of media war

A vigorous, partisan right-wing media (Fox News) which had scarcely existed in the last Gulf War shaped the public meanings of this war. There were other salient changes. The visualities of war had attained new levels of immediacy and vividness. The public record had never before captured the sense of actually being in a war with such a degree of accuracy before. The new satellite video-telephones, evident first in Afghanistan, came into their own in this conflict, relaying their staccato imagery around the globe. The camera was everywhere, satellite-linked: technological advance had made it possible to connect up highly portable cameras to satellites and instantly relay the images. The pyrotechnics of the first Gulf War with their astonishing rocket-head recordings of attack seemed almost quaint by comparison.

The technology was not merely a passport to vivid news, it was the news. Observed one astonished reporter:

Fox News broadcast extraordinary live sequences from moving vehicles of American armoured columns racing through the desert, their tracks throwing up clouds of dust. . . . Attacks commanded in real time by commanders hundreds of miles away are broadcast in real time to audiences of millions. . . . Satellite communications have become portable, allowing journalists to broadcast from anywhere as the troops advance through the Iraqi desert. (*Daily Telegraph*, 22 March 2003)

In the *Sunday Times* (23 March 2003) Sarah Baxter described the images as an army public relations dream, 'they showed live pictures of the American Seventh Cavalry barrelling towards Baghdad past the hulks of Iraqi tanks from former wars . . . It was the first time in the history of warfare that a wife could watch her husband invading a country thousands of miles away.'

The major evolution was a US propaganda concept, that of the 'embedded' journalist. This was, of course, a high-risk strategy. It could have easily backfired. The senior command of the US military remembered well the adversarial role assumed by journalists in the Vietnam War. This one was to be very different. The concept of the embedded journalist presented, of course, many potential problems – the journalists might, for example, witness vicious behaviour by the troops and, what proved to be a real problem, the world's public were inundated with scraps of detailed parochial information from 500 (estimates vary) embedded journalists, including Arab ones, which served merely to heighten the general confusion and obscure any overall pattern. Nevertheless, the embedded journalist was probably a successful propaganda sleight-of-hand. Since the embedded reporter by definition shares the hardship of the troops and lives through their emotions alongside them, the bias will inevitably be towards the military. Many British television

journalists wore elements of combat gear and one, the ITV journalist Bill Neely, was dressed entirely as a British soldier. It is a small step from wearing the corporation's uniform to adopting its values. According to Martin Bell:

one peril of embedding journalists is that they will accept the campaign's vocabulary and agenda. The idea of embedding journalists is new. Such journalists, although not required to wear uniform, are in many respects auxiliaries of the units to which they are attached. They work under censorship, including self-censorship, as to broadcast sensitive information might expose them and coalition forces to Iraqi fire. (*Daily Telegraph*, 24 March 2003)

Bell pointed out how in the first Gulf War censorship was tighter and images were broadcast three or four days late. Moreover, again a propaganda triumph for the Americans, embedded journalists were obliged to pool their material for readers of other newspapers and other viewers, they could not travel independently, and interviews had to be on the record. Rampton and Stauber (2003) remind us that the Pentagon also 'offered combatants as journalists, with its own film crew, called Combat Camera. The dramatic rescue of Jessica Lynch was a Combat Camera exclusive.'

So this was a new kind of media war. Some commentators did in fact argue that the embedded reporters had been an error. Argued one:

we drink thirstily from the Baghdad trickle and then turn round to be drowned by the coalition flood. The key problem is the embeds. They are all over southern Iraq like a cheap suit and they're all babbling excitedly, reacting, understandably, to every shot that is fired and every rumour that flashes around the battlefield. 'They're reporting every fight as if it's a major incident, every pinprick as if it's a mortal wound,' said a media manager at Centcom. The result is a deluge of reportage that simply cannot be assessed; it might be crucial, it might be trivial, who knows? . . . The reality is that it's harming the coalition by generating confusion, uncertainty and even depression. . . . The embeds are certainly tightly controlled, but the effect of their reports has been a massive loss of control for the military. The sheer volume of their reportage has swamped the media and repeatedly wrongfooted the generals. (Brian Appleyard, *Sunday Times*, 30 March 2003)

Qatar theatre

George Allison was commissioned to build a \$200,000 stage set for the headquarters in Qatar. Allison was a leading Hollywood art director who had worked with the illusionist David Blain (*The Times*, 11 March 2003). According to *The Times*:

gone are the easel and chart, solitary television and VCR machine with which General Norman Schwartzkopf showed fuzzy images of smart bomb raids during the 1991 Gulf War. On a set that will become instantly recognisable,

generals will present updates from two podiums at the front of the stage adorned with 50 inch plasma . . . screens and two 70 inch television projection screens ready to show maps, graphics and videos of action. Behind them will be a soft-focus elongated map of the world, as if to suggest that the world is united behind them.

The Times commented on the propaganda value of a stage set at the symbolic level: 'besides looking good on television the presentation conveys another message – that American technology is second to none and far outclasses anything possessed by the Iraqis, who will be watching the briefings on the Arab broadcaster Al-Jazeera . . . The technology gulf will be part of a psychological campaign abetted by the media . . .' And, commented Rory McCarthy in the *Guardian* (26 March 2003), 'a large US Central Command seal above the central podium delivers an unequivocal message of authority: an eagle sits on a Stars and Stripes shield with its wings outstretched to envelop a map of the Middle East and Arab world'.

Briefings

The briefings themselves were an important part of the propaganda campaign, with the black one-star general Vincent Brooks as a principal spokesman. Some observers were highly cynical: 'the messages are rigidly controlled. The media handlers in Qatar are in constant contact with Campbell, White House strategists and Victoria Clark, the press chief at the Pentagon. Every morning they agree what information will be put out in London' (Tim Shipman, *Spectator*, 29 March 2003). This same journalist complained of the deference of many correspondents: 'the Americans have hardly helped for calls of openness by asking supine questions that would have shamed even the 1950s BBC. It is not unusual to hear something along the lines of "Would the general like to tell us something about how vile the enemy are today?"' He suggested that the coalition was putting pressure on recalcitrant journalists. Commented Rory McCarthy:

The front row of the briefing hall at the Central Command headquarters in the deserts of Qatar is largely reserved for the American television networks but frequently the toughest questioning has come from those further back . . . the milder style favoured by some of the US correspondents is reflected in a question posed by a presenter with the American network CBS, who asked at General Frank's first briefing on Saturday, "The campaign so far has gone with breathtaking speed. Has it surprised you, or is it going more less as you expected?' (*Guardian*, 26 March 2003)

For one American journalist, Michael Wolfe:

this whole thing (not just the news conference, but in some sense, the entire war) is a phoney set-up, a fabrication in which just about everything is in service to some unseen purpose and agendas. . . . What is most surprising about this to me is not so much that there are a lot of people who would mistake a news conference for an actual, transparent, official giving of information, but that the Pentagon would be media-savvy enough to understand this. (*Guardian*, 14 April 2003)

Rush Limbaugh gave out Wolfe's e-mail address: 'almost immediately, 3,000 e-mails, full of righteous fury, started to come'.

Manipulation: the official propaganda war (2) Wooing the Arab world

The briefings were not politically deaf to the interests of the Arab world. They were translated simultaneously into Arabic, and Al-Jazeera was assigned a front row at the briefings. Arab-speaking diplomats were imported from the State Department to 'spin Arabs in their own language', and General Brooks was coached in Arab pronunciation. More generally 'Mr Bush hounds Cabinet members to give interviews to Al-Jazeera television, a new White House office flatters foreign reporters by spinning them, and the US began Radio Sawa to seduce Iraqis and other Arabs with sirens like Jennifer Lopez. The brilliant system of embedding journalists in US military units includes Arab journalists' (*New York Times*, 8 April 2003). Much was done under the auspices of the Office of Global Communications at the White House, which had been established during the Afghanistan war.

The coalition propaganda effort could look forced: 'the US effort to manufacture a huge global coalition involved an embarrassing effort to recruit micro-dots in the Pacific, and the White House proudly put out a list of supporting countries that included the Solomon Islands. When reporters asked the Solomon Islands Prime Minister about the support, he said he was "completely unaware" of that' (*New York Times*, 8 April 2003). Britain's Ministry of Defence boosted the effort by sending 160 media specialists to the Gulf, their message co-ordinated by Alastair Campbell (*Sunday Times*, 23 March 2003). By the beginning of the war the United States had already set up Radio Sawa, a populist radio station targeted at the Middle Eastern audience which aroused deep suspicion in the minds of Arab commentators: 'it seeks to brainwash and instil American ideas in the minds of the rising generation'. Congress had given \$35 million to fund the station for 2002. The aim here was propaganda as entertainment, with the ideology and even US bias completely invisible. Radio Sawa is popular, 'the favourite

station of more than 50 per cent of listeners in its target audience' (*The Times*, 15 November 2002).

The Iraqi people as target

We must first observe that the targets of coalition propaganda were diverse and required different persuasion strategies to achieve different objectives. One very important target was the Iraqis themselves, the Iraqi people in general, and the Iraqi military in particular. Ideally the United States wished the people to rise up and destroy their leaders, but this proved to be a chimera. It also wanted them to welcome the US troops euphorically and to tolerate a US army of occupation. The methods the United States used were the traditional ones of psy-ops – leaflets and radio broadcasts – for this particular target market. By late February more than 8 million messages had been dropped over Iraq (*New York Times*, 24 February 2003). The leaflets were aimed at troops but leaflets were also disseminated among ordinary Iraqis assuring them that the war was not a war of conquest and that Iraq would be run by and for the Iraqi people. Sixty thousand of these Blair-British texts were printed daily. 'There was an echo of New Labour propaganda in the leaflet when Mr Blair promised that a new representative Iraqi government would develop public services and spend Iraq's wealth not on palaces and weapons of mass destruction, but on schools and hospitals' (*Daily Telegraph*, 5 April 2003).

Radio was a particularly powerful instrument with such civilians. At this level the United States was using cultural propaganda, broadcasting in Arabic 'with programmes that mimic the programme styles of local radio stations and are more sophisticated than the clumsy preaching of previous wartime propaganda efforts. . . . Senior military officials say, for example, that the US radio shows broadcast from the EC-130 Commando Solo planes followed the format of a popular Iraqi station, Voice of the Youth, managed by President Hussein's elder son, Uday. The US programmes open with greetings in Arabic, followed by Euro-pop and 1980s US rock music intended to appeal to younger Iraqi troops, perceived by officials as the ones most likely to lay down their arms. The broadcasts include traditional Iraqi folk music, so as not to alienate other listeners, and a news programme in Arabic prepared by army psychological operations experts at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. Then comes the official message. 'Any war is not against the Iraqi people, it is to disarm Mr Hussein and end his government' (*New York Times*, 14 February 2003). Some argued that a major lesson learned in Afghanistan was the importance of explaining our presence there.

The Iraqi military

If the broadcasts to civilians carried a general message of friendship, the aural and literary message to Iraqi soldiers was more specific. One aim was, of course, to get them to desert so that no fighting would be necessary. Or to surrender. If propaganda really can achieve the goal of an evaporating enemy then it must rank as one of the most potent resources of the modern battlefield, raising also the possibility of a war whose casualties were light even among those who dared oppose the super-power. Clearly elements of the US leadership imagined that they could really stroll through Iraq and the entire opposition would melt away. Part of the aim of these communications, which also used television, was to stress that anyone who defended the Hussein regime would be brutally attacked and any war criminal would be put on trial. This process included, remarkably, direct attempts to communicate with commanders of Iraqi combat formations by military high-frequency radio, as well as attempts to reach the Iraqi military via their mobile phones (*Sunday Telegraph*, 29 March 2003). According to the *New York Times* (24 February 2003) 'American cyber-warfare experts recently waged an e-mail assault, directed at Iraq's political, military and economic leadership, urging them to break with Saddam Hussein's government. A wave of calls has gone to the private cellphone numbers of specially selected officials inside Iraq, according to leaders at the Pentagon and in the regional Central Command.' Missile operators were warned.

The military effectiveness of propaganda

US officers apparently had great faith in these methods. In the words of General Michael Moseley (*New York Times*, 24 February 2003) 'it pays to drop the leaflets. It sends a direct message to the operator on the gun. It sends a direct message to the chain of command.' Other military leaders claimed that propaganda had been integrated into military planning in ways never seen before – although they did not, of course, call it propaganda. In the words of General Paul Lebras, 'What we're seeing now is the weaving of economic warfare, psy-ops and other information warfare through every facet of the plan from preparation through execution.' The *New York Times* pointed out this truth (24 February 2003), that 'there are many ways to disable an enemy's operations'. Anti-aircraft radar, for example, can be destroyed from the air or captured on the ground but 'the enemy soldiers running the radar can be convinced to shut down the system and just go home'. The US military had within it a joint information operations centre based in Texas, and personnel from this joined the Central Command info-warfare team.

There was a final clever trick. When the war finished, the hunt began. After all, there was no formal surrender as on Luneberg Heath in 1945. The former Baghdad regime simply disappeared. It was at this point that the coalition created what must rank as one of the more vivid tactical moves in the whole history of propaganda, that is to say, to publish images of the fifty senior leaders of the regime as a pack of playing cards, divided according to their significance as spades, hearts, clubs and ace of diamonds (and already a collectors' item).

Rhetorical aspects of the war

Colonel Collins

'Shock and Awe' – these words alone remind us (and they were the brand name for the opening of the campaign) that the Iraq war was an exercise in rhetoric as well as myth making. All sides used rhetoric, the aim being to guide and bias perception. There is perhaps a distinction between rhetoric and eloquence, eloquence being its more elevated form.

Colonel Tim Collins of the Royal Irish Regiment achieved fame not in battle, the eminence of this military man rests on rhetorical skills alone: he apparently 'moved his men to tears' (*Daily Mirror*, 20 March 2003). In fact Colonel Collins's speech was a masterpiece of studied ambivalence, and it could be interpreted as meaning almost anything. The *Mirror's* headline was 'Show respect', and quoted:

If you are ferocious in battle remember to be magnanimous in victory. If someone surrenders ensure that one day they will go home to their family. We go to liberate, not to conquer. You will have to go a long way to find a more decent, generous people than the Iraqis. Show respect for them. Their children will be poor but in years to come they will know that the light of liberation was brought by you. Our business now is north.

For the *Sun* (20 March 2003), however, interpretation was rather different, under the heading 'Brit colonel's storming battle-cry' 'show them no pity . . . they have stains on their souls'. And here the colonel apparently became vengeful:

The enemy should be in no doubt that we are his nemesis and we are bringing about his rightful destruction. There are many regional commanders who have stains on their souls and they are stoking the fires of hell for Saddam. He and his forces will be destroyed by this coalition for what they have done. As they die they will know their deeds have bought them to this place. Show them no pity.

Other parts of the speech can be regarded as studied masterpieces of political correctness and multicultural sensitivity: 'Iraq is steeped in history.

It is the site of the Garden of Eden, of the great Flood and the birthplace of Abraham. Tread lightly there. You will see things that no man could pay to see. . . . You will be embarrassed by their hospitality, even though they have nothing.' The colonel stressed that his men and the enemy shared a common humanity: 'if there are casualties of war, remember, when they woke up and got dressed in the morning they did not plan to die this day. Allow them dignity in death. Bury them properly and mark their graves.' There is an important rationale behind this kind of eloquence, for the men who fight, in the familial circumstances of a regiment whose comrades they have come to regard as brothers, the temptation to be ruthless to an enemy and kill gratuitously is present. In this sense, eloquence is a way of internalising discipline. Colonel Collins again:

It is a big step to take another human life. It is not to be done lightly. I know of men who have taken life needlessly in other conflicts. I can assure you they will live with the mark of Cain upon them. If someone surrenders to you, remember they have that right in international law. The ones who wish to fight, well, we aim to please. If you harm the regiment or its history by over-enthusiasm in killing or cowardice, know it is your family who will suffer. You will be shunned unless your conduct is of the highest, for your deeds will follow you down through history. We will bring shame on neither our uniform or our nation.

Colonel Collins was far from being the only rhetorician of the Gulf war, his speech was not the only piece of striking rhetoric. Another voice of eloquence was that of eighty-five-year-old Senator Robert Byrd: 'I weep for my country. No more is the image of America one of the strong yet benevolent peace keeper. Around the globe our friends mistrust us, our word is disputed, our intentions are questioned, we flaunt our superpower status with arrogance' (speech delivered on the floor of the US Senate, 19 March 2003, www.commondreams.org). There was something of the Roman about Senator Byrd.

Coalition rhetoric

In contrast, the soundbites of the coalition were banal, even counterproductive. According to the *New York Times* (8 April 2003), 'US briefings, from Mr Bush on down, were always on plan, and our coalitions are always the largest in history.' The hyperbole of the coalition was a feature which irritated many commentators, but nevertheless it is an important facet of propaganda, starting with the 'Axis of Evil'. All Iraqi paramilitaries were to be 'death squads'. The war was a serial branding exercise. From 'Shock and Awe' to 'Coalition of the Willing', 'regime change', 'weapons of mass destruction' the entire exercise was punctuated with pithy and duplicitous phrases which were inserted into the public consciousness, bred and multiplied in it, so that

the public space swarmed with them. In the end the events could not be read in any other way but through the language our theatrical directors had created for us. For effective rhetoric constitutes a way of seeing which crowds out other possible ways of seeing. This was the great insight of our spin doctors. And if circumstances change so could the rhetoric, hence the mutation into 'weapons of mass destruction-related programmes'.

Then, of course, there was the military jargon, itself an important part of the rhetorical war: targets were 'serviced', bombing became 'kinetic warfare', commanders could discourse on 'effects-based warfare'. Such pseudo-technical jargon, about as far away from the concept of eloquence as one can possibly get, is still as important as the burning metaphors of formal rhetoric. For what it does is effectively turn war into a technical process rather than a human catastrophe, and the jargon is usually successful at deafening us to the cries of suffering humanity. Eloquence, therefore, the glory of the English language as captured in Colonel Collins's heroic prose, is only one facet of the rhetoric of effective persuasion. Deracinated language and the language of the technical manual or bureaucratic process, or the witless argot of everyday speech, can do equal service as rhetorical performer.

Deracinated language can naturalise and neutralise the exceptional and the perverse in the colours of the everyday. Radio Sawa was rather good at doing this. Thus *The Times* (15 November 2002) contrasted reports on Radio Sawa and Radio Damascus. Radio Sawa described the death of a Palestinian thus: 'Palestinian is killed by Israeli gunfire in Nablus.' Radio Damascus: 'Despite the curfew imposed by the Israeli occupation army on Nablus for more than 100 days, tension prevailed today over the area of Nablus where a Palestinian youth, aged 15 years, was martyred and five others were wounded in various confrontations between Palestinian civilians and the occupation army'. An Iraqi diplomatic offensive was described thus by Radio Sawa: 'sources said Iraq was probably asking that Gulf States not allow the US to use their military installations as launching points for the attacks on Iraq.' Radio Damascus: 'diplomatic and political efforts continue against the US's insistence on aggression against Iraq. Iraqi Foreign Minister, Naji Sabri, said the US stood as a dangerous threat to the future of the region.' Language also performs the happy duty of obscurantism, as in 'Rumspeak':

There are no known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say, we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tend to be the difficult ones. (*The Economist*, 6 December 2003)

Deceit and duplicity

Fabrication

Both in the run-up to the war and during the war itself there were increasingly voluble accusations that the British and US governments were fabricating evidence that favoured conflict with Saddam Hussein. There were the charges that Bush himself was loose with the facts. *The Wall Street Journal* claimed in October 2002 that 'senior officials constantly make reference to intelligence that could be neither proved or disproved. Both a senior former CIA official and *USA Today* accuse the government of using biased information' (quoted by Paul Krugman, *New York Times*, 25 October 2002). This sleight-of-hand became visible when it was revealed that 10 Downing Street had borrowed large parts of an old PhD thesis without acknowledgement to help create a public dossier on Saddam Hussein. This work 'related to events around the time of the Gulf War in 1991, but was presented by the British government as up-to-date. The dossier also plagiarised from *Jane's Intelligence Review*' (*Daily Telegraph*, 8 February 2003). Colin Powell praised this dossier in his presentation to the UN Security Council on 5 February 2003. Such was the extent of the plagiarism that not even grammatical errors were corrected.

The document was not simply plagiarised, it was also altered (*Sunday Times*, 9 February 2003). For example, the phrase 'helping opposition groups' was changed to 'supporting terrorist organisations' and 'monitoring foreign embassies' became 'spying on foreign embassies'. On 27 April 2003 the *Independent on Sunday* carried the headline 'Revealed: how the road to war was paved with lies'. It claimed that there was no evidence of chemical, biological, nuclear or banned missile activity by Baghdad:

the case for invading Iraq to remove its weapons of mass destruction was based on selective use of intelligence, exaggeration of sources named. A CIA report on the likelihood that Saddam would use weapons of mass destruction was partially declassified. The parts released were those which made it appear that the danger was high; only after pressure from Senator Bob Graham, the head of the Senate Intelligence Committee, was the whole report declassified, including a conclusion that the chance of Iraq using chemical weapons were very low for the foreseeable future. On biological weapons, the Secretary of State, Colin Powell, told the UN Security Council in February that the former regime had up to eighteen mobile laboratories. He attributed the information to defectors from Iraq, without saying that their claims – including one about a secret biological laboratory beneath the Saddam Hussein Hospital in central Baghdad – had repeatedly been disproved by UN weapons inspectors.

The article also pointed out that a report released in autumn 2002 by Tony Blair claimed that Iraq could deploy chemical and biological weapons

within forty-five minutes, but that Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon said that such weapons might have escaped detection because they had been dismantled and buried. The article concluded, 'Some American officials have all but conceded that the weapons of mass destruction campaign was simply a means to an end – a "global show of American power and democracy," as ABC News in the US put it. "We were not lying," it was told by one official, "but it was just a matter of emphasis.'" Perhaps this is the definition of propaganda. In the end, the war's truths and its illusions – such as the packaged miniature epic 'Saving Private Jessica' – were hopelessly intermingled.

The creation of enemies

If public opinion was to support a war with Iraq, it was essential for the Anglo-American alliance to utterly demonise Saddam and his regime. Really Saddam made the perfect enemy, he was a stage villain ordained by central casting, complete with heavy moustache and fedora. The most important part of the construction of Saddam's Enmity was of course the notion that he was a direct threat to the safety of the West through both his alleged weapons of mass destruction and his alleged close link with Osama bin Laden. If this magnitude of threat was to be credible, Saddam had also to be made into a truly evil man capable of anything. We had to learn to hate Saddam, and this was not difficult. So in the prologue to the war the British Foreign Office drew up a twenty-three-page report (*Daily Telegraph*, 3 December 2002) which dwelt laboriously on the various medieval processes of torture employed by Saddam's executioners – the gouged eyes, hands pierced with electric drills, suspension from the ceiling, acid baths, sexual abuse, electric shocks, etc; son Uday maintained a private torture chamber; one militia man functions as a professional rapist; prisoners are kept in rows of steel boxes as found in mortuaries until they confess or die. And there is the amputation of the tongue as penalty for insulting the President (as mentioned by George W. Bush). The briefing where journalists were presented with this report by the Foreign Office also included a video show depicting the beating and execution of prisoners and the famous scenes after the gas attack on Kurdish villages (*Daily Telegraph*, 3 December 2002). This theme of a murderously evil regime was continued into the war itself.

Throughout the war expectations of the immediate discovery of weapons of mass destruction were constantly stimulated. The press built up the image of 'Chemical Ali' and his female Mini-me, christened of course 'Chemical Sally'; expectations of a chemical attack were genuine. The evidence in support of this contention, the discovery of protective clothing for Iraqi troops, was tenuous, yet reports claimed that 'US and British forces

have found mounting evidence of a potential chemical or biological attack' or that the 'CIA's intelligence reports reveal that dozens of artillery shells tipped with poisonous Sarin, VX nerve agent or mustard gas have already been deployed. They have gone to troops in the Medina Division of the Republican Guard currently dug in South Baghdad' (*Sun*, 29 March 2003).

There were many other allegations of Iraqi brutality which were the extrinsic manifestation of an evil regime. Saddam's militia deliberately situated themselves next to civilian homes, defence installations stood in the suburbs; Iraqi troops advanced under a white flag, then fired; Iraqi troops deliberately fired on fleeing civilians. While there was some truth in these allegations, it was critically important for the coalition to create atrocity propaganda as a justification for war and as the ultimate manifestation, in atrocious acts, of Saddam's evil. And if atrocities could not be found they could always be fabricated. When Tony Blair appeared with George W. Bush at a news conference at Camp David he claimed that two British soldiers had been executed after their capture by the Iraqis. The evidence was that their bodies were lying next to their upturned Land Rover rather than inside it. Blair condemned 'the release of those pictures of executed British soldiers' by Al-Jazeera as an 'act of cruelty beyond comprehension'. The family of one of the dead protested, saying that the army had told them the soldier had died in combat (*Daily Telegraph*, 29 March 2003).

Myths of the war

Two foundation myths

We have argued that the confectionery of myth is the fundamental attribute of the activity of the propagandist. The Iraq war was constructed on two foundation myths. The first was that Saddam Hussein was concealing an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, chemical, nuclear and biological. The danger was that he would use them, perhaps on the other Arab states, perhaps on Israel, perhaps, as he had before, on the hapless Kurds. The second foundation myth, that of the linkage between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, was intimately connected with the first. For if Saddam possessed weapons of mass destruction and had created a relationship with Bin Laden, it followed that Bin Laden had access to weapons of mass destruction: a suicide bomber, and a dirty bomb? The idea was dreadful. But was it true? It seemed to many all along that both ideas really were myths, myths in the vernacular sense of being untrue. Yet to admit to the untruth of these myths publicly would have destroyed the very moral foundation of the Anglo-American invasion, and so, after the

conclusion of war, the Prime Minister was continuing to assert his increasingly laboured faith in the inevitability of their discovery.

The concept of emotional proof

Did the coalition leaders really believe in their own myths? This is not an easy question to answer, and at one level they surely did. The question is perhaps better put in a different way: not 'Did they fully believe in the myths?' but 'Did they believe in them sufficiently to be motivated to carry out an invasion of a nation of 25 million people with all the uncertainties and insecurities involved?' Perhaps the answer to this question may lie also in the concept of emotional proof, which is not the same as rational proof. *Emotional proof is where we feel intuitively that there is a causal connection which is highly significant to the creation of some event and yet which cannot easily be pinned down, but where we also believe this thing to be true because we have a deep emotional need for it to be true.* It is possible that this explains the peculiar determination of George W. Bush to exorcise the demon of Saddam Hussein. And in one sense he was right. The dominant, even the exclusive motive of Osama bin Laden was the presence of US troops on the soil of the land of the two holy cities, Mecca and Medina, and the contamination ascribed to it. Those soldiers were there to contain Saddam Hussein. Therefore Saddam Hussein was indeed an indirect cause of Nine-eleven. So remove Osama's *raison d'être* by removing Saddam. Indeed, Donald Rumsfeld announced the future withdrawal of US troops from Saudi immediately the Iraq war was finished. This is emotional proof rather than logical proof; the invasion of Kuwait put in motion the sequence of events which led to Nine-eleven. Saddam Hussein was not responsible for Nine-eleven in deductive logic, and yet, in emotional proof, he was.

Other Gulf War myths

There were two foundation myths to the Iraq war, therefore, but numerous other myths emerged to support the super-myths. One was that this war would fulfil the promise implicit in the first Gulf War, that war could be clean, that strikes could be surgical, that one could fight an antiseptic war without dead civilians. While the accuracy of modern electronically guided weapons is truly remarkable, the idea of deathless war must rank as one of those delightful myths by which democracies so often beguile themselves, a winsome conceit to deaden the pain of reality. Other support myths included the idea that the Iraqi people would rise up and destroy their rulers themselves, something in fact they were too afraid to do, and that they would warmly welcome their liberators – at best a half-truth, because

of the ambivalence most Iraqis felt towards the United States. The war was also conducted with large helpings of disinformation, such as the rumours that Saddam had been killed (*Sunday Telegraph*, 23 March 2000: it claimed the CIA believed there was a fifty-fifty chance that Saddam was dead).

Foundation myths (1) Saddam–Bin Laden alliance

The alleged link with Bin Laden was also significant to the coalition, although they were sufficiently shameless to manufacture other causes of war when the lead justifications were disproved. The evil that Saddam had done could always be conveniently polished as an alternative justification, one which was in fact increasingly advocated, so that towards the end the war was becoming merely one of liberation of an Arab people from a great evil rather than the protection of ourselves from that same evil. Before the war much effort had gone in to proving that link with Bin Laden, Dick Cheney claiming that Iraq had trained Al-Qaeda fighters: 'That's why confronting the threat imposed by Iraq is not a distraction from the war on terror, it is absolutely crucial to winning the war on terror. The war on terror will not be won until Iraq is completely and verifiably deprived of weapons of mass destruction' (*Daily Telegraph*, 3 December 2002). The *Sunday Telegraph* (27 April) was announcing as its banner headline 'World exclusive: the proof that Saddam worked with Bin Laden'. The paper claimed it had discovered intelligence documents in Baghdad proving a direct link, and that one Western intelligence official described this as 'sensational'. Another headline claimed 'Bush always suspected Saddam was behind Nine-eleven'. The trouble with this is that any link can be proved between any regime in the world and there always exists transmission of information at some level. The real question is 'What is the significance of this?' On what point of the scale would Saddam be implicated? The UK tabloid press was also insistent, claiming proof of links with Al-Qaeda terrorists (*Sun*, 6 April 2003), and dutifully reiterating the point made by Colin Powell in his UN speech.

Maureen Dowd claimed in the *New York Times* (9 March 2003) that George Bush had cited Nine-eleven eight times in a news conference, and she quoted William Ryder: 'As a bogus rallying cry, Remember Nine Eleven ranks with Remember the Maine of 1898 for war with Spain or the Gulf of Tonkin resolution of 1964.' Ms Dowd added, 'a culture more besotted with inane reality TV than scary reality is easily misled'. Dowd pointed out that in a *Times*-CBS News survey, 42 per cent believed Saddam was personally responsible for the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and in an ABC News poll 55 per cent believe he gave direct support to

Bin Laden: 'the case for war has been incoherent due to the overlapping reasons conservatives want to get rid of Saddam'.

Foundation myths (2) Weapons of mass destruction

The other foundation myth, that of weapons of mass destruction, received formal endorsement in a dossier presented to the British Cabinet Office's Joint Intelligence Committee published on 24 September 2002. Tony Blair argued that there was 'as clear evidence as you can get that he is continuing with his weapons programme and the threat is real, serious and continues' (*Guardian*, 24 September 2002). Blair added that Hussein 'will launch an external attack on his neighbours'. In February 2003 a Sky TV poll revealed that many Britons had now become convinced of the truth of this, with 79 per cent convinced Saddam possessed weapons of mass destruction and only 21 per cent doubtful (*Sun*, 6 February 2003). The myth of the weapons of mass destruction was in fact the principal justification for war. In the words of Paul Wolfowitz, 'President Bush's determination to use force if necessary is because of the threat posed by Iraq's weapons of mass destruction' (*Daily Telegraph*, 3 December 2002). British public opinion came quickly to believe that it had been manipulated into fighting the Iraq war (ICM poll results, 24 August 2003). Blair's claim that Iraq could launch weapons of mass destruction in forty-five minutes looked increasingly risible. Had No. 10 spin doctors really 'sexed up' the now infamous dossier? Had their bullying driven principal biological weapons expert Dr David Kelly to commit suicide? (It was also posthumous bullying – 'Walter Mitty' and so forth). For Blair's government, lost in a political Golgotha more desolate than any British administration had faced for many years, there seemed no obvious point of exit.

Partisan perspectives (1) The media war

Print

The print media had a vigorous and partisan war. So also did television. Increasingly the mass media seemed to forget their role as self-appointed fearless inquisitor after truth and became instead merely appendices of some vast semi-visible propaganda machine. In Britain the tabloids were violently divided. The editor of the *Daily Mirror*, Piers Morgan, embarked upon what can only be described as a propaganda crusade, one of the most aggressive and hyperbolic in the whole history of journalism. The *Sun* was somewhat less passionate, its bias precisely the opposite view, closely followed by the *Daily Mail* after some slight initial hesitation on account of

the size of its female readership. Soon the *Mail* was lauding the war and jeering at the anti-war camp ('extremist links of the anti-war rally leaders who called children on to the streets'). The *Sun* embroidered the patriotic theme in its own inimitable way, featuring on 4 and 20 March sundry images of almost naked women with small strips of combat gear as the slight, final protectors of their modesty. Another *Sun* poster, 'The *Sun* backs our girls' (18 March), was fully clothed and featured a service-woman foregrounding a union flag.

Banner headlines were the order of the day, the *Mirror* manufacturing some classic ones, for example 'Coalition of the bribed, bullied and blind' (22 March 2003). These were effective because they were set against poster-size photographs such as the caption 'Beast of the skies' over a picture of a massive B-52. Another memorable heading was 'UNlawful UNethical UNstoppable' (18 March). And the *Mirror* was determined to take the enemy seriously, with a treatise on how Saddam could fight back, listing the ferocious biological chemical and terrorist weapons he could have at his disposal. Such perspectives are immediately problematic when war is joined, the accusation that the paper is behaving in an unpatriotic way. The *Mirror* determined to continue its anti-war campaign during the process of the war itself, a strategy which lost it readers. It confronted the accusation of disloyalty by an effective stratagem: on one page, a massive picture (18 March 2003) of Tony Blair with the banner heading 'He's let us down' while opposite was an image of a British soldier and the retort 'He never will.' The *Mail* was reduced to mocking opponents of the war, such as 'Cocky Robin and the roller-coaster ride to resignation'.

The broadsheets were less ideologically consistent. On their comments pages every one of them permitted opponents of the dominant view to articulate their perspective, and this was true of *The Times*, the *Telegraph* and the *Guardian*. Nor could the pro-war media restrain the anti-war sentiments of some of their cartoonists, *The Times*, for example, publishing what must rank as the most tasteless cartoon in history (showing Tony Blair zipping up and George Bush pulling up his trousers). The *Spectator* published a cover (1 February 2003) with the legend 'Poodle power', featuring a massive decorated Texan boot and a minuscule Tony Blair in World War II pilot uniform standing proudly upon it.

Television

The television media seemed equally partisan, or were perceived as such, with the BBC attacked by the government for the alleged bias of its reporters. This was a charge it found difficult to sustain, unlike the liberal criticism of Fox News: 'Flag-waving patriotism is unrelenting, from the

reporters embedded with the American heroes and liberators on the front line in Iraq to the Rumsfeld-lauding talk-show host' (*Guardian*, 14 April 2003). Some idea of the chauvinist ethos of US television at this time is given by Rampton and Stauber (2003):

Networks quickly scrambled to give names to their war coverage, with corresponding graphic logos that swooshed and gleamed in 3-D colours accompanied by mood-inducing soundtracks. CBS chose 'America at War'. CNN went with 'Strike on Iraq'. CNBC used 'The Price of War' while NBC and MSNBC both went with 'Target: Iraq' – a choice that changed quickly as MSNBC joined Fox in using the Pentagon's own codename for the war, 'Operation Iraqi Freedom'. The logos featured fluttering American flags or motifs involving red, white and blue. On Fox, martial drumbeats accompanied regularly scheduled updates. Promos for MSNBC featured a photo-montage of soldiers accompanied by a piano rendition of 'The Star-spangled Banner'.

Liberals even began to suggest creating a liberal radio network as a riposte to the Rush Limbaugh show or those hosted by Oliver North and Gordon Liddy. 'Limbaugh entertains a 15 million audience with his pet obsessions such as, in this particular context, the French' (*Guardian*, 19 February 2003). Observers spoke of a charisma deficit on the liberal left. In truth, the nature of all media had changed since the first Gulf War little more than a decade before, the rise of talk radio and the ascent of Fox News had permanently altered the centre of gravity in these media. A cavalier, choleric right wing with its vivid personalities such as Bill O'Reilly and Anne Coulter had made the days of liberal CBS anchors anachronistic, almost a part of history. Rampton and Stauber (2003) describe a Fox anchor berating a professor who had written an anti-war letter as an 'obnoxious, pontificating jerk . . . A self-absorbed, condescending imbecile . . . An Ivy League intellectual lilliputian'. And NBC's Mike Savage was dismissive of 'turd-world nations'. The right had colour and the left had monochrome, and with the arrival of the Iraq conflict the right-wing pundits were ready to evangelise the war with their own boisterous nostrums.

Partisan perspectives (2) Private propaganda

A feature of the Iraq war was the level of private propaganda that it began to generate, embodied not only in the assertive posters of the 'Not in my name' campaign in the United Kingdom, which famously helped persuade a million marchers on to the streets of London, but also in the private initiatives of pressure groups and even of private citizens themselves. In the United States, organisations opposed to the war articulated their opposition in a classic American way. They advertised. Groups such as Bush Weakens

America printed dense copy in the press. Tom Paine dot-com created one of the best images: Bin Laden in the pointing pose of World War I Uncle Sam/Lord Kitchener recruiting posters with the phrase 'I want you to invade Iraq.' *Mad Magazine* manufactured 'Gulf War, Episode Two: Clone of the Attack', a photo-montaged pseudo-cinema poster festooned with images of warplanes, soldiers, explosions, and showcasing the various *dramatis personae* of the conflict.

The internet allowed individual initiative to surface in the propaganda war. For example, a retired sergeant of the Marine Corps, Ed Evans, wrote a kind of hyperbolic poem denouncing liberal treachery. Such texts, produced by individuals in their own homes, can attain extraordinary circulation, and possibly impact. If recipients are sufficiently moved to transmit them to every name in their address book, then by exponential process much of a country's population can be reached. Sergeant Evans, using the refrain:

I will not be manipulated,
I will not pretend to understand,
I will not forget.

went on to say, 'I will not forget the liberal media who have used freedom of the press to kick our country when it was vulnerable and hurting.' He argued that, speaking of the enemy, 'there is no compromise possible with such people, no meeting of minds, no point of understanding with such terror. Just a choice: defeat it or be defeated by it. And defeat it we must!'

I will force myself to:

Hear the weeping,
Feel their helplessness,
Imagine the terror,
Sense the panic,
Smell the burning flesh,
Experience the loss,
Remember the hatred.

I sat in a movie theatre, watching *Private Ryan*, and asked myself, where did they find the courage?

Now I know.

We have no choice. Living without liberty is not living.

Sergeant Evans urged his readers to 'keep this going until every living American has read and memorised it so we don't make the same mistake again'. Individuals could also engage in spectacular acts of vandalism which in the context of the Iraq war were appropriated as propaganda, such as the graffiti on the British war memorial at Etaples, 'Dig up your

rubbish, it is contaminating our soil' and 'Saddam will win and will make your blood flow' (*Daily Telegraph*, 4 April 2003).

Celebrity propaganda

Celebrities had the public prominence to be noticed when they made anti-war points, famously of course Michael Moore at the Oscars. Madonna's video *American Life* 'features models in haute-couture combat gear lobbing grenades at the audience, leaving viewers uncertain whether their idol is against war or just currently enamoured of the army surplus look'. Apparently she avoided clarity on this matter, 'releasing a statement to the effect that she is neither pro- nor anti-Saddam but simply wants to stir debate'. During the Iraq crisis groups such as Musicians United to Win without War put their name to newspaper advertisements. Blur and Massive Attack joined in with such campaigns but did not create fresh anti-war anthems to replace those of yesteryear (Neil McCormick, *Daily Telegraph*, 13 March 2003).

Fantasy and propaganda: the European, Arab and Iraqi media

Media self-deceit

The media had been oversold, promised an easy walk-over; some British and European journalists rapidly became suspicious. Judged retrospectively, their comments seem rather absurd: 'whether they like it or not . . . there has been a psychological and military miscalculation of enormous proportions and it has spread a damaging and depressed uncertainty among the British and American electorates'. This article went on to claim:

within a few days it was clear that the Iraqis were actually winning the propaganda war. They are winning because, in stark contrast to the coalition, they keep it simple. They broadcast the message: we're still here and we will win. Furthermore they let reporters in Baghdad say more or less what they like, censoring them invisibly to the viewer by restricting their movements. (Brian Appleyard, *Sunday Times*, 30 March 2003)

According to the leaked memo of one BBC defence correspondent:

I was gobsmacked to hear . . . in a set of headlines today that the coalition were suffering significant casualties. This is simply not true, nor is it true to say . . . that coalition forces are fighting guerrillas. It may be a guerrilla warfare but they are not guerrillas. And who dreamt up the line that the coalition was achieving small victories at a very high price? The truth is exactly the

opposite. The gains are huge and the cost still relatively low. This is real warfare, however one-sided, and losses are to be expected. (*Sunday Telegraph*, 30 March 2003)

The media became extraordinarily pessimistic, especially in Britain: 'hopes, however over-optimistic, of a quick, clean victory were being drowned by the bloody blasts of high explosive and the whine of shrapnel' (*Sunday Times*, 30 March 2003).

The Arab press

Much of the Arab media supported Saddam Hussein as a kind of Arab saviour for his bellicose anti-Americanism, his status as the only Arab leader who had confronted the United States, as well as his boisterous support for the Palestinians. The quality of this endorsement should, however, be scrutinised, for many Arabs were not in fact blind to the violent excesses of the regime. They voiced support for Saddam as a symbolic anti-Israeli and anti-American gesture rather than from some deep adherence to his cause. Those Arabs who did go and volunteer to fight for Saddam met with real hostility from the Iraqi people.

During this war the Arab media appeared to be living a lie:

Arab media are giving the impression that Iraq has already won the war. The mood is triumphant, and little attention has been given to the progress of the coalition forces towards Baghdad. 'Iraq has inflicted major losses on the coalition forces and the Americans and British are suffering a defeat they will never forget,' said a commentator on Syrian television. In Cairo, an editorial in the daily *al-Ahram* said Iraq had succeeded in turning the conflict into a long and bitter war and predicted that British and American public opinion would turn against it . . . the Qatar daily *al-Rai* praised the Iraqis for restoring Arab honour. (*Daily Telegraph*, 29 March 2003)

Such wilful self-deceit seems in retrospect pathetic, but given their geopolitical perspective it was hardly surprising. This suggests again the role of fantasy and self-deception in propaganda. Nor did the Arab news media alone articulate noisy support for Iraq. Again there was the pop music: 'the new video of Shaaban Abdel-Rahim, who sings folksy street music for the masses, flashes back to scenes from the last Gulf War and blasts the West for perceived double standards'. He topped Egyptian charts earlier with a song featuring the phrase 'I hate Israel,' after which US groups pressured McDonald's to drop 'his catchy jingle for their new falafel' (*Daily Telegraph*, 13 March 2003). Even near the end, some Arab papers continued to pretend that the alliance was nowhere near Baghdad, giving prominence to the verbal peregrinations of the Iraqi Information Minister, Mohammed

Said Sahhaf. The images of iconoclasm, the smashing of Saddam's statues, appear to have caused genuine astonishment in the Middle East, for such events 'overthrew the biggest lie in the recent history of the Arab world' (*The Times*, 10 April 2003).

Iraqi propaganda

Improbable though it may seem at this stage, the propaganda of the Iraqi regime had some admirers in the West, including those who began to say that Iraq was actually winning the propaganda war. Thus Hala Jaber claimed that Iraqi propaganda was working with the Iraqi people:

they have cast the war as a *jihad* in defence of the motherland. Saddam has worked hard to rally the nation behind a sense of patriotism. Many say that he has succeeded. . . . [I]n the face of foreign invasion, internal political differences are put aside. Arab tribes, Baath party members and religious sects had united under one banner, faith and culture – that of patriotism. (*Sunday Times*, 30 March 2003)

In practice the Iraqi propaganda machine, as described by the BBC correspondent Rageh Omaar, could hardly have been more cackhanded:

by putting such severe restrictions on where we are allowed to set our broadcasting equipment, the regime ensured that many reports that they had diligently helped us to gather are simply never sent out. . . . [A]fter what are often useful briefings from the most senior Iraqi officials, we are unable to send our reports. . . . [T]he allegations that we are being seduced by a slick Iraqi propaganda machine are way off the mark. (*Sunday Telegraph*, 30 March 2003)

One of the biggest errors of the Iraqi regime was so to antagonise Al-Jazeera that it decided to exit Iraq (*Daily Telegraph*, 4 April 2003). The regime ordered one Al-Jazeera journalist out of Iraq and banned another from working. In doing this Iraq effectively neutralised its most effective propaganda conduit. Al-Jazeera had a world audience during the war of 40 million, the only television team in Basra, and a ruthless willingness to show images of civilian death which created powerful atrocity propaganda against the coalition.

In the end, of course, Iraqi propaganda became counterproductive as the coalition advanced. In the final days 'comical Ali', Information Minister Mohamed Said Sahhaf, began to command centre-stage. News about the war began to focus on the character of the Information Minister himself, whose hyperbolic optimism and tenuous grip on reality combined with an own-label brand of blood-curdling rhetoric to turn him into a Monty Pythonesque character accorded the honour of his own website, 'We love the Iraqi information Minister dot com' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 13 April 2003).

He became a cult figure, T-shirts appeared festooned with 'his most outrageous lies' and the website was temporarily down owing to the blossoming of interest. Quotes of the day included such gems as 'I now inform you that you are too far from reality.' Aprons carried his marvels of spin, such as 'God will roast their stomachs in hell' or 'My feelings – as usual – we will slaughter them all.' According to the website 'he stands superior to truth'. The fascination was because he seemed surreal, a cartoon figure who simply contradicted such realities as the fact that Baghdad airport had been captured. Another gem: 'I'm here now to tell you, we do not have any Scud missiles and I do not know why they were fired into Kuwait' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 13 April 2003). Finally he went on 10 April. He was the last intact member of the regime and had already seen US troops before he disappeared after saying, 'No, no, no, maybe there are two or three tanks, but they will go.' Like Goebbels, he remained to the end; with the surrealism of his own performance the regime was in its final days pure propaganda without any kind of army, state or leadership, the propaganda ticking on for some days after the political entity whose vision it expressed had completely disappeared.

The limitations of propaganda: control

In a democracy the press can only ever be influenced and not controlled. Government information can only ever be an invitation to accept an interpretation. And this offer can be refused. America's problem in the second Gulf War was that so many foreign commentators simply rejected the perspective of the US government. Some of these critics saw the war as part of the broader political problem of so-called American exceptionalism. For example, Henry Porter in the *Observer* (23 March 2003) produced a list of the United States' errors of omission and commission – the Land-mine Treaty, the International Criminal Court, the Kyoto agreement, the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty, the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention's planned inspection powers, tariffs on steel imports, subsidies to its own farmers: 'It has become clear that America has been crudely manipulating many agendas in its own interests . . . there is a gathering conviction that America is, to use the word of the moment, in state of persistent non-compliance on too many protocols, agreements, treaties and conventions to number'.

Coherent integrating perspective. For other hostile observers, their antagonism was part of a broader rejection of US culture, a stance by no means confined to Middle Eastern critics. Listen to what the novelist Margaret Drabble had to say:

I was tipped into an uncontrollable rage by a report on Channel 4 news about 'friendly fire', which included footage of what must have been one of the most horrific bombardments ever filmed. But what struck home hardest was the subsequent image, of the row of American warplanes, with grinning cartoon faces painted on their noses. Cartoon faces, with big sharp teeth. It is grotesque. It is hideous. This great and powerful nation bombs foreign citizens and the people in those cities from Disneyland cartoon planes out of comic strips . . . others have written elegantly about the euphemistic and affectionate names that the Americans give to their weapons of mass destruction: Big Boy, Little Boy, Daisy Cutter, and so forth . . . but there was something about those playfully grinning warplane faces that went beyond deception and distortion into the land of madness. A nation that can allow those faces to be painted as an image on its national aeroplanes has regressed into unimaginable irresponsibility. A nation that can paint those faces on death machines must be insane. There, I have said it. I have tried to control my anti-Americanism, remembering the many Americans that I know and respect, but I can't keep it down any longer. I detest Disneyfication, I detest Coca-cola, I detest burgers, I detest sentimental and violent Hollywood movies that lie about history. I detest American imperialism, American infantilism, and American triumphalism about victories it didn't even win. (*Daily Telegraph*, 8 May 2003)

This critique articulates the emotional core of anti-Americanism today, a sentiment that is by no means confined to the left. This diatribe would resonate even with some *Telegraph* readers, and it is ironic that the *Telegraph* of all papers should have printed the most eloquent attack on the war of all those that I have read. Eloquent because the article uses the image of warplanes painted with faces as the central organising metaphor for her polemic. The painted-face warplane is for her symbolic both of the military aggression, technological dominance and alleged cultural deformity of the US nation. Against such hostility, what can propaganda do except to recognise that propaganda elicits counter-propaganda, and in this context Drabble herself has been self-conscripted into the ranks of Gulf War propagandists.

The quality of her literary rage is almost intoxicating, but it is also astonishingly selective both of the evidence and of the reasoning behind US actions. It demonstrates the effectiveness in propaganda of the coherent integrating perspective; 'American imperialism' seems to plausibly meld together phenomena connected with America into a universal explanatory framework. What stands outside that framework – such as US interventions in Bosnia, Somalia and Kosovo, where no conceivable US interest was served by intervention, is conveniently ignored or awkwardly incorporated.

The management of anarchy

The problem with war propaganda is that the propagandist cannot control the media, merely try to persuade those who control the media; nor can we control the actions of the forces of our own side. Both elements may and probably will betray us. As in Vietnam, the media can develop a universal negative consensus: similarly, despite the best efforts of rhetoric and the management of imagery, our own forces can do the most craven and stupid things because their ability is ultimately defined by the lowest common denominator of intelligence of their own soldiers. Where this worked well, as at the Imam Ali mosque, where US troops fell in to the shout of 'Everybody smile' from the platoon commander 'as he told his baffled men to kneel down and point their weapons to the ground in a surreal act of submission' (*Daily Telegraph*, 4 April 2003), it can become useful propaganda for a cause.

At its worst it can make the pro-government case articulated by the most sophisticated propaganda machine ever created seem cruel and murderous. Listen to Lance-corporal Gerard of the Household Cavalry:

there was a boy of about 12 years old. He was no more than 20 metres away when the Yank opened up. There were all these civilians around. He had absolutely no regard for human life. I believe he was a cowboy. There were four or five that I noticed earlier and this one had broken off and was on his own when he attacked. He'd just gone out on a jolly. I'm curious about what's going to happen to him. He's killed one of my friends and he's killed him on the second round. (*The Times*, 31 March 2003)

These two accounts show how far the American propaganda effort was dependent on the moral and military tactical decisions of individual soldiers and airmen. In the first instance, the lieutenant had acted with cultural insight and real initiative, instinctively recognising both the power of symbolism in that context and what particular symbolisation rituals he should order his men to enact. In the second, the pilot appears to have been blinded by the lust of battle; yet there is supreme political sensitivity in actions taken on the modern battlefield. There was an even more extreme example of this at Fallujah, thirty miles west of Baghdad, during a demonstration about the occupation of the local school. Fifteen people, including two boys, were killed: 'though the US troops say they fired in self-defence – and may well have done so – television footage of bleeding Iraqis, clearly unarmed, lying on the road, has shocked Western viewers' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 4 May 2003).

Events can also favour the propagandist; the symbolism, time and again, of the iconoclasm, the multiple populist beheadings of Saddamite statuary, and, ghoulishly, the discoveries of the mass graveyards of the murdered.

The crashing statues, the cracked cement heads, will be the image this war bequeaths to history, resonant symbols of propaganda value beyond price.

Media independence

The trouble with all these efforts at message production is that in the end propaganda is not a science but an immensely crude art. We cannot foreordain outcomes, we can only make intelligent guesses. Here, for example, is a cartoon in *The Times* of London (10 April 2003). It is captioned 'Budget day' and contains two images, one with the word 'Profit' underneath, the other with the words 'And loss'. The first is of a (cartoon) photograph in black-and-white of Saddam Hussein in a beret. The second (cartoon) photograph is of the famous armless boy, reduced almost to a torso, his skin a mass of bloody matted flesh. Such an image can effectively undermine the work of a legion of spin doctors. In propaganda, in a democracy, the free media may obey personal prejudices or economic interests and as such may indeed be effective propagandists for a government, but radicals who deny the media their independence are exaggerating. A newspaper is indeed a product, and as such it sells not just by sustaining expectations but also by selling novelty. So the press is inherently both conservative and radical, since the diet of unalloyed conservatism would bore even the most sedate of its readers. The press has to surprise us; in the Iraq war, even pro-war newspapers were sufficiently flexible to carry some anti-war messages such as the boy in the cartoon.

In this war, it is probably accurate to say, one particular event alienated the public most, or at least the kind of public that writes letters to newspapers and leads opinion. This was the apparent sacking of Iraq's National Museum of Archaeology by looters, many of them organised. Nothing in the war quite so antagonised intellectual opinion as this, the image of a nation ostensibly robbed of its cultural heritage, and by extension the entire world, given the significance of ancient Mesopotamia in the evolution of civilisation (though many artefacts subsequently resurfaced from safe storage). The inability of the US command to recognise this, and to engage in the simple expedient of sending in guards, was to many incredible. In this instance such indolence could almost cohere with the 'cultural Disneyland' libel propagated by America's antagonists. A conundrum of wartime propaganda is that much of the key imagistic material is completely out of the control of propagandists themselves, making their role to retrieve the situation after the fact, or simply hope that the world will forget. It usually does. These events also raised profound questions about the education of soldiers. An educational process which tutors them to be mere technicians is bound to end in such consequences when mere technicians go to war in a febrile social and cultural context.

The narrative production of the Iraq war was officially terminated with George W. Bush's fighter jet landing on the USS *Abraham Lincoln*. It was a theatrical tableau: the setting sun, the great 'Mission accomplished' banner, 'Commander-in-chief' painted beneath the cockpit, and (according to Democrats) a \$1 million cost (Rampton and Stauber 2003). In the end came recognition, with the admission by Colin Powell, that weapons of mass destruction did not exist. It was a reaffirmation of Mark Twain's aphorism, that a lie can travel half-way round the world while truth is still tying its shoelaces.

Afterword

The impact of propaganda

The claims made for the impact of propaganda are of course extensive. To 'prove' them in a clinical sense is much more difficult. Certainly enemies have been more inclined to attribute their opponents' success to manipulative ability than to courage. Thus a British view of Napoleon: 'it is a mystifying truth that he has done more mischief by means of the *Moniteur* of Paris than he has ever effected by the united efforts of the cannon and the sword' (Taylor 1990).

It is certainly possible to choose particular moments in history where seizure of the propaganda initiative does appear to have been decisive, such as the significance of German newsreels in re-establishing the Hitler myth in the wake of the July plot (Taylor 1990). The campaign orchestrated by the London advertising industry in 1914 at the behest of Lord Kitchener was the most successful in history up till that time. Kitchener (Pollock 1994) recognised that Britain's miniature professional army would be no match for the Germans and had to be supplemented by a vast influx of new soldiers, but he also opposed conscription. Therefore a campaign began to recruit 3 million volunteers, and he succeeded in meeting this target. What other term could describe such a campaign but 'propaganda'? To say that 'communication' created a volunteer army the size of the current Irish Republic tells nothing about the intrinsic nature of that communication.

One can also argue that the influence of particular propagandists on the evolution of historical events is demonstrable, as one might for instance with Verdi and the Italian Risorgimento, with many of his operas an impassioned cry against tyranny, *Rigoletto*, *Don Carlos*, *Aida*, *I Lombardi*, *The Battle for Legnano*. He was a 'master of the rebellion genre' (Perris 1985). And emergent social phenomena can be attributable to powerful propaganda entrepreneurship: environmentalist, feminist and other contemporary agendas for example were not initiated by political parties but via the

disorganised public evangelism of organised private groupings (see Richardson 1995). In all these cases it is impossible to isolate the influence of propaganda from that of other explanatory factors: the Risorgimento would have happened without Verdi, Hitler would have re-established his authority had the newsreels remained silent, reappraisal of the ethical status of abortion might, possibly, have occurred among the medical community without the evangelism of the Right to Life movement. At this level, then, belief in the power of propaganda is mere faith, made credible, of course, by persuasive examples and arguments.

Yet we come, again, to the problem of objective proof, and it is an insoluble one. How indeed does one ever 'prove' the effectiveness of propaganda in framing and forming the twentieth century, even if we believe that it did? The great revolutionaries of the twentieth century certainly had faith in its efficacy: as Hitler commented on the disintegration of German army morale in 1918 (propaganda documents were found on many prisoners), 'One could now see the effects of this gradual seduction. Our soldiers learned to think the way the enemy wanted them to think.' Hitler recognised the apolitically of most people, and that 'opinion and actions are determined much more by impressions produced on their senses than by reflection' (Blain 1988).

Belief is one thing, scientific evidence is another. Naturally in the communist and fascist revolutions of the twentieth century there was little incentive for anybody on either side to measure the effectiveness of the propaganda. One who did, an SPD organiser called Serge Chakotin (1971), in a controlled experiment applied 'new', i.e. copied from the Nazis, propaganda methods to four Hesse towns. The Nazis lost in every one of them, but won in the fifth town in the experiment, where the SPD had been using only traditional or 'rational' methods of persuasion. This of course raises a terrible thought: could the Nazis have been beaten with their own methods? If the SPD had really understood propaganda and the manipulation of emotion, might the Third Reich never have happened?

There are, however, still those who would downgrade the power and persuasiveness of rhetoric and propaganda (May 1982). Many historians dismiss notions such as the rhetoric of self-presentation as peripheral. A rational critique can, however, easily neglect the central role of communication in leadership, as practised say by Bernard Law Montgomery, who had actually taught 'Presentation' at staff college. In his excellent book *Eminent Churchillians* (1994) Andrew Roberts castigates the military incompetence of Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia during World War II. Mountbatten, however, was a very skillful propagandist indeed, in a theatre (Burma) where morale was not a peripheral matter but the core issue. (He became the

first military man to employ a professional public relations expert, Alan Campbell Johnson.)

Other critics aim to debunk the notion of language power and theorise that any power in society, including that of language use, derives from the particular social formations on which it is based and which it legitimates. Such economic and social determinism is really a denial of the power of propaganda, its (often Marxist) proponents, for example, may merely see Hitler and Churchill as ciphers for economic forces. For them, the thesis of this entire book is in fact a nullity. This was not of course the view of Hitler himself, who after the Munich *Putsch* declared, 'All that matters is propaganda.' Other authorities more plausibly claim that the impact of propaganda lies not in moulding our thoughts but in setting our agendas (Kim *et al.* 1990). Kim *et al.* argue that the media are 'not successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but . . . stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about'. They cite their study of the movie *Amerika*: those who did not see the programme pondered a different set of US-Soviet relations issues from those who did. The agenda-setting hypothesis has remained a major mass-communication theory. These researchers conclude from their investigation: 'the effects of exposure to the programme itself . . . seem to be minimal in the determination of the agenda for the post-programme discussion'. The implications for the study of propaganda are interesting, since the stress is on the power of the media to ordain issue priorities rather than dictate a particular line on those issues.

A singular example of effective propaganda comes from Northern Ireland (Demick *et al.* 1996), and unlike most public service campaigns this one had the attraction of an objective measure, the number of informer calls to a confidential telephone number. In the first advertisement, a young man is featured who knows a terrorist, and feeling guilty about his silence he rings the hot line after witnessing a shooting. There followed a 51 per cent increase in calls to the confidential telephone number. This advertisement, which ran for two years, is really a story of guilt and redemption through virtuous action: part of the aim was to destroy terrorist social networks by winning acceptance of the idea of putting public before private relationships. Its yield scarcely compares with some of the other spots which (between 1988 and 1992) produced astonishing call rises of 500 per cent or even over 700 per cent. With the cessation of violence came new images of present hope contrasted with past fear, of the young, and of community interaction, a metamorphosis as concrete blocks changed into flowerpots, guns into starting pistols. With phrases which might have come from a soft-drink advertisement, what may seem like the banality of ordinariness took on a new meaning ('Wouldn't it be great if it was like this all the time?'). For the first time the terms 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' were used.

Even better evidence arises from California, which has spent \$836 million on anti-smoking advertising and education since Proposition 99 took effect in 1988, but the Center for Disease Control estimates that it has already saved \$3 billion in direct health care costs and another \$5.4 billion in indirect costs. *The Economist* (9 December 2000) claimed that 'many Californian women were put off smoking by a brutal television ad that hit the airwaves in 1997, in which a woman named Debbie tried to explain that she could not suppress her desire for another cigarette. She addressed the viewers through a hole in her throat, cut there after a laryngectomy that had been made necessary by her smoking.' According to this account, adult smoking rates in California have declined by more than 32 per cent since 1988. Young people have reacted even more energetically: in one year, from 1998 to 1999, the number of young smokers fell more than 35 per cent, cutting the rate of tobacco used by twelve-to-seventeen-year-olds to 6.9 per cent.

However, it is easy to find counter-examples, where propaganda insensitively administered has failed or even been counterproductive. Thus the Reagan administration intensified anti-Soviet hyperbole, believing in the outmoded 'magic bullet' theory of wartime propaganda 'which assumed that foreign audiences could be easily manipulated if the propagandist had good aim and the right ammunition' (Nichols 1984). In 1984 the administration spent \$750 million on such propaganda. It de-emphasised the more influential cultural and information-oriented programmes and simply asserted that US propaganda was effective without supporting evidence or on the basis of fabricated evidence (such as Poles travelling west) and imaginative listening figures. A message must be received, not just created, and the audience is not passive but proactive. In Nichols's words, 'the effects of international propaganda are largely the product of audience needs and motivations rather than the intent and methods of the propagandist'. In the Soviet Union about 9.7 per cent of adults listened to Radio Liberty once a month or more in 1983, but about twice as many heard the more moderate Voice of America. (The BBC reached as many as Radio Liberty even though it broadcast less than 10 per cent as much.) Nichols concludes that blitzes merely exacerbated Soviet xenophobia and suggests that those who seek foreign propaganda are already alienated.

Soviet commentators were, however, impressed by the power of what they saw as Western 'cultural' propaganda. Thus Soviet critic S. Karganovic (1974):

Western propaganda, however, is attempting to undermine the socialist consciousness of the people by means of 'sociological subversion'. This is a far more sophisticated weapon than the old fashioned broadcasts of Radio Free Europe. Sociological subversion uses movies, records, cigarettes, cars and

other indicators of the relatively high standard of Western consumer society to divert the attention of the people from their productive tasks.

The post-Nine-eleven new era of US 'public diplomacy' showed every promise of repeating some of the Cold War errors. Under-secretary of State Charlotte Beers's 'shared values' advertising campaign, authored by McCann Erickson, was withdrawn by the State Department after less than a month:

Dubbed a Muslim as apple pie campaign by the *New York Times*, the shared values videos featured photogenic Muslim Americans playing with their children and going about their jobs. One TV commercial showed . . . Ismail, a Lebanese born schoolteacher who now lived in Toledo, Ohio. Her head covered with an Islamic scarf, Ismail was shown with her smiling children in her all-American kitchen, at a school softball game and extolling American values as she taught her class. 'I didn't see any prejudice anywhere in my neighbourhood after September 11th,' she said. (Rampton and Stauber 2003)

Impact on history

There has also been unquestionably a rising interest in retrospective verdicts on the twentieth century since the millenium passed. People are searching for meaningful ways of interpreting the chaos of twentieth-century events, and to call it 'the propaganda century' is as legitimate as any soubriquet. Propaganda must be understood not as a peripheral aspect of history but as a fulcrum. Previously political leadership had fallen to great military or aristocratic figures and hereditary castes: now it was the turn of populists/propagandists such as the ex-journalist Benito Mussolini. Propaganda was a necessary condition of dictatorship in the twentieth century.

It is not easy precisely to calibrate the role of propaganda and its significance in relation to other variables in historical judgement. For example, how relevant is it as an explanation for the collapse of Germany army morale in the closing stages of World War I? But, without doubt, that role – in war, revolution, capitalist–communist struggle, the rise of consumer society – has been significant. Wars and revolutions are unimaginable without the galvanising agency of propaganda. They are not created by popular sentiment alone, that sentiment has to be channelled, given reasons and an enemy, a leader figure, hope.

Propaganda also played a role in fomenting and sustaining both the National Socialist and Bolshevik revolutions (for example, communist cinema trains in the Russian countryside), since both Nazism and Marxism-Leninism were not mere political ideologies but proselytising creeds, in other words a propaganda ethos was integral to the dogma: ideology and propagation were confused. Their success lay in the fact that they were both

systems of political theory and also plans of action, and Lenin himself, like Hitler, had witnessed the propaganda battles of World War I and become a believer (Taylor 1990).

At one time a formal association, the Institute for Propaganda Analysis, existed to fulfil the function of critiquing propaganda. Its publications and speakers examined the methods not only of home-grown American propagandists like Charles Coughlin, and the methods of totalitarian dictatorships, but even the propaganda put out by US corporations under such disguises as educational toolkits. It was founded in response to a strong popular belief that the United States had been propagandised into joining the First World War, in particular by the activities of the Creel committee, with its 'Minutemen'. Ironically, its demise happened because the kind of analysis it offered became too politically incorrect. A nation at war does not want to be reminded that it, also, is in the propaganda business, and, moreover, the professional critics of propaganda could thereby be released and co-opted into the propaganda industry, which is exactly what happened.

Yet to visit the United States today is to witness a propaganda war without parallel since the Second World War itself. The iconography of patriotism is everywhere to behold, posters of weeping Statues of Liberty, eagles holding the stars and stripes. Right-wing commentators compose polemical books excoriating liberals, and liberals reply, while seldom also has the nation been so divided in ferocious debate between the sacred and the secular realms. Republicans are accused by Democrats of exploiting Nine-eleven (as with the controversy over Bush campaign advertising showing 'footage of the charred hulk of the World Trade Center and flag-draped remains' (Guardian 5 March 2004)); Republicans blame the previous Democrat regime for letting it happen. The propagandising of the media is embodied in the 'Fox effect', the halving of foreign coverage on mainstream news and media from 1989: as Rampton and Stauber (2003) comment, 'the more TV people watched, the less they knew'. And propaganda is now official policy since the passing by Congress of House Resolution 3969 (Lantos and Hyde), which instructs the Secretary of State to 'make public diplomacy an integral component in the planning and execution of United States foreign policy' (Rampton and Stauber 2003). To live in the United States today is to receive the perfect tutelage in propaganda. Maybe it should be a formal education.

Propagandists are in the business of normalising the abnormal, of naturalising the perverse. Their agency can transform the deeply destructive into the contextual given, the uninterrogated social parameter within which we are expected to operate. The depravities of power and ideology transmute into the latest, newest, current agenda whose despotism we are not expected to question, or even notice. It is all part of the modern

propaganda phenomenon. Propaganda addresses directly the problem of cognitive clutter today, the perceptual fog we inhabit: it casts this aside and beckons us through the retreating mist. It paints luminous tableaux, at once disgusting and alluring, that we cannot ignore. It alternately assaults and seduces our consciousness.

But to dismiss the power of propaganda is perverse, for that would be to deprecate a prime agency of change over the past 200 years. Business itself is both a target and a prime mover. Wal Mart, for example, accused of paying low wages, fights back not with new policies but with public relations advertising. Since the 1930s there does not appear to have been a visible attempt to educate students about manipulation techniques, and the Institute's ten points of propaganda analysis have been long forgotten. Yet a strong case could be made for saying that such an education could be essential to the evolution of citizens and a civic culture that are truly mature and independent. People spend much of their lives 'reading' media, and the aspiration therefore to create media literacy through the teaching of propaganda-critical techniques is not a trivial one. When we speak of the engineering of consent (perhaps 'acquiescence' would be a more accurate word) we hear claims that public opinion in the United States is a commodity to be purchased. Such a sentiment exaggerates, but like many caricatures it contains at its core an important truth.

Propaganda is ubiquitous. While such saturation is an obvious and definitive characteristic of totalitarian regimes, in democracies it is more concealed, because it is more sophisticated and naturalised as part of supposedly objective mass media communication. If we do not have labels for phenomena we tend not to recognise them, and thus the underlying unities of the myriad forms of modern propaganda will be neglected: they will simply be defined by their objective characteristics, for example 'public relations'. The breadth of propaganda media must be fully recognised, for instance, bureaucratic propaganda, and even aspects of military strategy, or that new forms of propaganda have emerged, such as certain research institutes with their pastiche academic titles like 'Research Fellow', to which the media referred during the Iraq crisis, forgetting 1,400 full-time US college faculty specialists in Middle Eastern Studies (Rampton and Stauber 2003). Even propaganda scholars treat the term conservatively. The perception that new forms of propaganda have arrived and old ones continue means that the work of propaganda analysis is never complete.

Bibliography

- Aaker, David, and Myers, John G. (1989), *Advertising Management*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs NJ.
- Adams, J.A.D. (1993), '1948 or 1984', *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 March.
- Adams, William C., et al. (1986), 'Before and after the day after: the unexpected results of a televised drama', *Political Communication and Persuasion*, 3:3, pp. 191–213.
- Albritton, James E. (1978), *Advertising as a Subsystem of Propaganda*, conference proceedings of the Southern Sociological Society.
- Aldgate, Anthony, and Richards, Jeffrey (1994), *Britain Can Take It*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.
- Allen, Robert C., ed. (1995), *To be Continued . . . : Soap Operas Around the World*, Routledge, London.
- Altheide, D., and Johnson, J. (1980), *Bureaucratic Propaganda*, Allyn & Bacon, Boston MA.
- Alubo, S. Ogo (1991), 'Mass mobilization and legitimation crisis in Nigeria', *Political Communication and Persuasion*, 8, pp. 43–62.
- Anderson, Jack (1996), *Inside the NRA*, Dove Books, Beverley Hills CA.
- Ang, Ian, and Stattan, John (1995), 'The end of civilization as we knew it: chances and the postrealist soap opera', in Robert C. Allen (ed.), *To be Continued . . . : Soap Operas Around the World*, Routledge, London.
- Ansolabehere, S., and Iyengar, S. (1995), *Going Negative*, Free Press, New York.
- Austin, J.L. (1962), *How to do Things with Words*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Banker, S (1992), 'The ethics of political marketing practices: the rhetorical perspective', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 11, pp. 843–848.
- Bateman, Thomas S., Tomoaki, Sakono, and Makoto, Fujita Roger (1992), 'Me and my attitude: film propaganda and cynicism towards corporate leadership', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 77:5, pp. 768–771.
- Baudrillard, J. (1988), 'Simulacra and simulation', in M. Poster (ed.), *Selected Writings*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA.
- Bennett, Richard (1995), *The Black and Tans*, Barnes & Noble, New York.
- Bennett, W. Lance (1996), *The Politics of Illusion*, third edition, Longman, London.